

MAKIO UENO

(Ōtani University)

On the Listening to Buddha's Words with Reverence: The Very First Step of Buddhist Practice in Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti**

Abstract

This paper focuses on the fifth chapter of the *Vyākhyāyukti* by Vasubandhu, a Buddhist thinker who was active in the fourth and fifth centuries in Northwestern India, and a commentary on that work, the *Vyākhyāyuktiṭīkā* by Guṇamati. In this chapter, Vasubandhu deals with the issue of how those who preach about the Buddha's words should teach about them and how those who listen to those teachings should study them. Vasubandhu explains that 'listening to the Buddha's words with reverence' is critical as the first step of Buddhist practice.

The source for this position of Vasubandhu's can be found in the *Arthavistara-dharmaparyāya* in the *Dīrghāgama* of the Sarvāstivāda. Vasubandhu argues that the first step of Buddhist practice is listening to the Buddha's words with reverence based on the third of sixteen methods for listening to the Buddha's words that are described in the fifth section of that scripture.

Why is reverence necessary when listening to the Buddha's words? Vasubandhu uses the famous metaphor of three kinds of vessels in answering this question. This metaphor respectively likens (1) a person who does not listen to the teachings, (2) a person who listens to the teachings but misunderstands them, and (3) a person who listens to the teachings but fails to remember them to (1) an upside-down vessel, (2) a dirty vessel, and (3) a vessel with a hole in it. That is to say, Vasubandhu is pointing to the fact that if a listener lacks respect for the preacher, they will (1) not try to listen carefully to the teachings, (2) misunderstand them, or (3) forget them.

Vasubandhu also uses this metaphor in his *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā*, which was written after the *Vyākhyāyukti*. This metaphor also appears frequently in Tibetan Buddhist literature in the works of figures such as Bu ston rin chen grub and Tsong kha pa. The position that Vasubandhu took regarding the importance of listening to the Buddha's words with reverence was extremely influential and came to be broadly held in the Buddhist traditions of both India and Tibet after the fifth century.

Keywords: Vasubandhu, *Vyākhyāyukti*, Guṇamati, *Vyākhyāyuktiṭīkā*, *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā*, *Arthavistara*, listening with reverence, metaphor of three kinds of vessels

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Introduction

Buddhist practice starts from listening to the Buddha's words; without listening, no one can start the Buddhist practice. However, the process of listening is always problematic, because one always listens in one's own way. In order to correct our misunderstanding, it is necessary to listen to many words of the Buddha (This is the reason why Indian Buddhists call an expert a *bahuśruta*, 'one who has heard many words'). Also, since people easily forget, it is necessary to listen repeatedly over and over and remember what they have listened to (Buddhist audiences are often referred to metaphorically as 'hollow vessels').

In his *Vyākhyāyukti* (hereafter VyY), Vasubandhu stated that the very first step of Buddhist practice is 'listening with reverence' (*gus par nyan pa*, **śuśrūṣā*), and it is a reverence for the Buddha himself and the Buddha's words that motivates us to listen the Buddhist dharma. 'Listening with reverence' is the subject of Chapter 5 of VyY. In this paper, I will consider 'listening with reverence' as the very first step of the buddhist practice. The VyY is a work of Vasubandhu's that is not found the original Sanskrit, and has not been translated into Chinese, but is preserved in Tibetan translation.

The *Arthavistara-dharmaparyāya*: The Source of Vasubandhu's Interpretation

When Vasubandhu emphasizes the importance of 'listening with reverence,' the source of the term is the *Arthavistara-dharmaparyāya* which Vasubandhu often quotes. This scripture is a prominent sutra that appears as the second sutra in a section of the *Dīrghāgama* of the Sarvāstivāda called *Ṣaṭsūtrakānīpāta*. The Tibetan text and the reconstructed Sanskrit text based on the Central Asian manuscript fragments by Hartmann 1991, are shown below. The translation is based on the remaining part of the Sanskrit manuscript, using the Tibetan text to supplement the parts missing from the Sanskrit.

