

Ācārya Vasubandhu's Thirty Verses (Trimśikā):

A Manual for Students

Sanskrit text, translation, and verse by verse explanation

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सौगतम्

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Introduction

यो बोधिसत्त्ववचनानि तनोति लोके
लोकोत्तराणि सुविशुद्धमनोरमाणि |
संसारनिर्वृतिपथप्रथमानशोभो
वन्दे तमार्यमनुजानुगतार्यशोभम् ||

yo bodhisattvavacanāni tanoti loke
lokottarāṇi suviśuddhamanoramāṇi |
saṃsāranirvṛtipathaprathamānaśobho
vande tam āryam anujānugatāryaśobham ||

The Yogācāra tradition takes its name, most likely, from Ārya Asaṅga's large compendium, "The stages of Yoga-practice" (Yogācārabhūmi); the term yoga-ācāra is in itself commonly used in other systems, and it often refers to the practice of meditation.

Apart from the Yogācārabhūmi, much of the literature of the school is based on five foundational treatises, traditionally believed to have been revealed by the Bodhisattva Maitreya to Ārya Asaṅga, who in turn taught them to others. The list of five differs in the Tibetan and Chinese traditions, but among them one is particularly important, "Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes" (Madhya-anta-vibhāga).

Ārya Asaṅga's illustrious half-brother, Ācārya Vasubandhu, composed several commentaries to both Sūtras and philosophical treatises, laying a thorough and elegant foundation for the school. He also wrote a number of short independent treatises that offer an overview of the main points of Yogācāra: the Treatise on the Five Aggregates (Pañcaskandhaka) is an outline of Yogācāra Abhidharma, in harmony with the much

larger Compendium of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccaya); the Twenty Verses, with their auto-commentary, defend the position that everything is only cognition, the distinguishing tenet of the school; and the Thirty Verses offer a more elaborate, yet still concise outline of how cognition operates, its various layers, and its nature.

Ācārya Sthiramati, among several brilliant students of Vasubandhu, was reputed as the greatest expert in Abhidharma; this is well reflected in his commentaries, including his detailed commentary on the Thirty Verses, that brings to relief how dependent arising unfolds as the process of affliction and purification. Much of the following is based on Sthiramati's commentary on the Thirty Verses.

I especially thank Lauren Bausch for a very large number of patient corrections of rather significant mistakes, as also for many useful suggestions and insightful discussions; and Harunaga Isaacson, for an additional great number of corrections and very helpful suggestions: my understanding of Yogācāra, while still very limited, has greatly improved thanks to his patient, detailed, clear, and eminently enjoyable readings of the Sākārasiddhiśāstra. I thank Maria Vasylieva, Bibek Sharma, Alejandro Martínez Gallardo, and Samīkṣā Kamble, for even further corrections. I thank the IBC students, who attended my courses, for offering their feedback. I apologize to the readers for all the mistakes that, despite all this help, remain in this publication.

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Summary of the Thirty Verses

Verse 1

Words like “self”, “living being”, and “person”; and words for dharmas, such as “form”, “feeling”, “notion”, etc., should not be taken literally: they indirectly refer to the continuum of consciousness, that alone exists and imagines itself as being such things.

Verse 2ab

The dependently arisen continuum of consciousness is subdivided into three types: maturation, i.e. the storehouse-consciousness; the afflicted thought-consciousness; and the six consciousnesses cognizing their imagined objects.

Verse 2cd

The first transformation is maturation, i.e. a resultant consciousness in a new realm of rebirth; it is “ālaya”, “storehouse”, as it contains all the seeds that will manifest as illusory dharmas.

Verse 3ab

All consciousness arises with an object/support (ālambana) and with an aspect/configuration (ākāra); the ālaya-vijñāna cannot cognize the aspect of its object in specific terms.

Verse 3cd

All moments of consciousness are accompanied by mental states; the ālaya-vijñāna is no exception, and it is accompanied by the five omnipresent mental states.

Verse 4abc

The ālaya-vijñāna and its mental states are unobstructed and undetermined, they have no clearly determined object, and as for the feeling, it is only neutral.

Verse 4d

Like a flowing stream, the ālaya-vijñāna is a continuous consciousness, its powerful current flowing without gaps for as long as there is saṃsāra for that person.

Verse 5a

The first transformation ceases when liberation is attained.

Verse 5bcd

The second transformation of consciousness arises as a continuum from the subtle perfumings in the ālaya-vijñāna, which it constantly misperceives as a self.

Verse 6ab

Four afflictions constantly accompany the 7th consciousness, which is called “afflicted thought-consciousness” (kliṣṭa-mano-vijñāna).

Verse 6cd

The four afflictions that accompany the seventh consciousness are different ways in which this consciousness misperceives the ālayavijñāna to be a self.

Verse 7ab

The 7th consciousness is always accompanied by nine mental states: four afflictions and the five omnipresent mental states.

Verses 7bcd/8a

The second transformation stops completely with the attainment of Arhathood, and stops temporarily in two states: the absorption of cessation, and the supramundane path.

Verse 8bc

The third transformation of consciousness includes six consciousnesses: eye-consciousness is the perception of visible form, ear-consciousness is the perception of sounds, etc.

Verse 8d

The third transformation can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neither: this is determined by the accompanying mental states.

Verse 9

Several mental states can accompany the third transformation, encompassing the vast array of states commonly analyzed by all Buddhist schools.

Verse 10abc

The five omnipresent mental states that accompany the third transformation were discussed in the context of the ālaya-vijñāna (Verse 3). Five mental states are called “delimited”: zest, conviction, mindfulness, samādhi, and wisdom.

Verses 10d/11abc

Eleven virtuous states may accompany the third transformation: faith, modesty, shame, non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion, heroism, ease, non-heedless-ness, neutrality, non-harming.

Verses 11d/12a

Six main afflictions may accompany the third transformation: attraction, aversion, delusion, presumption, view and doubt.

Verses 12b/14

The third transformation can be accompanied by twenty-four different secondary afflictions, which are actually names for other mental states, previously discussed, when they operate in a specific context. The last four can be either afflicted or non-afflicted.

Verse 15

Any number among the five sense consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body) may arise at the very same time, on the basis of the seeds in the ālaya-vijñāna.

Verse 16

The thought-consciousness, i.e. the 6th consciousness, continues without gaps, except for five states: the notionless state among deities of the Form Realm, the notionless attainment, the cessation-attainment, mind-less torpor, and mind-less swoon.

Verse 17

Cognition-only is the middle avoiding two extremes: “only” excludes the superimposition of a real object beyond cognition; “cognition” is existent and should not be over-negated.

Verse 18

The ālaya-vijñāna, with seeds of countless cognitions, arises with different potentiality at each moment, causing various types of cognition to arise: these in turn, deposit seeds for future cognitions in the ālaya-vijñāna.

Verse 19

The ālaya-vijñāna continues without the necessity of outer objects, being caused to arise in a new life by the perfumings from karma and the perfumings from the two-fold grasping (at an object to be grasped and at a grasper).

Verse 20

Whatever is conceptualized by various concepts, is only imagined, it does not really exist: this non-existent nature is called “thoroughly imagined own-existence” (parikalpita-svabhāva).

Verse 21

The second of the three natures is the conceptualization itself, that arises from causes and conditions that are other than itself, and thus is called “other-dependent”. Emptiness of the first nature in the second, is the third nature, the “thoroughly accomplished nature”.

Verse 22ab

The accomplished is the empty nature of the dependent, neither different from nor the same as the dependent. If different, the dependent would not be empty of what is wrongly imagined, and if it were the same, affliction and purification could not be separately established.

Verse 22c

Impermanence cannot be said to be different from the impermanent dharmas, because otherwise those dharmas would be permanent. It cannot be said to be the same, however: otherwise, those dharmas would be no more than subsequent absences.

Verse 22d

As long as one has not obtained the non-conceptual samādhi of the Noble Ones and thus realized the accomplished nature, one will not be able to see the dependent.

Verse 23

That the dependent nature really arises would seem to contradict Sūtra passages where it is said that all dharmas have no own-existence and are non-arisen. This is solved by explaining that the Buddha had in mind three different types of “lack of own-existence”, each of them referring to one of the three own-existences/natures.

Verse 24ab

The thoroughly imagined own-existence has no own-existence in the sense that it has no applicable defining trait, as it was never there in the first place.

Verse 24bc

The other-dependent does not have own-existence in the sense that it does not come into existence on its own; and since the way it appears to arise does not conform to the way it really arises, it has “lack of own-existence in terms of arising”.

Verses 24d/25

The accomplished nature is ultimate (paramārtha) and it is lack of own-existence (niḥsvabhāvatā). This is the same as the fact of being cognition only, free from an object to be grasped and a grasper, the ultimate ever identical nature of all dharmas, non-arisen purity.

Verse 26

To overcome grasping at duality, the yogin must rest in the nature of the mind, that is cognition-only free from duality.

Verse 27

Even thinking “this is only cognition” is thinking of something, i.e. taking something as an object of the mind: it is not yet in harmony with the actual reality of cognition-only.

Verse 28

For the mind to rest in its own nature, it must not be directed towards any object, including the teachings of Cognition-Only; when it is no more directed towards any object, it also realizes the absence of a perceiver, and is placed in its own non-dual cognition-only-ness.

Verse 29

According to different stages of the path, from the Path of Seeing onwards, resting in the mind’s nature of cognition-only corresponds to different states mentioned in the Sūtras.

Verse 30

The mind resting in its non-dual nature, when reaching different degrees of purity, acquires different names, up to the state of Buddhahood, where it is called Dharmakāya.

Translation of the Thirty Verses

आत्मधर्मोपचारो हि विविधो यः प्रवर्तते |

विज्ञानपरिणामे ऽसौ परिणामः स च त्रिधा || १ ||

ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate |

vijñānapariṇāme 'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā || 1 ||

The manifold approximation, such as “self” and “dharma”, that goes on, refers to the transformation of consciousness, and that transformation is threefold:

विपाको मननाख्यश्च विज्ञप्तिर्विषयस्य च |

तत्रालयाख्यं विज्ञानं विपाकः सर्वबीजकम् || २ ||

vipāko mananākhyāś ca vijñaptir viṣayasya ca |

tatrālayākhyam vijñānam vipākaḥ sarvabījakam || 2 ||

maturation; the one called “thinking”; and the cognition of a domain.

Among these, the consciousness called ālaya is the maturation, and contains all the seeds.

असंविदितकोपादिस्थानविज्ञप्तिकं च तत् |

सदा स्पर्शमनस्कारवित्सञ्ज्ञाचेतनान्वितम् || ३ ||

asaṁviditakopādisthānavijñaptikaṁ ca tat |

sadā sparśamanaskāravitsaññācetanānvitam || 3 ||

In it, clinging, and the cognition of a locus, are not cognized;

it is always accompanied by contact, mental placement, feeling, notion and intention.

उपेक्षा वेदना तत्रानिवृताव्याकृतं च तत् |

तथा स्पर्शादियस्तच्च वर्तते स्रोतसौघवत् || ४ ||

upekṣā vedanā tatrānivṛtāvākṛtaṁ ca tat |

tathā sparśādayas tac ca vartate srotasaughavat ||4 ||

In it, feeling is neutral. It is unobstructed and undetermined, and so are contact, etc.;;
it goes on in a flow, like a stream.

तस्य व्यावृत्तिरर्हत्त्वे तदाश्रित्य प्रवर्तते |

तदालम्बं मनोनाम विज्ञानं मननात्मकम् || ५ ||

tasya vyāvṛttir arhattve tad āśṛitya pravartate |

tadālambaṁ manonāma vijñānaṁ mananātmakam || 5 ||

Its cessation comes about at the state of an Arhat; on its basis, there comes forth
a consciousness called “thought”, having the former as its support, and having the
nature of thinking;

क्लेशैश्चतुर्भिः सहितं निवृताव्याकृतैः सदा ।

आत्मदृष्ट्यात्ममोहात्ममानात्मस्नेहसञ्ज्ञितैः ॥ ६ ॥

kleśaiś caturbhiḥ sahitaṁ nivṛtāvyaḥkṛtaiḥ sadā ।

ātmadṛṣṭyātmamohātmamānātmāsnehasañjñitaiḥ ॥ 6 ॥

it is always accompanied by four afflictions, obscured and undetermined,
called: view of self, delusion of self, presumption of self, affection towards the self.

यत्रजस्तन्मयैरन्यैः स्पर्शाद्यैश्चार्हतो न तत् ।

न निरोधसमापत्तौ मार्गे लोकोत्तरे न च ॥ ७ ॥

yatrajas tanmayair anyaiḥ sparśādyaiś cārhatō na tat ।

na nirodhasamāpattau mārge lokottare na ca ॥ 7 ॥

Wherever one is born, they correspond to that level; it also has others, contact, etc.; it
does not exist for an Arhat,

nor during the absorption of cessation, nor in the supramundane path:

द्वितीयः परिणामो ऽयं तृतीयः षड्विधस्य या ।

विषयस्योपलब्धिः सा कुशलाकुशलाद्वया ॥ ८ ॥

dvitīyaḥ pariṇāmo 'yaṁ tṛtīyaḥ ṣaḍvidhasya yā ।

viṣayasyopalabdhiḥ sā kuśalākuśalādvayā ॥ 8 ॥

this is the second transformation. The third is the perception
of the sixfold domain, and it can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neither.

सर्वत्रगैर्विनियतैः कुशलैश्चैतसैरसौ |

सम्प्रयुक्ता तथा क्लेशैरुपक्लेशैस्त्रिवेदना || ९ ||

sarvatragair viniyataiḥ kuśalaiś caitasair asau |

samprayuktā tathā kleśair upakleśais trivedanā || 9 ||

It is joined by the omnipresent mental states; by those of delimited occurrence; by virtuous ones; by afflictions; and by secondary afflictions. It has three types of feeling.

आद्याः स्पर्शादयश्छन्दाधिमोक्षस्मृतयः सह |

समाधिधीभ्यां नियताः श्रद्धाथ हीरपत्रपा || १० ||

ādyāḥ sparśādayaś chandādhimokṣasmṛtayaḥ saha |

samādhidhībhyāṁ niyatāḥ śraddhātha hrīr apatrapā || 10 ||

The first are contact, etc. Zest, conviction and mindfulness, plus samādhi and wisdom, are the delimited; faith, modesty, shame,

अलोभादि त्रयं वीर्यं प्रश्रब्धिः साप्रमादिका |

अहिंसा कुशलाः क्लेशा रागप्रतिघमूढयः || ११ ||

alobhādi trayam vīryam praśrabdhiḥ sāpramādikā |

ahimsā kuśalāḥ kleśā rāgapratighamūḍhayaḥ || 11 ||

the three starting from non-greed, heroism, ease, that which comes with non-heedlessness, and non-harming, are the virtuous. The afflictions are attraction, aversion and delusion,

मानदृग्विचिकित्साश्च क्रोधोपनहने पुनः ।

म्रक्षः प्रदाश ईर्ष्याथ मात्सर्यं सह मायया ॥ १२ ॥

mānadṛgvicikitsās ca krodhopanahane punaḥ ।

mraakṣaḥ pradāśa īrṣyātha mātsaryaṁ saha māyayā ॥ 12 ॥

presumption, view, doubt. Furthermore, anger and grudge,

dissimulation, biting, envy, stinginess, illusionism,

शाठ्यं मदो विहिंसाहीरत्रपा स्त्यानमुद्धवः ।

आश्रद्धयमथ कौसीद्यं प्रमादो मुषिता स्मृतिः ॥ १३ ॥

śāṭhyaṁ mado vihirṁsāhrīra trapā styānam uddhavaḥ ।

āśraddhyam atha kausīdyaṁ pramādo muṣitā smṛtiḥ ॥ 13 ॥

deceitfulness, intoxication, harming, non-modesty, non-shame,

sloth, excitement, non-faith, laziness, heedlessness, deceived mindfulness,

विक्षेपो ऽसम्प्रजन्यं च कौकृत्यं मिद्धमेव च ।

वितर्कश्च विचारश्चेत्युपक्लेशा द्वये द्विधा ॥ १४ ॥

vikṣepo 'samprajanyaṁ ca kaukṛtyaṁ middham eva ca ।

vitarkaś ca vicāraś cety upakleśā dvaye dvidhā ॥ 14 ॥

scatteredness, lack of discerning awareness, what derives from bad deeds, torpor,

deliberation and analysis, are the secondary afflictions. The two pairs are twofold.

पञ्चानां मूलविज्ञाने यथाप्रत्ययमुद्भवः ।

विज्ञानानां सह न वा तरङ्गाणां यथा जले ॥ १५ ॥

pañcānām mūlavijñāne yathāpratyayam udbhavaḥ ।

vijñānānām saha na vā taraṅgāṅām yathā jale ॥ 15 ॥

The arising of the five consciounesses in the root consciousness is according to conditions; it may occur together or not, just like the arising of waves on water.

मनोविज्ञानसम्भूतिः सर्वदासञ्ज्ञिकादृते ।

समापत्तिद्वयान्मिद्धान्मूर्छनादप्यचित्तात् ॥ १६ ॥

manovijñānasambhūtiḥ sarvadāsañjñikād ṛte ।

samāpattidvayān middhān mūrchanād apy acittakāt ॥ 16 ॥

The thought-consciousness always comes about, except for: the notionless, the two attainments, mind-less torpor and swoon.

विज्ञानपरिणामो ऽयं विकल्पो यद्विकल्प्यते ।

तेन तन्नास्ति तेनेदं सर्वं विज्ञप्तिमात्रकम् ॥ १७ ॥

vijñānapariṇāmo 'yaṁ vikalpo yad vikalpyate ।

tena tan nāsti tenedaṁ sarvaṁ vijñaptimātrakam ॥ 17 ॥

This transformation of consciousness is a concept. What is conceptualized by it, does not exist: therefore, all of this is cognition-only.

सर्वबीजं हि विज्ञानं परिणामं तथा तथा ।

यात्यन्योन्यवशाद्येन विकल्पः स स जायते ॥ १८ ॥

sarvabījaṁ hi vijñānaṁ pariṇāmaṁ tathā tathā ।

yāty anyonyavaśād yena vikalpaḥ sa sa jāyate ॥ 18 ॥

The consciousness which contains all the seeds reaches manyfold ways of transformation, due to mutual influence; due to this, the concept arises in manyfold ways.

कर्मणो वासना ग्राहद्वयवासनया सह ।

क्षीणे पूर्वविपाके ऽन्यं विपाकं जनयन्ति तत् ॥ १९ ॥

karmaṇo vāsanā grāhadvayavāsanayā saha ।

kṣīṇe pūrvavipāke 'nyaṁ vipākaṁ janayanti tat ॥ 19 ॥

The perfumings from karma, together with the imprint of two types of grasping, when the previous maturation has vanished produce another maturation.

येन येन विकल्पेन यद्यद्वस्तु विकल्प्यते ।

परिकल्पित एवासौ स्वभावो न स विद्यते ॥ २० ॥

yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate ।

parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo na sa vidyate ॥ 20 ॥

By whichever concept such and such a thing is conceptualized,
that thing is only a thoroughly imagined own-existence: it does not exist.

परतन्नस्वभावस्तु विकल्पः प्रत्ययोद्भवः ।

निष्पन्नस्तस्य पूर्वेण सदा रहितता तु या ॥ २१ ॥

paratantrasvabhāvas tu vikalpaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ ।

niṣpannas tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahitatā tu yā ॥ 21 ॥

The other-dependent own-existence, on the other hand, is the concept, arisen due to conditions.

The accomplished is the latter's being always bereft of the former.

अत एव स नैवान्यो नानन्यः परतन्नतः ।

अनित्यतादिवद्वाच्यो नादृष्टे ऽस्मिन् स दृश्यते ॥ २२ ॥

ata eva sa naivānyo nānanyaḥ paratantrataḥ ।

anityatādivad vācyo nādṛṣṭe 'smin sa dṛśyate ॥ 22 ॥

Precisely due to this, it is neither other nor not other than the other-dependent.

It should be explained just like impermanence, etc. That is not seen as long as this is not seen.

त्रिविधस्य स्वभावस्य त्रिविधां निःस्वभावताम् ।

सन्धाय सर्वधर्माणां देशिता निःस्वभावता ॥ २३ ॥

trividhasya svabhāvasya trividhāṁ niḥsvabhāvatām ।

sandhāya sarvadharmāṇāṁ deśitā niḥsvabhāvatā ॥ 23 ॥

The lack of own-existence of all the dharmas was taught intending to refer to the threefold lack of own-existence of the threefold own-existence.

प्रथमो लक्षणेनैव निःस्वभावो ऽपरः पुनः ।

न स्वयम्भाव एतस्येत्यपरा निःस्वभावता ॥ २४ ॥

prathamo lakṣaṇenaiva niḥsvabhāvo 'paraḥ punaḥ ।

na svayambhāva etasyety aparā niḥsvabhāvatā ॥ 24 ॥

The first has no own-existence just in terms of its defining trait; while for the next, it means that it has no coming into existence on its own accord. There is another type of own-existence-less-ness:

धर्माणां परमार्थश्च स यतस्तथापि सः ।

सर्वकालं तथाभावात् सैव विज्ञप्तिमात्रता ॥ २५ ॥

dharmāṇāṃ paramārthaś ca sa yatas tathatāpi saḥ ।

sarvakālaṃ tathābhāvāt saiva vijñaptimātratā ॥ 25 ॥

due to being the ultimate of the dharmas; it is also thusness, being thus at all time; that itself is cognition-only-ness.

यावद्विज्ञप्तिमात्रत्वे विज्ञानं नावतिष्ठति ।

ग्राहद्वयस्यानुशयस्तावन्न विनिवर्तते ॥ २६ ॥

yāvad vijñaptimātratve vijñānaṃ nāvatiṣṭhati ।

grāhadvayasyānuśayas tāvan na vinivartate ॥ 26 ॥

As long as consciousness does not remain in cognition-only-ness, for that long the insidious growth of the two types of grasping does not cease.

विज्ञप्तिमात्रमेवेदमित्यपि ह्युपलम्भतः ।

स्थापयन्नग्रतः किञ्चित्तन्मात्रे नावतिष्ठते ॥ २७ ॥

vijñaptimātram evedam ity api hy upalambhataḥ ।

sthāpayann agrataḥ kiñcit tanmātre nāvatiṣṭhate ॥ 27 ॥

Since by perceiving even that “this is only just cognition”,
one is placing something in front, one is not remaining in that only.

यदा त्वालम्बनं ज्ञानं नैवोपलभते तदा ।

स्थितं विज्ञानमात्रत्वे ग्राह्याभावे तदग्रहात् ॥ २८ ॥

yadā tv ālambanaṁ jñānaṁ naivopalabhate tadā ।

sthitaṁ vijñānamātratve grāhyābhāve tadagrahāt ॥ 28 ॥

On the other hand, when awareness does not apprehend a support, then
it is placed within consciousness-only-ness, since in the absence of an object to be
grasped, it does not grasp that.

अचित्तो ऽनुपलम्भो ऽसौ ज्ञानं लोकोत्तरं च तत् ।

आश्रयस्य परावृत्तिर्द्विधादौष्टुल्यहानितः ॥ २९ ॥

acitto 'nupalambho 'sau jñānaṁ lokottaraṁ ca tat ।

āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhāduṣṭhulyahānitaḥ ॥ 29 ॥

That is the mind-less non-perception; it is supramundane awareness;
it is the revolution of the basis, thanks to the destruction of the twofold badness.