*tshe dang ldan pa dag chos nyan par 'dod pas rnam pa bcu drug gis mnyan par bya ste | 'di lta ste | (1) dus su chos mnyan par bya ba dang | (2) bkur sti bya ba dang | (3) gus par nyan pa dang | (4) ma rangs pa med pa dang | (5) bsgo ba bzhin nyan pa dang | (6) klan ka mi tshol ba dang | (7) chos la gus par bya ba dang | (8) chos smra ba'i gang zag la gus par bya ba dang | (9) chos la mi brnyas pa dang | (10) chos smra ba'i gang zag la mi brnyas pa dang | (11) bdag la mi brnyas pa dang | (12) rtse gcig pa'i sems dang | (13) kun shes par bya ba'i sems dang | (14) rna ba blags te mnyan pa dang | (15) sems bsdu pa dang | (16) sems thams cad kyis bsams te chos mnyan par bya'o || (AvDh(tib.) §5)
... śro(tavyaḥ katamaiḥ ṣoḍa)śabhiḥ (1) kālena dha(rmaḥ śrotav)ya(ḥ) (2) satkṛtya (3) śuśrūṣa(māṇena) (4) (anasūyatā) (5) (anuvīdhīyamānena) (6) (anupālam-*

bhāprekṣiṇā) (7) (*dharme gauravam upasthāpya*) (8) (*dharmakathi*)ke pudgale gaurav(am) upasthāpya (9) *dharmam aparibhavatā* (10) *dharmā(kathikaṃ pudgalam aparibhavatā)* (11) (*ātmānam apa*)ribhavatā (12) *ek(āgracittena)* (13) (*ājñācittena*) (14) (*avahitaśrotre*)ṇ(a) (15) *samāvarjitamānasena* (16) *sarvacetasā* (*samanvāhṛtya dharmāḥ śrotavyaḥ*) (AvDh §5, Hartmann1991: 320–321)¹

Venerable sirs, he who wishes to listen to the dharma should listen in sixteen ways. Namely, (1) he should listen to the dharma at an opportune time, (2) with respect, **(3) listen with reverence / wishing to listen**, (4) without complaining, (5) compliantly, (6) without looking for an argument, (7) establishing reverence for the dharma, (8) establishing reverence for the dharma-preacher, (9) without belittling the dharma, (10) without belittling the dharma-preacher, (11) without belittling himself, (12) with a mind that wishes to know fully, (13) with a singularly focused mind, (14) giving ear, (15) concentrating the mind, and (16) whole heartedly he should listen to the dharma, O venerable sirs. In these sixteen ways he should listen to the dharma.²

The above description is the sixteen kinds of ways or attitudes the listeners (*śrotṛjana*) should have, which is preached by Śāriputra at the direction of the Buddha. From the Tibetan translation and two kinds of Chinese translations of (3), we can see two aspects of the word *śuśrūṣamāṇena*: listening with reverence (attitude) and wanting to listen (motivation).³ In other words, ‘reverence’ included in this word does not mean simple respect. It includes a motivation and desire to listen to the Buddha’s words, and, in that sense, objects of reverence are the ‘Buddha’ and ‘Buddha’s words,’ as well as the ‘dharma-preachers’ and ‘dharma-preacher’s teachings.’

¹ Cf. *Puṣyayī jing* 普法義經 (T 01.0098, Translation by 安世高 An Shigao). T 01.0098: 922c1–8. 舍利弗復謂比丘。欲聞法者、當有十六業。何等為十六。一當為有時可聞、二當為多聞、三當為向耳聽、四當為事、五當為莫平訶、六當為莫訶失、七當為莫求長短、八當為法恭敬、九當為說法者恭敬、十當為莫易法、十一亦莫易說法者、十二亦莫自易身、十三一向心、十四莫餘意、十五正持心、十六覺一切念、可聞法正。

Cf. *Guangyi famen jing* 廣義法門經 (T 01.0097, Translation by 眞諦 Paramārtha). T 01.0097: 919c15–22 長老。若人欲聽正法、具十六相、乃可聽受。何等十六。一隨時聽、二恭敬、三欲樂、四無執著、五如聞隨行、六不為破難、七於法起尊重心、八於說者起尊重心、九不輕撥正法、十不輕撥說者、十一不輕己身、十二一心不散、十三欲求解心、十四一心諦聽、十五依理正思、十六憶持前後、而聽正法。

² The English translation is based on the translation in Horiuchi 2013: 359. ‘The sixteen kinds of ways or attitudes of the listeners’ (AvDh §5) are cited in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, balagotrāpātala. Cf. BoBh 104.17–105.9.

³ The Sanskrit *śuśrūṣā* is a desiderative form of *śru*, so if we literally translate it, it will have the meaning of ‘wishing to listen,’ just as the Paramārtha’s Chinese translation 欲樂yù lè (wishing [to listen]) shows. It can be inferred that the nuance ‘reverence’ (*gus pa*) was put in based on the judgment of the Tibetan translator, but it can be said that it is a suitable translation consistent with the contents of Chapter 5 of VyY.