स एवानास्रवो धातुरचिन्त्यः कुशलो ध्रुवः ।

सुखो विमुक्तिकायो ऽसौ धर्माख्यो ऽयं महामुनेः ॥ ३० ॥

sa evānāsravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ ।

sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yaṁ mahāmuneḥ ॥ 30 ॥

That itself is the dhātu without fluxes, inconceivable, virtuous, permanent;

it is the blissful body of liberation, and this is called “Dharma” for the Great Muni.

त्रिंशिकाविज्ञप्तिकारिकाः समाप्ताः । कृतिरियमाचार्यवसुबन्धोः ॥

triṁśikāvijñaptikārikāḥ samāptāḥ । kṛtir iyam ācāryavasubandhoḥ ।

The Thirty Verses on Cognition are complete; this is a composition of Ācārya Vasubandhu.

Explanatory Notes

The following comments are primarily based on Sthiramati's Bhāṣya, with a few references to other Yogācāra treatises. In some cases, I have simply paraphrased his text, expanding or summarizing; some longer discussions have been omitted.

Each part of the comments is followed by a brief restatement, that is a slightly expanded version of the sentences in the initial summary.

Verse 1

आत्मधर्मोपचारो हि विविधो यः प्रवर्तते |

विज्ञानपरिणामे ऽसौ परिणामः स च त्रिधा || १ ||

ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate |

vijñānapariṇāme 'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā || 1 ||

The manifold approximation, such as “self” and “dharma”, that goes on, refers to the transformation of consciousness, and that transformation is threefold:

padacchedaḥ

ātma-dharma-upacāraḥ, hi, vividhaḥ, yaḥ, pravartate, vijñāna-pariṇāme, asau, pariṇāmaḥ, saḥ, ca, tridhā

The purpose of the treatise

Ācārya Sthiramati, the great commentator, explains the purpose of the Thirty Verses in three different ways.

We can understand that Ācārya Vasubandhu composed the treatise in order to offer a correct explanation of the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of dharmas, for the sake of those who have not understood them at all, and for those who have understood them incorrectly. This purpose connects the Thirty Verses to the Twenty Verses, where Vasubandhu himself explained that the usual teaching of the twelve entrances is for the sake of introducing disciples to the selflessness of persons, while the teaching of cognition-only introduces them to the selflessness of dharmas.

The realization of the two-fold selflessness, in turn, causes the destruction of the two-fold obscuration: realizing the selflessness of persons destroys the obscurations of afflictions, while realizing the selflessness of dharmas destroys the obscuration to objects of awareness.

Removing the afflictions results in liberation; removing the obscuration to objects of awareness results in omniscience. Therefore, The ultimate purpose of taking up this treatise is to elicit the causes and conditions for liberation and omniscience.

The second possible explanation is that when people are attached to self and dharmas they cannot properly understand mind-only: thus the treatise is meant to gradually introduce them to consciousness-only, together with its results.

The third possible explanation is that the treatise removes two possible misconceptions about reality: the first is that the object of consciousness, just like consciousness, is real (the position of most non-Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers); the second is that consciousness too, just like the object of consciousness, is purely conventional (the position of the Madhyamaka). By negating these two misconceptions, the treatise is meant to establish the correct view of reality, i.e. cognition-only.

Approximation

The term I translate with “approximation” is *upacāra*: it is a key-term in Buddhist philosophy, and offers very useful clues to understand the treatise.

This term is sometimes translated as “metaphor”, but its sense may be somewhat broader. For example, a standard way to divide the teachings of the Buddha is to evaluate whether a certain statement is “based on an approximation” (*aupacārika*) or “based on the defining traits of things” (*lākṣaṇika*). When the Buddha speaks in terms of persons extended through time and space, it is no more than a convenient approximation of speech, not corresponding to the actual nature of things – which is disclosed in statements more directly in harmony with selflessness.

“Approximation” (*upacāra*) is, in other words, a synonym of “designation” (*prajñapti*) and “convention” (*saṃvṛti*). Outside of a strictly Buddhist context, an “approximation of speech” can be a metaphor, such as when one says “this student is fire” in order to highlight a quality of the student that is common to fire, such as the ability to consume quickly whatever he studies, or an extreme redness of complexion: such expression does not mean, literally, that the student is fire.

Vasubandhu had already explained (in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) that Buddhas use the “approximation” of “self”: this approximation can refer to the mind, because the mind is the basis of the sense of “I”. It does not entail a literal acceptance of a real “self” beyond a mere name for the collection of the five aggregates, but it can be a convenient way of conveying one’s intention in such expressions as “one should tame oneself by oneself”.

Accepting that the self is an “approximation” one will be in harmony with the view of the selflessness of persons. This view of selflessness, advocated by most non-Mahāyāna schools, considers that all that exists in the context of “persons” is collections of dharmas, such as the five aggregates, that are impermanent and brought about by causes and conditions; and since there is no permanent core anywhere to be found within or apart from the aggregates, all dharmas are thus “self-less”, in the sense that there is no permanent “self”, anywhere. It is said that the approximation of “self” is manifold

because other similar words can be found to refer to a similar idea, such as “sentient being”, “living being”, etc.

One further step is to say that the dharmas themselves are an approximation of speech, i.e. they don't just lack a permanent core, but they do not really exist. In the context of Yogācāra, this means that dharmas are no more than a projection of consciousness, and do not exist as either objects or agents of grasping/perception. This is the level of “selflessness of dharmas” which means that dharmas themselves lack the nature of being anything more than conceptual illusions, and do not even arise as possible objects or agents of grasping: there was nothing to be perceived in the first place. The approximation of dharmas is manifold because there are many types of dharmas, such as “form”, “feeling”, “notions”, etc.

Approximations of speech appear in both mundane, ordinary usages, and in technical treatises (śāstra). When using an approximation of speech (upacāra) we use a certain term while actually referring to something else: thus, when we say “the student is fire”, “fire” does not have a literal referent as any real fire, but refers to the student himself and his qualities. In the case of the approximation of self and dharmas, the actual, real referent is the “transformation of consciousness”.

Transformation of consciousness

The word “transformation” (pariṇāma) can be used in different senses. For example, in the context of Sāṅkhya philosophy and elsewhere, it can refer to how an enduring reality undergoes different states; this usage of “transformation” would be inapplicable in a Buddhist context, as the idea of an enduring substance continuing though all apparent changes is antithetical to the teachings of impermanence and selflessness.

Sthiramati explains that here the term “transformation” is a synonym of “the property of being different” (anyathātvam); it is the arising of the momentary effect, different from the momentary causes that precede it (the difference is the basis for the usage of the term “transformation”).

Overall sense of Verse 1

Both in mundane usage and in technical treatises we find expressions such as “self”, “living being”, and “person”; and the Buddhist treatises often describe various types of dharmas, such as “form”, “feeling”, “notion”, etc. From the perspective of Yogācāra philosophy, neither of these types of expressions should be taken literally: they do not directly refer to anything real. Both of them actually, and indirectly, refer to different aspects of the dependently arisen continuum of consciousness, of which persons, visible forms, sounds, feelings, delusion and wisdom, and any other experienced objects and agents, are mere illusory projections.

Verse 2ab

विपाको मननाख्यश्च विज्ञप्तिर्विषयस्य च ।

vipāko mananākhyas ca vijñaptir viṣayasya ca |

maturation; the one called “thinking”; and the cognition of a domain.

padacchedaḥ

vipākaḥ, manana-ākhyah, ca, vijñaptiḥ, viṣayasya, ca

Three transformations: the Yogācāra system of eight consciousnesses

The first verse introduced the Yogācāra theme that there is no outer object, and that which appears is no more than an appearance of consciousness itself, a transformation. Yogācāra philosophers explain that the arising of mind and mental states is possible without the presence of outer form/materiality (rūpa) functioning as the

“support/object condition” (ālabana-pratyaya), and one way to explain this relies on a system of eight consciousnesses, rather than the usual six as accepted by other Buddhist schools. These eight consciousnesses, in turn, are grouped into three transformations, as listed in the first half of verse 2.

Maturation: the store-house consciousness

The first transformation is primarily defined as “maturation”; Sthiramati clarifies that this refers to the manifestation of a result due to the maturation of subtle perfumings (vāsanā) of karma.

The consciousness called “maturation” refers to the ālaya-vijñāna, what is usually translated as “store-house consciousness”; a special feature of Yogācāra Abhidharma, and normally counted as the 8th consciousness in this system.

Defining the ālaya-vijñāna primarily as “maturation” is an indication that this is a resultant consciousness, and determines its further features, that will be explained in the subsequent parts of the text.

Thinking: the afflicted thought-consciousness

This type of thought-consciousness (mano-vijñāna) is to be distinguished from the usual thought-consciousness appearing as the 6th in the more common list of six types of consciousness. Its object is not dharmas (i.e. anything whatsoever), but rather, very specifically, the store-house consciousness; and it is called “thinking” because it is constantly (and wrongly) conceptualizing the store-house consciousness as a self. The afflicted thought-consciousness is also a special feature of Yogācāra Abhidharma, where it is counted as the 7th consciousness. The sense in which it is called “afflicted” has to do with its mistaken conceptualization of a self, and will be discussed in greater detail in the section devoted to the second transformation.

The cognition of a domain: the six consciousnesses that appear as objects

In the *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu defines consciousness as “specific cognition” (*prativijñapti*), explaining in the commentary that this means the cognition of a specific domain (*viṣaya*). Objects of consciousness are called “domains” because each type of object (for example: visible objects) is the proper scope of the functioning of each the cognitive faculties (for example: the eye-faculty), as also of the corresponding consciousnesses (for example: the eye-consciousness, i.e., visual cognition).

Vasubandhu’s definition as found in the *Abhidharmakośa* represents a way of understanding consciousness that is common to practically all schools of Buddhism. The third transformation includes the six consciousnesses that are commonly accepted and found throughout the Buddhist teachings: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and thought-consciousness.

Sthiramati offers an important clue to understand how these consciousnesses operate from the perspective of mind-only: they do not really perceive objects, but rather they appear as objects (*viṣayapratyavabhāsa*). This implicitly reflects a *Yogācāra* distinction between two types of form/materiality: the completely imagined form (*parikalpita-rūpa*), i.e. form in the sense of an object of cognition, does not exist at all; on the other hand, the form that one conceptualizes about (*vikalpita-rūpa*), i.e. the form that is the basis for conceptualizations such as “self”, etc., exists as an appearance of consciousness.

Overall sense of Verse 2ab

The transformation of consciousness that is the real basis for all experience and conceptualization is of three types: maturation, i.e. the storehouse-consciousness; the afflicted thought-consciousness that constantly conceptualizes the storehouse-consciousness as a self; and the six consciousnesses that appear as specific types of objects.

Verse 2cd

तत्रालयाख्यं विज्ञानं विपाकः सर्वबीजकम् ॥ २ ॥

tatrālayākhyam vijñānam vipākaḥ sarvabījakam ॥ 2 ॥

Among these, the consciousness called ālaya is the maturation and contains all the seeds.

padacchedaḥ

tatra, ālaya-ākhyam, vijñānam, vipākaḥ, sarva-bījakam

Storehouse consciousness

The section starting from this half-verse is devoted to the definition of the first of the three transformations of consciousness, i.e. the “maturation”. The first term employed to clarify the characteristics of this type of consciousness is ālaya-vijñāna: although I have here translated it as “store-house consciousness”, this is a key-term with multiple meanings, each of them applicable to the same word thanks to a different etymological and grammatical analysis.

Sthiramati offers three alternative explanations of the meaning of ālaya:

- ālaya means locus/place (synonym of sthāna), and the ālaya-vijñāna is so called because it is the locus for all the seeds of the dharmas belonging to the side of affliction;
- or, it is called ālaya because all the dharmas are connected to it/stick to it (ālīyante) as effects;
- or, it is called ālaya because it is connected to/it sticks to all the dharmas (ālīyate) as a cause.

The common feature of all these explanations is that the term ālaya is employed to highlight the relationship between this type of consciousness and the seeds; the “seeds”

are produced by momentary experiences and will eventually mature into new momentary experiences of a similar kind, appearing as the cognition of objects.

Maturation

Here the ālayavijñāna is called “maturation” because it is the maturation of previous virtuous and non-virtuous karmas in different realms (desire, form, formless) and types of birth (hell, preta, animal, human, demigod, god). This explanation hints at an important argument to prove the existence of the ālaya-vijñāna, as Yogācāra philosophers assign it a crucial role in the process of rebirth, as exemplified by the twelve limbs of dependent arising.

Containing all the seeds

Sthiramati explains that this means that the ālaya-vijñāna is the basis of the seeds for all the dharmas (in the sense of all the “entities”, not in the more restricted sense of “teachings”, etc.); this will be clarified later, when the causal relationship between the ālaya-vijñāna and the other two transformations of consciousness will be explained in some detail. It means, in brief, that the ālayavijñāna is the source from which everything else manifests, when the appropriate conditions are there.

Overall sense of Verse 2cd

The most basic definition of the first transformation of consciousness is that it is maturation, i.e. a resultant consciousness; it is called “ālaya”, which we can understand, although flexibly, as “storehouse”; and it contains all seeds that will manifest as dharmas, i.e. as illusory cognitions of an object to be grasped and a grasper.

Verse 3ab

असंविदितकोपादिस्थानविज्ञप्तिकं च तत् |

asamviditakopādīsthānavijñaptikam ca tat |

In it, clinging, and the cognition of a locus, are not cognized;

padacchedaḥ

asamviditaka-upādi-sthāna-vijñaptikam, ca, tat

The support/object (ālambana) and the aspect/configuration (ākāra)

Like all other Buddhist thinkers, Yogācāra philosophers also accept that each moment of consciousness arises on the basis of a support/object (ālambana) and with an aspect/configuration (ākāra) matching that object. In case of the six usual consciousnesses, these two elements are easily identified: for example, visual consciousness has visible form (rūpa) as its object, and arises with a configuration that matches that visible form. What is, however, the object of the ālaya-vijñāna? Sthiramati explains that the ālaya-vijñāna arises with undetermined support, i.e. with a support whose configuration/aspect is not precisely or specifically cognized as being this or that. The sense in which these are “undetermined” is further clarified as pertaining to two things: the “clinging-basis” (upādi) and the “cognition of a location” (sthāna-vijñapti).

The ālaya-vijñāna does not discern its clinging-basis (upādi)

The term upādi is equivalent to the more common term upādāna; this is a key term in Buddhist thought, and it is not entirely easy to render in English. It has the sense of “appropriation” or “clinging”, or the basis that is appropriated/clung to, or the instrument through which one appropriates/clings/makes something “one’s own”.

Keeping this range of meanings in mind is important in order to understand what the word refers to in the context of this verse, which is more than one thing. As Sthiramati carefully explains, the upādi can refer to, internally, to what “pertains to oneself”:

- the subtle impressions/perfumings of attachment to the completely imagined nature (parikalpitasvabhāva) and
- the rūpa that forms the sense-faculties, together with its support (i.e. the body), and the nāma that accompanies it (altogether, this is the conventional basis for speaking of a “person”).

First meaning of upādi: subtle impressions/perfumings (vāsanā) of the concepts of self and dharmas

In this explanation, the term upādi is explained as meaning “the cause for appropriating”, “the cause for clinging to”, “the cause for taking up”. Due to the subtle impressions/perfumings (vāsanā) of the concepts of “self”, etc., and “dharma”, etc., such concepts are taken up/appropriated/clung to as effects by the ālayavijñāna. Thus, the subtle perfumings are called upādi, but in the sense of being the cause of the action called upādi.

This first type of upādi, i.e. the two-fold subtle impressions/perfumings of concepts, are “non- cognized” in the sense that they are not cognized according to their specific configurations (ākāra), such as when one can say “this is in this” or “this is such and such”.

Second meaning of upādi: the clinging/dependence on the basis (āśraya)

The second meaning of upādi is as a synonym of “dependence”; the ālaya-vijñāna “depends” on the complex of nāma-rūpa that makes up a conventional person, in the sense that they have the same destiny (eka-yogakṣematva), i.e. when one is favored, the other also is, and when one is harmed, the other also is. Of course the nāma-rūpa complex is purely a projection, but this does not preclude this type of conventional

analysis: whatever “happens” to the illusory collection of nāma-rūpa will affect the ālaya-vijñāna.

The second type of upādi, i.e. the nāma-rūpa complex that makes a conventional “person”, is “non-cognized” in the sense that the ālaya-vijñāna cannot cognize it as something specific, as being this or that.

The ālaya-vijñāna does not discern its cognition of a location (sthāna-vijñapti)

While the previous lack of determination was about what pertains to the person, this is about the environment; the ālaya-vijñāna does not cognize the environment in the specific aspect of its layout, etc.

The case of the “absorption of cessation”, etc.

Sthiramati supports the Yogācāra doctrine of a consciousness not cognizing the specifics of the person and environment by pointing to the example of such states as the “absorption of cessation”, and similar cases; he discards the possibility that in such states the mind is completely not there, and thus points out that, for those who accept that some type of consciousness continues during the “absorption of cessation”, etc., that consciousness arises without a specific determination of the object/support (ālambana) in terms of its aspects/configuration (ākāra). In other words, Yogācāra philosophers are not the only Buddhist thinkers who accept the possibility of an undetermined object/support for consciousness.

Overall sense of Verse 3ab

Like all other types of consciousness, the ālaya-vijñāna arises with an object/support (ālambana) and with an aspect/configuration (ākāra); however, it cannot cognize the configuration of its object in specific terms, whether this refers to the nāma-rūpa complex that makes up a “person”, or whether this refers to the broader environment within which that person finds him-/herself. Sthiramati points to the example of the

“absorption of cessation” and other similar states as a case where even non-Yogācāra Buddhist philosophers accept that consciousness arises without precisely determining the features of its object/support.

Verse 3cd

सदा स्पर्शमनस्कारवित्सञ्ज्ञाचेतनान्वितम् ॥ ३ ॥

sadā sparśamanaskāravitsaññācetanānvitam ॥ 3 ॥

it is always accompanied by contact, mental placement, feeling, notion and intention.

padacchedaḥ

sadā, sparśa-manaskāra-vit-saññā-cetanā-anvitam

The five omnipresent mental states

A further widely accepted principle in Buddhist Abhidharma is that mind (citta) never arises without some accompanying mental states (caitta); mind is the mere cognition of an object, while mental states are further cognitive or emotive attitudes towards that object. Thus the question is, what are the mental states that accompany the ālaya-vijñāna? They are five, and they always accompany it: contact (sparśa); mental-placement/attention (manaskāra); feeling (vedanā); notion (saññā); and intention (cetanā).

This section clarifies Yogācāra Abhidharma positions on caittas, and Sthiramati offers a brief yet comprehensive overview of these mental states.

Contact (sparśa)

Contact refers to the coming together of three things: the sense-faculty (indriya) the object/domain (viṣaya) and the corresponding consciousness (vijñāna); for example, the eye- faculty, visible form, and the eye-consciousness. “Coming together” means being assembled together in a cause-effect relationship; the sense-faculty and the object/domain are two minimal causes of the arising of a corresponding consciousness. Contact determines the quality of the feeling (vedanā) that accompanies consciousness.

Mental-placement/attention (manaskāra)

Mental placement is an effort, or turning towards, of the mind; it means its turning towards its object/support (ālambana). Its function is to ensure that the mind turns its attention again and again towards the same object.

Feeling (vedanā)

Feeling has the nature of experience: it can be of three types, i.e. painful, pleasant or neutral.

Notion (saṃjñā)

Notion is the grasping of the “sign” (nimitta) of the object/domain; sign here refers to the specific feature of the object, and perceiving it means observing it such as when conceptualizing “this is blue”, etc.

Intention (cetanā)

Intention is an activity of the mind that makes as if pulsate towards the object, just as when iron moves towards a magnet.

Overall sense of Verse 3cd

All moments of consciousness are accompanied by mental states; the ālaya-vijñāna is no exception, and it is accompanied by the five omnipresent mental states.

Verse 4abc

उपेक्षा वेदना तत्रानिवृताव्याकृतं च तत् ।

तथा स्पर्शादयस्

upekṣā vedanā tatrānivṛtāvyaḥkṛtaṁ ca tat ।

tathā sparśādayas

In it, feeling is neutral. It is unobstructed and undetermined, and so are contact, etc.;

padacchedaḥ

upekṣā, vedanā, tatra, anivṛta-avyākṛtam, ca, tat, tathā, sparśa-ādayaḥ

The only type of feeling in the ālayavijñāna is neutral

While in general there are three types of feeling (vedanā), i.e. pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, only the last type accompanies the ālayavijñāna; this is because the pleasant and unpleasant types have by necessity an object that is determined in its aspects, while, as we have seen, the object of the ālaya-vijñāna is not determined in its aspects (and thus too it must be for the accompanying feeling, since mind and accompanying mental states always have the same object); furthermore, pleasant and unpleasant vedanā can

have the insidious growths (anuśayas) of attraction and aversion, and this is incompatible with the nature of the ālaya- vijñāna.

The ālaya-vijñāna is unobstructed (anivṛta) and undetermined (avyākṛta)

There are four possible types of consciousness: virtuous (kuśala), non-virtuous (akuśala), not-obstructed and undetermined (anivṛta-avyākṛta) and obstructed and undetermined (nivṛta-avyākṛta). “Undetermined” means neither virtuous nor non-virtuous, and this can still however be called “blocked” or obstructed by the afflictions; Sthiramati specifies that it is not obscured by the afflictions that pertain to the level of manas (manobhūmika).

Since the ālaya-vijñāna is a resultant maturation (vipāka) it cannot in turn be virtuous or non-virtuous in respect to a future maturation – i.e., it cannot form virtuous or non-virtuous karma. It is also not obstructed by adventitious afflictions (it is accompanied by only five mental states).

The five omnipresent mental states that accompany the ālaya-vijñāna conform to it

Thus, their object is not determined as per its aspects, and they are all unobstructed and undetermined. This is the application to the specific instance of the ālaya-vijñāna of a general Abhidharmic principle that mental states conform to the quality of the moment of mind that they accompany.

Overall sense of Verse 4abc

This part explains the type of mind and mental states in the context of the ālaya-vijñāna: all of them are unobstructed and undetermined, they have no clearly determined object, and as for the feeling, it is only neutral. Some of the features are due to the fact that the ālaya-vijñāna is a maturation consciousness, i.e. its main definition (see above).

Verse 4d

तच्च वर्तते स्रोतसौघवत् ॥ ४ ॥

tac ca vartate srotasaughavat ॥ 4 ॥

it goes on in a flow, like a stream.

padacchedaḥ

tat, ca, vartate, srotasā, ogha-vat

The ālaya-vijñāna is a continuous stream of moments of consciousness

This special feature of the ālaya-vijñāna is not shared by any other type of consciousness: it never stops, until liberation, i.e. each moment of ālaya-vijñāna is followed by another moment of ālaya-vijñāna, without any gap. Thus, the ālaya-vijñāna has the key role of ensuring continuity, something that no other type of consciousness would be able to do, as all other types have gaps.

Sthiramati also points out that the example of a flowing stream has an additional purpose; just like a strong stream flows by carrying logs and other debris, so also the ālaya-vijñāna flows without interruption for as long as saṃsāra, carrying the subtle perfumings (vāsanā) connected to merit, demerit and immovable karmas.

Overall meaning of Verse 4d

This verse uses the image of a flowing stream to emphasize that the ālaya-vijñāna is a continuous type of consciousness, its powerful current flowing without gaps for as long as there is saṃsāra for that person.

Verse 5a

तस्य व्यावृत्तिरर्हत्त्वे

tasya vyāvṛttir arhattve

Its cessation comes about at the state of an Arhat;

padacchedaḥ

tasya, vyāvṛttiḥ, arhattve

The end of the vipāka transformation

We have seen that the special feature of the ālaya-vijñāna is that it is continuous, i.e. each moment of this type of consciousness is followed by another moment, without any interruptions: it continues as long as there is saṃsāra, i.e. the continuum of repeated birth and death.