**‘Three Kinds of Vessels’ in the *Vyākhyāyukti*
and the *Pratītyasamupādayākhyā***

So, why do we need ‘reverence’ when listening to the Buddha’s words? The answer is not explicitly shown in the *Arthavistara*. On the other hand, a clue for thinking about that point lies in the famous ‘metaphor of three kinds of vessels’ in Chapter 5 of VyY and the *Pratītyasamupādayākhyā*. Vasubandhu’s VyY 5.2.1 says as follows:

*ci’i phyir gus par chos mnyan par bya zhe na | snod gsum dag tu ni lhas char
phab kyang chu’i bya ba mi byed de |*

(1) *kha gzhan du phyogs pa’am bcad pa gang du mi ‘bab pa nyid dang |*

(2) *mi gtsang ba gang du bab kyang skyon can du ‘gyur ba dang |*

(3) *bug dang bcas pa gang du mi gnas pa’o ||*

*de bzhin du skye bo nyan pa po’i yid kyi snod gsum dag tu chos smra bas chos
kyi char phab kyang | chos kyi chu’i bya ba mi byed de |*

(1) *rnam par g.yeng ba dang | rmugs pa dang | gnyid dag gis mi nyan pa’i phyir
| gang du mi ‘bab pa dang |*

(2) *tshul bzhin yid la mi byed pa’i phyir | gang du bab kyang skyon can du ‘gyur
ba dang |*

(3) *dran pa brjed ngas pa’i phyir | gang du mi gnas pa’o ||*

*de lta bas na de’i skyon yongs su spang ba’i phyir bcom ldan ‘das kyis de’i
phyir nyon la legs par rab tu⁴ yid la byos shig ces gsungs pa yin pas na⁵ mnyan
pa’i skyon de bdag cag la ‘byung na mi rung ba’i phyir | gus par chos mnyan par
bya’o || (VyY 5.2.1, D shi 116a3–6, P si 135a3–7)*

[Question] Why should we listen to the dharma with reverence?

[Answer] Three vessels (**bhājana*) do not work [to hold] water even if it rains from the sky.

(1) [The vessel] that is turned upside down or broken, so [rain] cannot not fall there,

(2) [The vessel] that is unclean, so even if it rains, [the water] will get dirty,

(3) [The vessel] that has a hole in it, so [rainwater] cannot be stored in it.

Likewise, the three vessels of listeners (**śrotṛjana*) say that even though the dharma-preacher may rain the dharma, the [rain] of the dharma does not function.

⁴ rab tu VyY(D) : rab tu nyon la VyY(P)

⁵ na VyY(D) : om. VyY(P)

- (1) Because [they are] distracted, depressed, or not listening to [the dharma] due to dozing, there is no [rain of the dharma] falling there [i.e., in the listeners],
- (2) Since correct attention is not directed, even if [rain of the dharma] falls there [i.e., in the listeners], it is sullied.
- (3) Because [their] memories are bad, there is no [rain of the dharma] staying there [i.e., in the listeners].

Therefore, in order to fully break down the above [three types of] negligence, it is said that the Buddha says, 'Therefore, listen and pay attention well and properly (*tad śṛṇuta, sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca manasikuruta*).' Thus, for us to give rise to such negligent listening is not appropriate, so you should listen to the dharma with reverence.

A passage with the same meaning as this description of the 'three vessels' can be found in the remaining part of the Sanskrit manuscript of Vasubandhu's *Pratīyasamutpādavyākhyā* (hereafter PSVy). This work is a commentary on the *Pratīyasamutpādasūtra*⁶ created after the VyY. In this work, 'three kinds of negligence' accompanying the listening are explained by Vasubandhu in the context of annotating the stock phrase '*tad śṛṇuta, sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca manasikuruta*.'

tad ity ayaṃ nipāto vākyopanyāse tasmādarthe ca. (1) śṛṇuteti śrotrāvdhāne prayojayati. (2) sādhu ca (3) suṣṭhu ca manasikurutety aviparītādaragrahaṇe parśado deśanābhājanatvāpādanārtham. anyathā hi deśanāyāḥ sāphalyaṃ na syāt tribhir doṣaiḥ. (1) ākṣepadoṣeṇa vyañjanasyāśravaṇāt. (2) prajñādoṣeṇa vā viparītavyañjanārthagrahaṇāt, svastyariṣṭādivat. (3) mandacchandadoṣeṇa vānādarodgrhītasādhdhāraṇāt.⁷ parāṇmukhāśucichidrabhājaneṣu vṛṣṭya-sāphalyavat tadapraveśavaiḥkrītyānavasthānataḥ. (PSVy 613.15–614.6)