What happens, though, when the mind-stream becomes free from mental afflictions, and thus attains liberation? This verse tells us that the ālaya-vijñāna ceases; and this is interpreted differently by different Yogācāra philosophers, some understanding that it means that it continues in a purified form not anymore fit to be called ālaya.

It may be here worth pointing out that the ālaya-vijñāna is, according to the Yogācāra view, something to be transcended, as it is the receptacle of all the seeds of past perfumings based on wrong conceptualization. This verse also offers an opportunity to clarify that for Yogācāra philosophers the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine (“Buddha-Nature”) is not an ultimate teaching, as they do not believe that everyone will become a Samyaksambuddha: Arhats are, for them, thoroughly out of saṃsāra, and there is no question of an Arhat “waking up” from the notion of nirvāṇa to embark on the Bodhisattva path.

Overall sense of Verse 5a

The first transformation, which otherwise goes on as a flow of moments with no gaps, ceases when liberation is attained.

Verse 5bcd

तदाश्रित्य प्रवर्तते |

तदालम्बं मनोनाम विज्ञानं मननात्मकम् || ५ ||

tad āśritya pravartate |

tadālambaṁ manonāma vijñānaṁ mananātmakam || 5 ||

on its basis, there comes forth

a consciousness called “thought”, having the former as its support, and having the nature of thinking;

padacchedaḥ

tat, āśritya, pravartate, tat-ālabam, manaḥ-nāma, vijñānam, manana-ātmakam

Introducing the second transformation

The second transformation of consciousness can also be counted as the 7th consciousness in the Yogācāra system of 8 consciousnesses. It is called “afflicted thought-consciousness” (kliṣṭamanovijñāna) and should be distinguished from the 6th

consciousness, i.e. the “thought-consciousness” (manovijñāna), common to all Buddhist schools.

The second transformation is based on the ālaya-vijñāna

This point is explained by Shīramatī as having two meanings.

- First: the afflicted mind-consciousness arises in a continuum from the subtle perfumings (vāsanā) deposited in the ālaya-vijñāna.
- Second: its level and realm (desire, form, formless) match that of the ālaya-vijñāna on which it is based, since its occurrence is bound to the ālaya-vijñāna.

The second transformation takes the ālaya-vijñāna as its object/support (ālambana)

The afflicted thought-consciousness always has the same object, the ālaya-vijñāna, in the sense that the ālaya-vijñāna is what it misconstrues as a “self” (ātman); it does not mean that it directly perceives the ālaya-vijñāna (this would contradict the doctrine of cognition-only, since it would mean that the 7th consciousness has a real object of perception).

The second transformation has the nature of constantly thinking of the ālaya-vijñāna

Shīramatī explains that this consciousness is called manaḥ by way of nirukti, i.e. an etymology that relies primarily on sound-association rather than principled grammatical derivation: thus, it is manaḥ because it has the nature of manana, i.e. the action of thinking of something (that is to say, of the ālaya-vijñāna). This etymological explanation may also be an additional way to distinguish the 7th consciousness from the 6th consciousness.

Overall sense of Verse 5bcd

The second transformation of consciousness arises as a continuum from the subtle perfumings deposited in the ālaya-vijñāna, which it takes as its object of perception too, misunderstanding it by constantly thinking of it as a self.

Verse 6ab

क्लेशैश्चतुर्भिः सहितं निवृताव्याकृतैः सदा |

kleśaiś caturbhiḥ sahitam nivṛtāvyākṛtaiḥ sadā |

it is always accompanied by four afflictions, obscured and undetermined,

padacchedaḥ

kleśaiḥ, caturbhiḥ, sahitam, nivṛta-avyākṛtaiḥ, sadā

The second transformation is always accompanied by four afflictions

The second transformation is always accompanied by four afflictions, apart from the five omnipresent mental states: thus, it always has nine mental states accompanying it. This explains why it is called “afflicted thought consciousness” as distinguished from the “thought consciousness” that is the 6th among the eight.

The four afflictions are obscured and undetermined

These four afflictions are “obscured”, which is more or less a synonym of defiled/afflicted, although there exists some debate about the precise sense of the term. They are also undetermined, i.e. neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

Overall sense of Verse 6ab

There are four specific afflictions that constantly accompany the 7th consciousness, and this is why this type of thought consciousness is called “afflicted” (kliṣṭa).

Verse 6cd

आत्मदृष्ट्यात्ममोहात्ममानात्मस्नेहसञ्ज्ञितैः ॥ ६ ॥

ātmadṛṣṭyātmamohātmmānātmasnehasañjñitaiḥ ॥ 6 ॥

called: view of self, delusion of self, presumption of self, affection towards the self.

padacchedaḥ

ātma-dṛṣṭi-ātma-moha-ātma-māna-ātma-sneha-sañjñitaiḥ

The four afflictions are ways to misconstrue the ālaya-vijñāna as a self

All the four afflictions that constantly accompany the 7th consciousness are different ways in which this consciousness mis-perceives the ālaya-vijñāna as being a self. This point is of considerable importance: it is said that the Buddha did not teach the ālaya-vijñāna in the beginning because it is easily misunderstood to be like the non-Buddhist self, and this more theoretical level of misunderstanding is mirrored by the very structure of consciousness.

The error on the part of the afflicted-thought-consciousness is constant, and is not occurring only during those few gaps of time when that consciousness itself stops (these gaps will be discussed later).

View of self

Viewing the five clinging-aggregates as a ‘self’ is the view of self: it is the same as the “view about the transitory collection” (sat-kāya-dṛṣṭi), one of the main forms of wrong view.

Delusion of self

Delusion of self means non-awareness in respect to the self (presumably, not being aware that a permanent self does not exist).

Presumption of self

This means having presumption regarding the self, and is the same as the presumption that can be expressed in the form “I am”, “I exist”.

Affection towards the self

This means affection or love towards the “self.”

Overall meaning of Verse 6cd

The four afflictions that constantly accompany the seventh consciousness (“afflicted thought consciousness”) are all different ways in which this consciousness misperceives the ālayavijñāna to be a self, and relates to that self on the basis of such misconception.

Verse 7ab

यत्रजस्तन्मयैरन्यैः स्पर्शाद्यैश्च

yatrajas tanmayair anyaiḥ sparsādyaiś ca

Wherever one is born, they correspond to that level; it also has others, contact, etc.;

padacchedaḥ

yatra-jaḥ, tat-mayaiḥ, anyaiḥ, sparsā-ādyaiḥ, ca

The level of the four afflictions that accompany the 7th consciousness

The four afflictions through which the 7th consciousness misperceives the ālaya-vijñāna match its level and realm (bhūmi and dhātu); they never belong to a different level or realm. Thus, for example, if the afflicted thought consciousness belongs to the desire realm, the four afflictions will also belong to the desire realm; if it belongs to the form realm, they will belong to the form realm, etc.

The other five mental states that accompany the 7th consciousness

Sthiramati explains that this verse can be understood as implying two points.

We can first of all understand that the five omnipresent mental states (sarvatraga) accompany the 7th consciousness too, not just the ālaya-vijñāna, as they accompany, in fact, all types of consciousness without exception: and what was said of the four afflictions also applies to them, i.e. they will belong to the same level as the 7th consciousness that they accompany.

Secondly, we can take the word “others” (anyaiḥ) to represent a distinction from the five omnipresent states that accompany the ālaya-vijñāna. In that case, they were

“unobstructed- undetermined” (anivṛta-avyākṛta), just like the ālaya-vijñāna, while in this case they are “obstructed-undetermined” (nivṛta-avyākṛta), just like the 7th consciousness.

Overall meaning of Verse 7ab

The 7th consciousness, the afflicted thought consciousness, is always accompanied by nine mental states: four afflictions through which it misperceives the ālaya-vijñāna as a self, and the five omnipresent mental states. All the nine belong to the same level and realm as the 7th consciousness that they accompany.

Verses 7bcd/8a

अर्हतो न तत् ।

न निरोधसमापत्तौ मार्गे लोकोत्तरे न च ॥ ७ ॥

द्वितीयः परिणामो ऽयं

arhato na tat ।

na nirodhasamāpattau mārge lokottare na ca ॥ 7 ॥

dvitīyaḥ pariṇāmo 'yaṁ

it does not exist for an Arhat,

nor during the absorption of cessation, nor in the supramundane path: this is the second transformation.

padacchedaḥ

arhataḥ, na, tat, na, nirodha-samāpattau, mārge, loka-uttare, na, ca, dvitīyaḥ, pariṇāmaḥ, ayam

The 7th consciousness stops completely after liberation

Like all the other mental afflictions that are destroyed during the last path (ānantaryamārga), the afflicted thought consciousness does not exist any more for an Arhat. We should also remember that Arhat includes a Samyaksambuddha, since a Samyaksambuddha has both the result of Arhathood (the removal of the mental afflictions) and the result of Omniscience (the removal of the obscurations to knowables).

The 7th consciousness stops temporarily during the absorption of cessation

For a Non-Returner (anāgāmin) who has obtained the absorption of cessation, the 7th consciousness stops temporarily during that absorption. However, it arises again when he comes out from that absorption, since the ālaya-vijñāna did not cease during that time and the 7th consciousness can once again start arising from the ālaya-vijñāna. One of the functions of the ālaya-vijñāna is to ensure continuity even during those states wherein all other types of consciousness temporarily cease.

The 7th consciousness stops temporarily during the supramundane path

Since the supramundane path consists in the seeing of self-less-ness, while the afflicted thought consciousness is afflicted precisely by grasping at a “self”, when the supramundane path arises, the afflicted thought consciousness is temporarily stopped by its antidote. It once again arises from the ālaya-vijñāna once the meditator emerges from the supramundane path to a mundane mental state.

Overall sense of Verses 7bcd/8a

The second transformation stops completely with the attainment of Arhathood, and stops temporarily in two states: the absorption of cessation, and the supramundane path. When it stops temporarily, it can arise again later from the ālaya-vijñāna, which does not stop even during those two states.

Verse 8bc

तृतीयः षड्विधस्य या |

विषयस्योपलब्धिः सा

tṛtīyaḥ ṣaḍvidhasya yā |

viṣayasyopalabdhiḥ sā

The third is the perception of the sixfold domain,

padacchedaḥ

tṛtīyaḥ, ṣaḍvidhasya, yā, viṣaya-upalabdhiḥ, sā

The common Abhidharmic definition of consciousness

Different Buddhist systems of Abhidharma define consciousness in similar ways, as the perception of an object (viṣaya-upalabdhi, prativijñapti, etc.). This definition is simple; it is nonetheless extremely helpful to keep it in mind when reading more complex philosophical discussions. The basic mind/consciousness (citta/vijñāna) is not an enduring entity pre-existing its object, but, like the object, is momentary; furthermore, its momentary object is one of the necessary causes for the consciousness to arise.

Of course the above explanation is from the perspective that objects really exist outside of consciousness, and this is not the ultimate Yogācāra view. Nonetheless, this is a level of analysis that Yogācāra philosophers themselves engage in, as a preliminary level of improved conventionality. They then discard the view of external object by explaining that it actually refers solely to aspects of consciousness: for example, the Twenty Verses explain that the terms “faculty” (indriya) and “object/domain” (viṣaya) should actually be understood to refer to the seed and the specific appearance of any given cognition: the “eye” actually refers to the seed of a specific moment of visual cognition, a seed

deposited in the ālaya-vijñāna; while “visible form” refers to the way in which that moment of cognition is going to appear.

The third transformation of consciousness is therefore consciousness as commonly understood in the Buddhist tradition, as the mere perception of an object/support (ālambana), with accompanying mental states perceiving specificities about that very object. In the context of Yogācāra this type of consciousness is called pravṛtti-vijñāna (consciousness of engagement/occurrence).

Six-types of consciousness

Like all other Buddhist schools, the Yogācāra system classifies the object-perceiving consciousness as being of six-types, named after the bases that makes its arising possible; eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and thought-consciousness. The first five bases are sense-faculties (indriya), while “thought” refers to a prior moment of any of the six consciousness – as the “thought-consciousness” does not have a sense-faculty as its basis, but rather, a prior moment of cognition.

The object of the first five is delimited (eye-consciousness can only perceive visual forms, ear-consciousness can only perceive sounds, etc.); the object of the sixth consciousness is not delimited, as it can perceive any of the objects of the previous five, plus some objects that are perceived exclusively by it.

Overall meaning of Verse 8bc

The third transformation of consciousness includes the six types of consciousness accepted by all Buddhist schools, and defined as the perception of an object: eye-consciousness is the perception of visible form, ear-consciousness is the perception of sounds, etc.

Verse 8d

कुशलाकुशलाद्वया || ८ ||

kuśalākuśalādvayā || 8 ||

and it can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neither.

padacchedaḥ

kuśala-akuśala-advayā

General principle to classify pravṛtti-vijñānas

The six types of pravṛtti-vijñānas are classified as virtuous (kuśala), non-virtuous (akuśala) or undetermined (neither of the two, advayā), according to whether the mental states that accompany them are virtuous, non-virtuous or undetermined. Thus they differ from both the ālaya-vijñāna and the afflicted thought consciousness, as they can be of all three types.

Virtuous pravṛtti-vijñānas

When a pravṛtti-vijñāna is accompanied by any of the three virtuous roots, i.e. non-greed, non-aversion, or non-delusion, it is classified as virtuous.

Non-virtuous pravṛtti-vijñānas

When a pravṛtti-vijñāna is accompanied by any of the three non-virtuous roots, i.e. greed, aversion, or delusion, it is classified as non-virtuous.

Undetermined pravṛtti-vijñānas

A pravṛtti vijñāna is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous when it is neither accompanied by virtuous facts, nor by non-virtuous ones.

Overall meaning of Verse 8d

The third transformation of consciousness, i.e. the six pravṛtti-vijñānas, can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neither, and this is determined by the accompanying mental states. In this way, the third transformation differs from the first two.

Verse 9

सर्वत्रगैर्विनियतैः कुशलैश्चैतसैरसौ |

सम्प्रयुक्ता तथा क्लेशैरुपक्लेशैस्त्रिवेदना || ९ ||

sarvatragair viniyataiḥ kuśalaiś caitasair asau |

samprayuktā tathā kleśair upakleśais trivedanā || 9 ||

It is joined by the mental states that are omnipresent; by those of delimited occurrence;

by virtuous ones; by afflictions; and by secondary afflictions. It has three types of feeling.

padacchedaḥ

savatra-gaiḥ, viniyataiḥ, kuśalaiḥ, caitasaiḥ, asau, samprayuktā, tathā, kleśaiḥ, upakleśaiḥ, tri-vedanā

The mental states that accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas

The treatment of the pravṛtti-vijñānas is rather similar to how non-Yogācāra forms of Abhidharma discuss these six consciousnesses. They are always accompanied by mental states, divided into five types: 5 omnipresent, 5 delimited, 11 virtuous, 6 afflictions, and 24 secondary afflictions (of which the last four can actually be either afflictions or not), for a total of 51.

Omnipresent (sarvatraga), and types of feeling (vedanā)

These are called “sarvatraga”, i.e. “everywhere-present”, because they accompany all types of mind, whether ālaya-vijñāna, afflicted thought consciousness, or pravṛtti-vijñānas. “Feeling” is included among the omnipresent mental states: with the pravṛtti-vijñānas, all three types of feeling (pleasant, painful, or neutral) can occur.

Delimited (viniyata)

Since they are limited (niyata) to specific moments of mind (viśeṣe), they are called delimited. These mental states will not accompany the ālaya-vijñāna or the afflicted thought consciousness; they will only accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas, and not always, and not necessarily all together.

Overall meaning of Verse 9

The types of mental states that can accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas are far more than in the case of the first two transformations. The pravṛtti-vijñānas are the consciousness that correspond to a more accessible layer of experience, and encompass the vast array of emotional and cognitive states that are commonly and similarly analyzed by all Buddhist schools.

Verse 10abc

आद्याः स्पर्शादयश्छन्दाधिमोक्षस्मृतयः सह |

समाधिधीभ्यां नियताः

ādyāḥ sparśādayaś chandādhimokṣasmṛtayaḥ saha |

samādhidhībhyām niyatāḥ

The first are contact, etc. Zest, conviction and mindfulness,

plus samādhi and wisdom, are the delimited;

padacchedaḥ

ādyāḥ, sparśa-ādayaḥ, chanda-adhimokṣa-smṛtayaḥ, saha, samādhi-dhībhyām, niyatāḥ

5 Omnipresent mental states

The five omnipresent mental states were discussed in the context of the ālaya-vijñāna: contact, mental placement, feeling, notion and intention. Their definitions can be found in the explanation of Verse 3.

5 Delimited mental states

Delimited mental states accompany only specific moments of mind, and that too, only for the pravṛtti-vijñānas.

Zest (chanda)

Zest is strong longing towards an object that one wishes to see, hear, etc. It has the function of making one take up valor/heroism (vīrya).

Conviction (adhimokṣa/adhimukti)

Conviction is the clear determination that something already ascertained is in such and such a way. By “ascertained”, Sthiramati explains, it is meant something that was either ascertained through reasoning (yukti) or through the instruction of reliable people (āpta-upadeśa).

Conviction has the function of making one not susceptible to be seized by other philosophical factions.

Mindfulness (smṛti)

Mindfulness is not losing a known object (from the mind), and bringing to mind again and again its aspect/configuration (ākāra). It has the function of avoiding mental scatteredness, i.e. distraction.

It is also defined as “engaging in conversation” (abhilapanatā) with the object; this, which consists in bringing to mind again and again the object and its aspects, allows the mind not to become distracted from that particular object. Perhaps the image of attentively conversing with another person could be the basis for this definition.

Samādhi

Samādhi is the one-pointed-ness of the mind in respect to something that is being closely scrutinized in terms of its good qualities or flaws. It has the function of offering a basis for awareness, since thorough awareness of the way things are occurs when the mind is in samādhi.

The last point clarifies the relationship between samādhi and wisdom (prajñā), i.e. between śamatha and vipāśyanā, their synonyms. Regarding the specific order of their cultivation, different texts will offer rather different approaches, but it is quite common to encourage meditators to first begin by learning how to focus on an object of attention.

Wisdom (prajñā)

Wisdom also applies to an object that is being closely scrutinized. It can be applied according to what is reasonable, according to what is not reasonable, or neither. It is the right or wrong realization of distinctions in dharmas, that are, for most people, as if their specific and common characteristics had been all mixed-up.

“What is reasonable” here refers to: instruction from reliable people, direct sense-proximity, and subsequent validation through inference. The type of realization born from these three means is called “applied according to what is reasonable” (yogavihita). It is further subdivided into wisdom made of listening, wisdom made of reflection, and wisdom made of meditation. The first is born on the basis of the authoritative instruction of reliable people; the second, on contemplating through reasoning; the third is born from samādhi.

“What is not reasonable” refers to: instruction from unreliable people, what appears as subsequent validation through inference but is not in fact so, and wrongly placed samādhi.

The wisdom that is neither applied according to what is reasonable, nor its opposite, is the one that is obtained just by birth, and the understanding of worldly conventions.

Overall meaning of Verse 10abc

The 5 omnipresent mental states that accompany the pravṛtti-vijñāna were already discussed in the context of the ālaya-vijñāna (Verse 3). The five mental states called “delimited” are zest, conviction, mindfulness, samādhi, and wisdom. In the context of the explanation of wisdom, Sthiramati offers his view on reliable validation (pramāṇa), and on how it relates to the three stages of wisdom (born from listening, contemplation, meditation).

Verses 10d/11abc

श्रद्धाथ हीरपत्रपा ॥ १० ॥

अलोभादि त्रयं वीर्यं प्रश्रब्धिः साप्रमादिका ।

अहिंसा कुशलाः

śraddhātha hrīr apatrapā ॥ 10 ॥

alobhādi trayam vīryam praśrabdhiḥ sāpramādikā ।

ahimsā kuśalāḥ

faith, modesty, shame, the three starting from non-greed, heroism, ease,
that which comes with non- heedlessness, and non-harming, are the virtuous.

padacchedaḥ

śraddhā, atha, hrīḥ, apatrapā, alobha-ādi, trayam, vīryam, praśrabdhiḥ, sa-apramādikā,
ahimsā, kuśalāḥ

Eleven virtuous mental states

These also occur only in concomitance with the pravṛtti-vijñānas.

Faith

Faith takes as its object specifically the karma and its fruit, the Four Truths of the Noble Ones, and the Three Jewels. It is of three types: belief that something exists; good disposition towards something that not only is held to be existent, but also as having good qualities; and longing for something that not only is held to be existent and with good qualities, but also attainable. It is a “good-disposition” or “clarity” (prasāda) of

the mind as it removes all the impurities of the afflictions and secondary afflictions. Its function is to be a basis for zest.

Modesty

Modesty is a sense of embarrassment, thinking of a transgression – whether one may have committed it or not – by taking oneself or the Dharma as a point of reference. The function of modesty is to offer a basis for restraint from bad conduct.

Shame

Shame is a sense of embarrassment, thinking of a transgression – whether one may have committed it or not – by taking the world as a point of reference. The function of shame too is to offer a basis for restraint from bad conduct.

Non-greed

Non-greed is the antidote to greed; it means non-attraction towards and disinclination from existence within saṃsāra, and from things that assist it. Its function is to offer the basis for not engaging in bad conduct.

Non-aversion

Non-aversion is the antidote to aversion; it means having no wish to harm sentient beings, suffering, or things that produce suffering.

Its function too is to offer the basis for not engaging in bad conduct.

Non-delusion

Non-delusion is the antidote to delusion; it means having no confusion about karma and its fruit, the Four Truths of the Nobles, and the Three Jewels, to understand them as they are.

Its function too is to offer the basis for not engaging in bad conduct.

Heroism

Heroism is enthusiasm to perform what is virtuous, and is the antidote to laziness: enthusiasm for what is not-virtuous itself counts as “laziness”. The function of heroism is to bring about the fulfillment of virtuous deeds.

Ease

Ease is the antidote of “badness”, which refers to the non-workability of body and mind, and to the seeds of afflictions. “Ease” is a mental state that cause the body and mind to become pliant, which in the case of the mind refers to what happens to someone who has right attention/mental placement: the mental state of ease will cause the mind to experience a type of gladness that makes it easy to remain on a specific mental object. The function of this mental state is to remove all the obscurations that are afflictions, thanks to the “revolution of the basis” – an important Yogācāra idea that refers to the removal of the seeds of afflictions.

Non-heedless-ness

The non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion and heroism which allow one to vanquish non-virtuous dharmas and to bring about the virtuous dharmas that are their antidotes are collectively called “non-heedless-ness”. This mental state is the antidote to heedlessness, and its function is to accomplish both mundane and supramundane success.

Neutrality

Neutrality is expressed in the verse as “that which comes with non-heedlessness”, probably for the sake of conciseness. It refers to three types of neutrality that occur in the beginning, in the middle, and at the last stage of the cultivation of samādhi: evenness of the mind, relaxation of the mind, and effortlessness of the mind. Sinking into the object of meditation and being excited (laya and auddhatya) are the two sides of unevenness; when these two basic obstacles to the obtainment of samādhi are overcome, it is said that the mind has the first type of neutrality (i.e., neither sinking nor excitement), “evenness”. Relaxation of the mind is when the mind can remain on its object of concentration without effort, but still with some concern about sinking or excitement, since one has not cultivated samādhi for long.

Lastly, when the samādhi obtains its utmost excellence and the mind needs to make no more effort to pay any attention to the possible signs of either sinking or excitement, there is effortlessness, also a type of neutrality. The mental state of neutrality has the function of offering no occasion for any affliction or secondary affliction.