This **therefore** is an appendage to sentences, and hence is used as an indeclinable participle. (1) '**listen**' means to guide the audience to listen. (2) '**[Pay attention] well,**' (3) '**pay attention . . . properly**' means not to apprehend invertedly, [to guide the audience] to grasp with reverence. It is to make the audience a vessel of the teachings. For if not, the teachings will not be fruitful because of the three faults. (1) Because one does not listen to syllables depending on the negligence of distraction. (2) Because of negligence in wisdom, one apprehends the meaning of the opposite syllable, like [confusing] a precursor of good (*svasti*) and a precursor of death (*ariṣṭa*). (3) Because of the negligence of weak motivation, [teaching] grasped without reverence is not retained.

⁶ On this sutra, see Chung 2008: 107–110; Chung 2017.

⁷ Tucci: *anāgraho-*. Correct *anāgraho-* to *anādaro-* based on the Tibetan translation and Sanskrit parallel. Cf. PSVy(Tib.) D 3b1, P 3b7: *ma gus pas bzung ba mi 'dzin pa'i phyir ro ||* ; AVSN 83.9: *anādarodgrhītasāsamdhāraṇāt*.

[As if] (1) The mouth faced downwards, (2) unclean, (3) for vessels with holes, do not not lead to results of rainwater. It is because [rain] does not enter, it changes, it does not stay.

The famous ‘metaphor of three kinds of vessels’ is frequently cited by Indian and Tibetan Buddhists like Bu ston rin chen grub.⁸ Content that is listened to in an unrespectful way, is heard distractedly and does not stay inside the listener, so he writes, ‘[teaching] grasped without reverence is not retained.’ In other words, reverence is effective for keeping the preached teachings within one’s mind.

Four Extracts from Chapter 5 of the *Vyākhyāyukti*

This section presents translations of four passages I have chosen from Chapter 5 of VyY.

[1. A Relationship between the Dharma-preacher and the Listener (VyY 5.1.2)]

‘phags pa sh’a ri’i bus

tshe dang ldan pa dag dge slong chos smra ba pos gzhan dag la chos dang ldan pa’i gtam smra ba na | rnam pa nyi shu dag dang ldan pas gtam bya ste | (1) dus su gtam bya ba dang | (2) gus pa dang | (3) go rims dang zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa dang

tshe dang ldan pa dag chos mnyan par ‘dod pas rnam pa bcu drug dang ldan pas chos mnyan par bya ste | (1) dus su chos mnyan par bya ba dang | (2) gus pa dang | (3) sri zhu dang

zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa gsungs pa yin no || nged dam khyed kyi de ni bsgrub par dka’bas de’i phyir rnam pa nyi shu ‘am bcu drug lta zhog gi re zhig rnam pa gcig tsam yang byas la | ngas kyang gus par chos bshad par bya | khyod kyis kyang gus par chos nyon cig | (VyY 5.1.2, D shi 115a4–7, P si 134a3–6)

[1]

Sage Śāriputra taught the likes of the following:

Venerable sirs, when a preaching monk delivers a sermon, he should speak to others in these twenty ways. He should speak (1) at an opportune time, (2) respectfully, (3) in order, ... (**kathikenāyusmanto bhikṣuṇā dhārmīm kathāṃ*

⁸ *Bu ston chos ‘byung* = BU 141.12–142.6, Obermiller 1931: 79.

*kurvantānyeṣāṃ viṃśatibhir ākāraiḥ kathā karaṇīyā. (1) kālena kathā karaṇīyā (2) satkṛtya (3) anupūrvam ...)*⁹

As well as the likes of the following:

Venerable sirs, he who wishes to listen to the dharma should listen in sixteen ways. Namely, he should listen to the dharma (1) at an opportune time, (2) with respect, **(3) listen with reverence**,¹⁰ ... (... *śrotavyaḥ ... (1) kālena dharmāḥ śrotavyaḥ (2) satkṛtya (3) śuśrūṣamāṇena ...)¹¹

This is hard for me and you to do, and therefore, putting aside the twenty ways and the sixteen [ways] for the time being, at any rate, doing even just one of these ways, I am also going to preach the dharma with reverence. You also should listen to the dharma with reverence.

[2. The Dharma and the Dharma wheel (VyY5.2.7)]

yang ci'i phyir zhe na |

'khor lo legs par sbyar ba yang 'phul¹² bar byed pa dang | sa dang | gnyis kyi yon tan gyis 'dril te | gal te 'phul¹³ bar byed pas kyang legs par 'phul¹⁴ ba la | gang du dbul bar bya ba 'i sa yang mi mnyam pa med pa yin na 'o ||

de bzhin du de bzhin gshegs pa 'i¹⁵ chos kyi 'khor lo legs par bshad pa yang ston pa po dang | nyan pa po dang | gnyis kyi¹⁶ yon tan gyis bskor te | gal te ston pa pos yang dag par ston la¹⁷ gang la bstan par bya ba 'i nyan pa po yang dag par nyan na 'o ||

de nyid kyi phyir bcom ldan 'das kyi gang zag gnyis ni | de bzhin gshegs pa 'i chos dang ldan pa 'i chos kyi 'khor lo bskor ba 'i rjes su skor¹⁸ bar byed pa yin te | gang zhig gus par chos 'chad pa dang | gang zhig de gus par nyan pa 'o || (VyY5.2.7,¹⁹ D shi 120a4–7, P si 139b6–140a2)

⁹ The source of this is *Arthavistara* §4, which describes twenty ways to preach. Before the VyY 5.1.2 that appears here, Vasubandhu provides a more detailed explanation in VyY 2.62. See Horiuchi 2013: 357–358.

¹⁰ The translation of the second (2) of sixteen ways to listen to the dharma is *gus pa* in VyY and *bkur sti* in Guṇamati's VyYT. Also, the translation of (3) in VyY is *sri zhu* and *nyan par gus pa* in VyYT. While their translations differ, it appears that the original terms were the same: *satkṛtya* for (2) and *śuśrūṣamāna* for (3).

¹¹ The source of this passage is *Arthavistara* §5. Before the VyY 5.1.2 that appears here, Vasubandhu provides a more detailed explanation in VyY 2.63. See Horiuchi 2013: 359–360.

¹² 'phul VyY(D) : phul VyY(P)

¹³ 'phul VyY(D) : 'bul VyY(P)

¹⁴ 'phul VyY(D) : phul VyY(P)

¹⁵ pa'i VyY(D) : pas VyY(P)

¹⁶ kyi VyY(D) : kyis VyY(P)

¹⁷ la VyY(P) : pa VyY(D)

¹⁸ skor VyY(D) : bskor VyY(P)

¹⁹ Cf. EĀ (Trip) 18.636:

*asāhasena dharmeṇa samyag evānuśiṣṭavān |
dharmacakraṃ vartayitvā asmin pṛthivīmaṇḍale ||*

[2]

[Question] Furthermore, why [should one listen with reverence]?**[Answer]** A correctly assembled wheel turns due to the virtue of the person propelling it and the ground. In other words, if the person propelling it correctly propels it and the ground upon which it advances is not uneven.

In the same way, the Wheel of the dharma correctly preached by the Tathāgata turns due to the virtue of both the teacher and the audience. In other words, if the teacher correctly teaches and the audience being preached to correctly listens.

It is for this very reason that for the World-Honored One two people continue to turn the dharma Wheel that is equipped with the Tathāgata's dharma. [These two people] are the person that preaches with reverence and the person that listens to this with reverence.

[3. The Avadāna of the cowherd Nanda (VyY 5.2.10)]

*brda*²⁰ *mi phrad pas kyang sangs rgyas kyi gsung gus par mnyan par bya ste |*
'di ltar dad pa tsam gyis kyang nyan na bsod nams chen po nyid dang ldan pa
*dang | shes rab kyi*²¹ *khams brtas*²² *par 'gyur na don rtogs pa la lta smos kyang*
ci dgos te |

ba lang rdzi dga' bos sbal pa khar bas mnan pa'i rtogs pa brjod pa yang
brjod par bya'o || 'dir yang bshad pa |
*dad pas mnyan pas*²³ *gang gis na ||*
mtho ris dga' ba'i bsod nams dang ||
gang gis mya ngan 'das thob pa'i ||
*shes rab sa bon brtas*²⁴ *par 'gyur ||*

*'dzin pa pos snod gzung ba ni sla'*²⁵ *ldugs pa pos bcud kyis*²⁶ *len blugs par*
*ni*²⁷ *dka' bas khyed kyis ni sems gtad par bya bas rna ba'i snod gzung*²⁸ *ba 'ba'*
*zhig bya zhing | bdag cag gis*²⁹ *ni dam ba'i chos kyi bcud kyis len blugs par bya*
*ste | khyed kyi bya ba*³⁰ *ni sla ba yin | nged kyi bya ba ni dka' ba yin no ||*

sla ba rigs pa dang ldan pa mi byed pa ni smad par bya ba yin pas de
lta bas na gus par chos mnyan par bya'o || (VyY 5.2.10, D shi 121a2–5, P si
*140b7–141a4)*³¹