Non-harming

Non-harming is the antidote to harming; it means not wishing to do violence to sentient beings by hitting them, binding them, etc., and it refers to compassion. This English term translates here karuṇā, a word explained as “it blocks (ruṇaddhi) pleasure (kam)”, since a compassionate person is pained by others’ pain. The function of non-harming is to make one have no wish to harm others.

Overall meaning of Verses 10d/11abc

There are 11 virtuous states that may accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas: faith, modesty, shame, non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion, heroism, ease, non-heedlessness, neutrality, non-harming. They help the acquirement of samādhi and/or the uprooting of affliction, and in many instances their function is explained in terms of the progress on the path and its relation to meditation.

Verses 11d/12a

क्लेशा रागप्रतिघमूढयः ॥ ११ ॥

मानदृग्विचिकित्साश्च

kleśā rāgapratighamūḍhayaḥ ॥ 11 ॥

mānadṛgvicikitsās ca

The afflictions are attraction, aversion and delusion, presumption, view and doubt.

padacchedaḥ

kleśāḥ, rāga-pratigha-mūḍhayaḥ, māna-dṛk-vicikitsāḥ, ca

The six main afflictions

There are six main afflictions that can accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas. The word kleśa comes from the root kliś, which has the sense of being tormented or afflicted (according to the standard lists of root-meanings, upatāpane).

Attraction (rāga)

This refers to attraction towards, and wish for, existence and enjoyment. Its function is to generate the five aggregates, which have the nature of suffering, since it is due to craving for the three types of existence (desire, form, and formless) that one is reborn.

While rāga has often been translated as “attachment”, I feel that this is not so precise. A mind in which rāga develops at a certain moment for a specific object is attracted to that object: attachment may then develop, or subtle attachment may be the basis for that attraction to arise, but this is expressed differently in Sanskrit (example: saṅga). I

see significant advantages in representing in English translations the Sanskrit distinction between *rāga* (attraction) and *saṅga/sakti* (attachment).

Aversion (*pratigha*)

Aversion is a wish to harm sentient beings, due to which one reflects on various type of misfortunes for them, such as killing, imprisoning, etc. Its function is to cause discomfort and thus bad conduct (as someone who has mental and physical discomfort is likely to behave poorly).

Delusion (*mūḍhi, moha*)

Delusion is non-awareness about bad and good rebirths, *nirvāṇa*, the causes that bring these about, and the correctly understood relationship of cause and effect between those results and those causes. It offers the basis for the arising of thorough affliction (*saṃkleśa*), which here includes affliction, karma, and rebirth.

Presumption (*māna*)

All types of presumption occur on the basis of seeing the transitory collection of the aggregates as a permanent self, and are characterized by elation: thinking about the aggregates “this is me” or “these are mine”, one becomes especially elated and believes oneself to be superior to others. The function of presumption is to offer a basis for lack of reverence towards teachers and people with good qualities, and to offer a basis for re-birth that has the nature of suffering. “Presumption” can be further divided into several types (seven), according to whether it is directed towards superiors, equals, inferiors, etc.

View (dṛk, dṛṣṭi)

View here does not refer to right view, but to a specific list of five: the view about the transitory collection, the view that grasps at extremes, wrong view, excessive attachment to views, and excessive attachment to discipline and vows.

The view about the transitory collection (satkāya-dṛṣṭi) means to see the five clinging-aggregates as a self or what belongs to a self. The view that grasps at extremes (antagrāha-dṛṣṭi) is to look at those five aggregates, perceived as a self or what belongs to a self, and see them either in terms of cutting-off (i.e. no rebirth) or permanence (i.e. the continuation of a person from birth to birth). Wrong view (mithyā-dṛṣṭi) is the view that negates cause or result, or activity, or a real entity; since it is the most sinful of all views, this takes the name “wrong view”.

Excessive attachment to view (dṛṣṭi-parāmarśa) is to see the five clinging-aggregates as special or supreme. Excessive attachment to discipline and vows (śīla-vrata-parāmarśa) is to see the five clinging aggregates as pure, as liberated, or as leading to freedom.

Doubt (vicikitsā)

Doubt is to have mental uncertainty regarding karma, its result, the Four Truths of the Nobles, and the Three Jewels. This mental state is distinguished from wisdom, even though wisdom can be mistaken “wisdom”, because even wrong “wisdom” is in the form of an ascertainment rather than of a type of uncertainty.

Overall meaning of Verses 11d/12a

There are six main afflictions that may accompany the pravṛtti-vijñānas: attraction, aversion, delusion, presumption, view and doubt. These are directly connected with the process of rebirth and thus with the production of suffering.

Verses 12b/14

क्रोधोपनहने पुनः ।

म्रक्षः प्रदाश ईर्ष्याथि मात्सर्यं सह मायया ॥ १२ ॥

शाठ्यं मदो विहिंसाहीरत्रपा स्त्यानमुद्धवः।

आश्रद्ध्यमथ कौसीद्यं प्रमादो मुषिता स्मृतिः ॥ १३ ॥

विक्षेपो ऽसम्प्रजन्यं च कौकृत्यं मिद्धमेव च ।

वितर्कश्च विचारश्चेत्युपक्लेशा द्वये द्विधा ॥ १४ ॥

krodhopanahane punaḥ ।

mraḥṣaḥ pradāśa īrṣyātha mātsaryaṁ saha māyayā ॥ 12 ॥

śāṭhyaṁ mado vihiṁsāhrīr atrapā styānam uddhavaḥ ।

āsraddhyam atha kausīdyaṁ pramādo muṣitā smṛtiḥ ॥ 13 ॥

vikṣepo 'samprajanyaṁ ca kaukṛtyaṁ middham eva ca ।

vitarkaś ca vicāraś cety upakleśā dvaye dvidhā ॥ 14 ॥

Furthermore, anger and grudge,

dissimulation, biting, envy, stinginess, illusionism,

deceitfulness, intoxication, harming, non-modesty, non-shame, sloth, excitement, non-faith, laziness, heedlessness, deceived mindfulness,

scatteredness, lack of discerning awareness, what derives from bad deeds, torpor, deliberation and analysis, are the secondary afflictions. The two pairs are twofold.

padacchedaḥ

krodha-upanahane, punaḥ, mrakṣaḥ, pradāśa, īrṣyā, atha, mātsaryam, saha, māyayā, śāṭhyam, madaḥ, vihimśā, ahriḥ, atrapā, styānam, uddhavaḥ, āśraddhyam, atha, kausīdyam, pramādaḥ, muṣitā, smṛtiḥ, vikṣepaḥ, asamprajanyam, ca, kaukṛtyam, middham, eva, ca, vitarkaḥ, ca, vicāraḥ, ca, iti, upakleśāḥ, dvaye, dvidhā

Secondary afflictions

Secondary afflictions (upa-kleśa) are not really different from the afflictions: rather, when certain afflictions appear in specific contexts, they are given new names, that are relevant to the path of liberation and thus help the practitioners. This means that they are only designations (prajñapti), no more than different names for the afflictions, but names that may help better recognize their workings.

Anger (krodha)

Anger is a wish to harm based on a present unfavorable act that one is incurring. It is not different from aversion, but rather it is a specific instance of it. Its function is to offer the basis to bestow beatings, etc.; it can occur both towards sentient beings and towards non-sentient things.

Grudge (upanāha)

Grudge is a continuum of enmity that comes about after one has become angry, and later thinks, continuously “such and such a person/thing wronged me”, etc. Its function is to be the basis for lack of forbearance, which means the inability to tolerate wrongs that one receives, and the wish to act in retribution. It is also, like anger, a type of aversion.

Dissimulation (mrakṣa)

Dissimulation means hiding one's transgression when someone points them out; since it has the nature of concealment, it is a type of delusion. It offers a basis for remorse about bad deeds and for discomfort.

Biting (pradāśa)

“Biting” means the mental state that causes one to bite with fierce words: it refers to a wish to harm that follows anger and grudge, and thus it is just a type of aversion. It causes bad verbal conduct, and also discomfort, since a person with such type of aversion will have mental pain.

Envy (īrṣyā)

Envy is a thorough irritation when perceiving others' good fortune; it is a type of aversion, causing sadness and discomfort.

Stinginess (mātsarya)

Stinginess is a type of strong mental attachment that impedes generosity, a wish not to give. Its function is to offer a basis for lack of frugality, since a stingy person will hoard things.

Illusionism (māyā)

Illusionism is so called because it causes one to show something unreal in order to fool others; in particular, it means to show a certain type of discipline, etc., when actually one has a rather different type. It is a name for attraction and delusion occurring together in the specific context of wishing to deceive others, and its function is to offer a basis for wrong livelihood (deceptions regarding one's actual discipline are discussed at some length in respect to ordained bhikṣus looking for offerings).

Deceitfulness (śāṭhya)

Deceitfulness is a kind of mental crookedness that is a means to hide one's faults, thus deceiving others either by distracting them or by showing something unclearly; it is therefore slightly different from deceit, as it does not altogether conceal, but rather does so indirectly.

It is a name for attraction and delusion occurring together in the specific context of trying to hide one's faults for the sake of fooling others. Its function is to cause obstacles to the proper mental placement that allows one to obtain right advice.

Intoxication (mada)

Intoxication is an excessive joy at one's success and fortune, that completely seizes one's mind, and occurs for someone who has attraction. Its function is to offer a basis for all the afflictions and secondary afflictions.

Harming (vihimsā)

Harming is the wish to harm sentient beings in manifold ways, such as killing, imprisonment, etc. It is a type of aversion, and its function is to cause harm to sentient beings.

Non-modesty (āhrīkya)

Non-modesty means having no embarrassment in front of oneself when one has committed a transgression. It is in opposition to modesty (see earlier, among the virtuous states).

Non-shame (atrapā, anapatrāpya)

Non-shame means having no embarrassment in front of others when one has committed a transgression. It is in opposition to shame (see earlier, among the virtuous states).

Both of the above mental states contribute to all afflictions and secondary afflictions. According to the context, they may either be a type of attraction or a type of aversion.

Sloth (styāna)

Sloth is the non-workability of the mind, its not being ready to work; it is the state of being rigid and immovable, incapable of engaging with its object/support. Its function is to contribute to all afflictions and secondary afflictions, and it is just a type of delusion.

Excitement (auddhatya, uddhava)

Excitement is lack of mental peace, which here refers specifically to śamatha. It occurs for someone who thinks of past experiences conducive to attraction and thus loses mental peace, and it is an obstacle to śamatha.

Non-faith (āśraddhya)

Non-faith means not believing in the truth of karma, its results, the Four Truths of the Nobles, and the Three Jewels. More precisely, it is the opposite of the three types of faith (see above, among the virtuous states), i.e.: belief that something exists; good disposition towards something that not only is held to be existent, but also as having good qualities; and longing for something that not only is held to be existent and with good qualities, but also attainable. Its function is to offer the basis for laziness, since someone who has no faith will not have any zest towards practice.

Laziness (kausīdya)

Laziness means lack of mental enthusiasm towards what is virtuous; it counteracts heroism. It is a part of delusion, a lack of enthusiasm towards virtuous karmas of body, speech and mind, due to having resorted to the pleasure of sleep or laying down on the side. Its function is to be an obstacle to the practice of what is virtuous.

Heedlessness (aprāmadikā, apramāda)

Heedlessness is a name for those greed, aversion, delusion and laziness, due to which one does not guard the mind against the afflictions and one does not cultivate its antidotes, what is virtuous. Its function is to offer the basis for the increase in what is non-virtuous and the decrease in what is virtuous.

Deceived mindfulness (muṣītā smṛti)

Deceived, or even “stolen” (muṣītā) mindfulness is afflicted mindfulness, i.e. accompanied by afflictions. Its function is to offer a basis for scatteredness.

Scatteredness (vikṣepa)

Scatteredness is mental distraction that can be part of attraction, aversion, or delusion, according to which affliction or afflictions are the cause for the mind to be thrown away from its intended object/support of samādhi. Its function is to be an obstacle to non-attraction/dispassion (vairāgya).