²⁰ brda VyY(D) : brda' VyY(P)

²¹ kyi VyY(P) : kyis VyY(D)

²² brtas VyY(D) : rtas VyY(P)

²³ pas VyY(DP) : pa BU

²⁴ brtas VyY(D) : rtas VyY(P)

²⁵ sla'i VyY(P) : bla'i VyY(D)

²⁶ kyis VyY(D) : kyi VyY(P)

²⁷ ni VyY(D) : mi VyY(P)

²⁸ gzung VyY(P) : bzung VyY(D)

²⁹ gis VyY(D) : gi VyY(P)

³⁰ ba VyY(D) : om. VyY(P)

³¹ This part is quoted twice by *Bu ston chos 'byung*. The first quote, which is a quote only

[3]

Even those who cannot understand (**agamaka*) should listen reverently to the Buddha's words (**buddhavacana*). This is for the following reason: even by [just] listening with only belief [to the Buddha's words], [one becomes a person] with vast merit and cultivates the element of wisdom (**prajñādhātu*), and this is all the more so [if one] realizes the meaning [of the dharma].

[The preacher] should also tell the *avadāna*³² of the cowherd *Nanda who crushed a frog with a stick.³³ I will explain more about this.

Those who listen with belief will have merit [that is the cause of] joy [in] the heavenly realm (**svarga*) and their seeds of wisdom [that are the cause of] obtaining nirvāṇa cultivated.³⁴

While it is easy for the receiving side to hold a vessel, it is difficult for the pouring side to pour life-extending medicine. Therefore, you should only hold the vessel of the ears by directing the mind, and we will pour the life-extending medicine of the Saddharma. Your duty is easy [to do] and our duty is hard [to do].

Not doing easy things that make sense is worthy of criticism. Therefore, one should listen to the dharma with reverence.

[4. The Decline of Buddhism (VyY 5.2.28)]

- (1) *nyan pa 'i skye bo dag ni phal cher phyir phyogs dang ||*
 (2) *yongs su 'dzin par byed pa phal cher 'das pa dang ||*
 (3) *nyes par*³⁵ *rnam par bshad pa dag gis*³⁶ (4) *mthu bcom pas*³⁷ ||

deng sang legs par bshad pa mthar gyur to ||

[Interpretation 1] *tshigs su bcad pa 'dis ni deng sang phyogs gnyis la sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa yongs su nyams pa rnam pa bzhi dang | nub la thug*³⁸ *pa nyid du*³⁹ *ston pa yin no ||*

of the verse, is BU 37.2–5, Obermiller 1931: 13–14, n. 98. The second quote is BU 146.9–12, Obermiller 1931: 81 and ns. 729, 730.

³² This refers to the following *avadāna*. When the cowherd Nanda was listening intently to Śākyamuni, a frog was being crushed by his cane. While his vital body parts were severed off and joints split, he thought, 'If I move my body or raise my voice, this will interfere with Nanda's listening to the World-Honored One.' He then died after awakening his faith in the Buddha, and was reborn in the heaven of the four divine kings. This comes from *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (Bhaiṣaj 51.1–6, Yao 2013: 271). There are many parallel materials, including Chinese *Samyuktāgama* sutra no. 1174, Chinese *Ekottarikāgama* 43.3, and SN 35.200 of the Pāli-Nikāya. See Chung 2008: 82.

³³ I have understood this part as being an instruction of Vasubandhu to (potential) preachers: 'Tell of the *avadāna* about the cowherd Nanda.'

³⁴ Looking at the introductory phrase '*dir yang bshad pa*, it appears that this is a summary verse by Vasubandhu. One does not find this verse in the corresponding part of *Bhaiṣajyavastu*.

³⁵ *nyes par* VyY(DP) VyYT(P) : nye bar VyYT(D)

³⁶ *gis* VyY(DP) VyYT(D) : gi VyYT(P)

³⁷ *pas ||* VyY(DP) : zhing | VyYT(DP)

³⁸ *thug* VyY(D) VyYT(D) : thub VyY(P) VyYT(P)

³⁹ *du* VyY(D) : om. VyY(P)

(1) *nyan pa 'i skye bo dag ni phal cher phyir phyogs dang || zhes bya bas ni khyim pa 'i phyogs la nyan pa yongs su nyams par ston pa yin te | de dag ni phal cher nyan pa po yin pas so ||*

(2) *yongs su 'dzin par⁴⁰ byed pa phal cher 'das pa dang || zhes bya bas ni rab tu byung ba 'i phyogs la 'don pa yongs su nyams par ston pa yin te | de dag ni phal cher yongs su 'dzin par byed pa yin te | thos pa⁴¹ 'dzin pa 'i phyir ro ||*

(3) *nyes par rnam par bshad pa dag gis⁴² zhes bya bas ni de nyid la don bshad pa yongs su nyams par ston pa yin te | don log par 'chad pa 'i phyir ro ||*

(4) *mthu bcom pas zhes bya bas ni rtogs pa nyams par ston pa yin te | gang gi don du ste | dge slong gi tshul gyi 'bras bu rtogs pa 'i don du bshad pa ste | de nus par mi byed pa 'i phyir ro ||*

'di ni mdor bsdu na⁴³ yongs su nyams pa rnam pa gnyis su 'gyur te | tshig dang don gnyis kyi lung yongs su nyams pa dang | rtogs⁴⁴ pa yongs su nyams pa 'o ||

[Interpretation 2] *gzhan yang (1) nyan pa 'i skye bo phyir phyogs pa nyid dang | (2) yongs su 'dzin par byed pa phal cher 'das pa nyid kyis ni thos pa yongs su nyams pa yin la | (3) nyes par bshad pa nyid kyis ni yang dag par bsam pa yongs su nyams pa yin no || (4) mthu bcom pa nyid kyis ni yang dag par bsgom pa yongs su nyams pa yin no ||*

deng sang legs par bshad pa mthar gyur to || zhes bya ba ni nub la thug pa nyid du ston pa yin no ||

[Summary] *de ltar sangs rgyas kyi gsung ni yongs su nyams pa dang yun ring du mi gnas par rig par byas nas ji srid du cung zad lus pa de srid du 'di mnyan pa dang gzung⁴⁵ ba dang⁴⁶ don mthun par bsgrub pa la dad pa can rnams kyis⁴⁷ rab tu 'bad par bya 'o || (VyY 5.2.28, D shi 124b1–125a1, P si 144b5–145a6)*

[4]

Due to (1) those who listen to [the teachings] largely having betrayed,
 (2) those who hold [the teachings] largely having gone on, and
 (3) because of those who mistakenly explain [the teachings] (4) having broken the ability, currently [the Buddha's] good teachings (**subhāṣita*) are in danger of dying.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ par VyY(D) : pa VyY(P)

⁴¹ pa VyY(D) : la VyY(P)

⁴² gis VyY(D) : gi VyY(P)

⁴³ na VyYṬ(DP) : nas VyY(DP)

⁴⁴ rtogs VyY(D) VyYṬ(DP) : rtog VyY(P)

⁴⁵ gzung VyY(D) : bzung VyY(P)

⁴⁶ dang VyY(D) : om. VyY(P)

⁴⁷ kyis VyY(D) : kyi VyY(P)

⁴⁸ This brings to mind the verse found at the end of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*'s *Samāpattinirdeśa*. Cf. AKBh 460.4–13 ad AK VIII.41–43. I assume that the verse of VyY is quoted from Aśvaghōṣa's lost **Sūtrālamkāra*. On the relationship between Vasubandhu's view of the 'Decline of Buddhism' (*saddharmavipralopa*) and Aśvaghōṣa's *kāvya*s, see Ueno and Matsuda 2021. On the quotations of Aśvaghōṣa's *kāvya*s in chapter 5 of VyY, see Horiuchi 2022.

[Interpretation 1] This verse shows the current four kinds of decline in the Buddha's teachings on the two sides (of laypeople and renunciates), and that the [Buddha's teachings] are in danger of disappearing.⁴⁹

(1) 'Those who listen to [the teachings] largely having betrayed' shows that on the layperson side listeners have declined. This is because they (laypeople) are largely the listeners.

(2) 'Those who hold [the teachings] largely having gone on' shows that on the renunciate side [those who] read silently have declined. They (renunciates) are largely the holders [of teachings]. This is because they hold what they have heard.

(3) 'Because of those who mistakenly explain [the teachings]' shows that on that same [renunciate side] those who [correctly] preach the meaning have declined. This is because they explain mistaken meanings.

(4) By the [phrase] 'having broken the ability' it is shown that realization (**adhigama*) has declined. [Ability] for what [has declined]? The [ability] to explain how to attain the realization that is the fruit of practice (**śrāmaṇyaphala*). This is because [currently on the renunciate side] this is impossible.

Summarizing the above, there are two kinds of decline. Decline of the transmission of words and [their] meaning (**āgama*) and decline of realization (**adhigama*).

[Interpretation 2] In another [interpretation], [correct] listening (**śruta*) has declined due to (1) the betrayal of listeners and (2) those who hold [the teachings] generally having gone on. (3) Due to mistakenly explaining, correct thought (**cintā*) has declined. (4) Due to ability being broken [by those who mistakenly explain], correct practice (**bhāvanā*) has declined.

'Currently [the Buddha's] good teachings are in danger of dying' shows that they are in danger of disappearing.

[Summary] Knowing as shown above that the Buddha's teachings have declined and will not survive for long, insofar as they remain a little, those with belief should work to listen to and hold [the Buddha's teachings], and practice them in accordance with their meaning.

As we have seen above, Chapter 5 focuses on 'listening with reverence' to the Buddha's words. Vasubandhu positions this as the very first step in Buddhist practice. In other words, the VyY depicts the following process. First, someone listens reverentially to the Buddha's words, and continues to listen reverentially (Chapter 5). Then, they eventually leave home, listen to many things, retain that which they have heard, and accumulate that which they have heard (first half of Chapter 1). Finally, they grow into a preacher that has mastered scriptural

⁴⁹ The tibetan translation *nub pa* is a verb that expresses the setting of the sun. In other words, the decline of the Buddha's teachings is being likened to a sunset.

interpretation (second half of Chapter 1 to Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, it is said that those who transmit the Buddha's teachings as a dharma-preacher (*dhārmakathika*) should encourage listeners to 'listen with reverence' in order to turn them into 'those who are vessels of the teachings' (*deśanābhājanatva*).⁵⁰

In the background to Vasubandhu having written this work appears to have been his view regarding the disappearance of the dharma, in other words, as is shown in VyY 5.2.28 'The Decline of Buddhism,' the idea that Buddhism, having declined amongst laypeople and renunciates, was in danger of dying. This is also clearly expressed in the last verse of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*'s Samāpattinirdeśa, which preceded VyY. However, in VyY, Vasubandhu expresses concern that the decline of speakers has influenced listeners and that renunciates who offer mistaken explanations to laypeople have increased. We can thus see that Vasubandhu wrote VyY with the transmission of traditional knowledge and the nurturing of future generations in mind.

Conclusion

According to Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti*, the very first step of Buddhist practice is reverence, i.e., reverence toward the Buddha and the Buddha's word. One who listens to the Buddha's words with reverence can start Buddhist practice, and reverence will close the 'hole' in 'vessel' of Buddhist listeners' minds.

⁵⁰ Refer to the PSVy passage quoted previously in Part 3 of this paper.

References

Abbreviations

- AK *Abhidharmakośakārikā* (Vasubandhu): See AKBh.
- AKBh *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Vasubandhu): P. Pradhan, ed., *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1967.
- AvDh *Arthavistara-dharmaparyāya*. See Hartmann 1991.
- AvDh(tib.) The Tibetan translations of the *Arthavistara-dharmaparyāya*. See Hartmann 1991.
- AVSN *Arthaviniścayasūtranibandhana* (Vīryaśrīdatta): N.H. Samtani, ed., *The Arthaviniścaya-Sūtra and Its Commentary (Nibandhana)*. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1971.
- Bhaiṣaj *Bhaiṣajyavastu*. Nalinaksha Dutt, ed., *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. III, Part 1. Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press, 1947.
- BoBh *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Wogihara Unrai, ed., *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Tokyo: 1930–1936.
- BU *Bu ston chos 'byung* (Bu ston rin chen grub): Tibetan Works Research Project ed., *Bu ston's Introduction to Buddhism: A Critical Edition of First Chapter of the Bu ston chos 'byung*. Kyoto: Ōtani University Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute, 2022.
- D Derge (sDe dge) blockprint edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka.
- EĀ(Trip) *Ekottarikāgama*. Chandrabhal Tripathi ed., *Ekottarikāgama Fragmente der Gilgit-Handschrift*. Reinbek: Dr. Inge Wezler Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1995.
- P Peking edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka held at Otani University, Kyoto.
- PSVy *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā* (Vasubandhu): Giuseppe Tucci, 'Fragment from the *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā* of Vasubandhu,' *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* 1930: 611–630. (Reprint: *Opera Minora*, parte I. Roma 1971, 277–304.)
- PSVy(tib.) The Tibetan translations of the *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā*. D 3995, P 5496.
- VyY *Vyākhyāyukti* (Vasubandhu): D 4061, P 5562.
- VyYT *Vyākhyāyuktiṭīkā* (Guṇamati): D 4069, P 5570.
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