Lack of discerning awareness (asamprajanya)

Lack of discerning awareness is a type of wisdom accompanied by afflictions, due to which one does not understand the proper behavior of body, speech and mind and, not knowing what is to be done and what should be avoided, engages in wrong activities. Its function is to offer the basis for incurring downfalls.

What derives from bad deeds (kaukr̥tya)

“What derives from bad deeds” refers to a kind of mental disturbance that causes distraction, when the mind thinks of a past bad deed (ku-kr̥ta) one has committed; its function is to be an obstacle to the stillness of the mind.

Torpor (middha)

Torpor is the “shrinking” of a mind that does not operate autonomously in respect to its object/support, i.e. it has no power to direct itself here or there; or, it can refer to a way of functioning of the mind that is unable to sustain the body (such as when one is asleep). “Shrinking” refers to not operating through the various sense-doors, such as the eye-faculty, etc. Torpor is a type of delusion; its function is to offer the basis for downfalls in respect to what needs to be done, i.e. someone afflicted by torpor may not be able to accomplish what is needed.

Deliberation (vitarka)

Deliberation is an investigating “mental murmur”, i.e. an inner conceptual discourse where one observes a certain object thinking “what is it”? It is a mixture of intention and wisdom, since intention is a kind of vibration of the mind, while wisdom has the aspect of discerning good qualities or flaws. It is also defined as “coarseness” of the mind, as it only investigates the thing (not its further features).

Analysis (vicāra)

Analysis resembles deliberation, except for its observation of a previously realized object, with a kind of recognition “this is such and such”. Therefore, it is called “subtlety” of the mind, by comparison with deliberation, in terms of representing a deeper level of observation.

Both of these have the function to offer either comfort or discomfort, and they are distinguished only on the basis of their relative coarseness/subtlety.

The last four mental states can be in two different ways

What derives from bad deeds, torpor, deliberation, and analysis can be either afflicted or non-afflicted, depending on the context.

Overall meaning of Verses 12b/14

The pravṛtti-vijñānas can be accompanied by 24 different secondary afflictions, which are actually names for other mental states, previously discussed, when operating in a specific context. The last four can be either afflicted or non-afflicted.

Verse 15

पञ्चानां मूलविज्ञाने यथाप्रत्ययमुद्भवः |

विज्ञानानां सह न वा तरङ्गाणां यथा जले || १५ ||

pañcānām mūlavijñāne yathāpratyayam udbhavaḥ |

vijñānānām saha na vā taraṅgāṅām yathā jale || 15 ||

The arising of the five consciences in the root consciousness is according to conditions;

it may occur together or not, just like the arising of waves on water.

padacchedaḥ

pañcānām, mūla-vijñāne, yathā-pratyayam, udbhavaḥ, vijñānānām, saha, na, vā, taraṅgānām, yathā, jale

The five sense-consciousnesses can arise together: a special feature of Yogācāra

Other forms of Buddhist Abhidharma tell us that when we see something, we do not hear something: our notion that we see and hear at the same time is due to our inability to perceive the subtle distinctions of very brief moments of consciousness. Our experience is the rapid alternation of different types of consciousness from among the six groups, but it is never the case that two moments of consciousness arise at the same time within the stream of a single sentient being. In fact, we may say that the stream of a single sentient being is none other than the succession of single moments of consciousness.

Yogācāra masters, however, uphold the unique tenet that we may see, hear, smell, taste and touch at the very same time, according to the presence of specific “conditions” (pratyaya), i.e. the seeds, in the ālaya-vijñāna, for our illusory perceptions of objects. This unique tenet is closely dependent on the idea that the continuous stream of the ālaya-vijñāna is the source of all other experiences, and we can see that the idea of the conscious stream of a single, identifiable sentient being remains possible precisely thanks to the continuity of the ālayavijñāna.

The verse implicitly refers to the initial part (chapter 2) of the “Sūtra of the Descent into Laṅkā”, where the Buddha sees both the ocean and its waves, as a matching symbol of the different layers of consciousness, and also to a section of the Sandhinirmocanasūtra (quoted by Sthiramati in his commentary): when the fitting conditions are there, even five sense-consciousness may arise at the same time.

Overall meaning of Verse 15

A special feature of Yogācāra Abhidharma is that any number among the five sense consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body) may arise at the very same time, on the basis of the seeds in the ālaya-vijñāna.

Verse 16

मनोविज्ञानसम्भूतिः सर्वदासञ्ज्ञिकादृते ।

समापत्तिद्वयान्मिद्धान्मूर्च्छनादप्यचित्तकात् ॥ १६ ॥

manovijñānasambhūtiḥ sarvadāsañjñikād ṛte ।

samāpattidvayān middhān mūrchanād apy acittakāt ॥ 16 ॥

The thought-consciousness always comes about, except for: the notionless, the two attainments, mind-less torpor and swoon.

padacchedaḥ

manaḥ-vijñāna-sambhūtiḥ, sarvadā, asañjñikāt, ṛte, samāpatti-dvayāt, middhāt, mūrchanāt, api, a-cittakāt

When the 6th consciousness stops

The 6th consciousness is sometimes misunderstood as being a conceptual consciousness, but this is not the point of its definition: it is considered to be as conceptual or non-conceptual as the other five sense-consciousness (depending on the accompanying mental states), while the main distinction is that its support is not a sense-faculty (eye, ear, etc.), but anyone of the previous moments of consciousness.

Yogācāra Abhidharma upholds that the thought-consciousness is fairly continuous, stopping only in the notionless state, in two types of attainment, torpor, and fainting that is “without mind”.

The notionless state

The notionless state is the cessation of mind and mental states that happens for someone who is born among the sentient beings without notions, a class of deity of the Form Realm, where one can be born thanks to the special type of karma produced by meditative attainment, and called “immovable” (āneñjya), i.e. it is not sufficient to have accumulated merit.

Two types of attainment

This refers to the notionless attainment and the cessation-attainment; both of these are meditative states.

The notionless attainment happens for someone who has gone beyond the third dhyāna and has no attraction towards it; after placing in the mind the notion to exit that, such meditator will obtain a meditative state wherein the thought-consciousness and its accompanying mental states cease.

The cessation-attainment occurs after someone, who has gone beyond any attraction towards the “sphere of nothing whatsoever”, produces the notion that he shall have a peaceful dwelling at ease, and then both the thought-consciousness and the afflicted thought consciousness (i.e. the 6th and the 7th consciousnesses), and the mental states that accompany them, stop.

Mind-less torpor

For someone severely affected by torpor, i.e. during deep sleep, the thought-consciousness stops, and this is called “mind-less torpor”.

Mind-less swoon

When the body is in a severely imbalanced state due to the three bodily constituents of wind, heat, and phlegm (vāta, pitta, śleśman) having been adversely affected, the

imbalance of the body may be incompatible with the functioning of the thought-consciousness, which therefore stops: this is called “mind-less swoon”.

Overall meaning of Verse 16

The thought-consciousness, i.e. the 6th consciousness, always continues without gap, except for 5 states: the notionless state among deities of the Form Realm, the notionless attainment, the cessation-attainment, mind-less torpor, and mind-less swoon. When each of these temporary states comes to an end, the thought-consciousness once again arises from the ālaya-vijñana, that contains the seeds for all types of consciousness.

Verse 17

विज्ञानपरिणामो ऽयं विकल्पो यद्विकल्प्यते |

तेन तन्नास्ति तेनेदं सर्वं विज्ञप्तिमात्रकम् || १७ ||

vijñānapariṇāmo 'yaṁ vikalpo yad vikalpyate |

tena tan nāsti tenedaṁ sarvaṁ vijñaptimātrakam || 17 ||

This transformation of consciousness is a concept. What is conceptualized by it, does not exist: therefore, all of this is cognition-only.

padacchedaḥ

vijñāna-pariṇāmaḥ, ayam, vikalpaḥ, yat, vikalpyate, tena, tat, na, asti, tena, idam, sarvam, vijñapti-mātrakam

The middle free from two extremes: superimposition and over-negation

There are two possible ways to misunderstand reality: the first is to superimpose something that is not there; the second is to negate that something is there, when in fact it is there.

Sthiramati explains that this verse removes these two extremes by showing that 1. the object of consciousness is only a superimposition; and 2. all what exists is consciousness, which should not be negated.

The transformation of consciousness is a process of conceptualization

The moments of mind and accompanying mental states belonging to the three spheres (desire, form, and formless) are said to be concepts, i.e. conceptualizing activity, because they have the aspect of a superimposed object; in other words, their object is imagined, and the threefold transformation of consciousness is precisely the process of imagining such objects.

The object of its conceptualization is unreal

What is imagined by the threefold transformation of consciousness consists in the environment, one-self, the aggregates, bases and entrances, such as visible form, sound, etc. All of this does not exist.

Sthiramati points out that consciousness can arise even when its object is non-existent even in widely accepted instances, such as an illusion, a city of Gandharvas, a dream, an eye-disease, etc. If the arising of consciousness depended on a real object, it should not arise in all those instances. Therefore, consciousness arises from a previous instance of consciousness, not from an object outside of itself. Furthermore, even in cases where it is commonly accepted that there is a single object for many people who perceive it, their perceptions may be mutually contradictory, and it is not possible for something that exists as one real entity to be perceived in mutually contradictory ways.

Thus, the nature of the outer object is just a superimposition – the object itself does not exist.

Everything is cognition-only

Since the object of cognition, that is conceptualized by cognition, does not exist, all that exists is cognition: this includes, according to Sthiramati, the Three World Spheres, and also the un-produced dharmas.

Overall meaning of Verse 17

Cognition-only is the middle way that avoids the two extremes: “only” excludes the superimposition of a real object beyond cognition, while “cognition” is existent and should not be over-negated.

Verse 18

सर्वबीजं हि विज्ञानं परिणामं तथा तथा ।

यात्यन्योन्यवशाद्येन विकल्पः स स जायते ॥ १८ ॥

sarvabījam hi vijñānam pariṇāmaṁ tathā tathā ।

yāty anyonyavaśād yena vikalpaḥ sa sa jāyate ॥ 18 ॥

The consciousness which contains all the seeds reaches manifold ways of transformation, due to mutual influence; due to this, the concept arises in manifold ways.

padacchedaḥ

sarva-bījam, hi, vijñānam, pariṇāmaḥ, tathā, tathā, yāti, anyonya-vaśāt, yena, vikalpaḥ, saḥ, saḥ, jāyate

The varied arising of consciousness does not require a causal factor outside of consciousness

Most forms of Buddhist Abhidharma uphold that a moment of mind arises on the basis of an external object; for example, a moment of visual consciousness arises on the basis of a moment of visible form, which functions as its “support condition” (ā lambana-pratyaya), its object.

Yogācāra masters explain that the variety of cognition can be explained even without upholding the existence of outer objects of cognition; rather, each moment of consciousness has as its conditions only prior moments of consciousness. This is because the ālaya-vijñāna contains the seeds of all possible types of consciousness, and is a continuous flow whose state is constantly changing due to the vast variety of past conditions that determine its contents – the seeds of future cognitions.

The ālaya vijñāna transforms in different ways: mutuality between ālaya-vijñāna and the pravṛtti-vijñānas

“Transformation” was earlier defined by Sthiramati, while commenting on verse one, in great detail, and with reference to momentariness; in brief, it means becoming different, which in this context means that a subsequent moment will have certain characteristics that differ from the moment that precedes it. In the specific case of the ālaya-vijñāna, the difference that is most relevant to explain the overall variety of cognition is that each moment of ālaya-vijñāna obtains a state that is capable of giving rise, immediately after, to a wide variety of concepts.

Thus, each moment of ālaya-vijñāna has the seed-potential for a different type of pravṛtti- vijñāna to arise as its effect in the immediately succeeding moment. The

pravṛtti-vijñāna, in turn, is the cause for the continuation of the ālaya-vijñāna, since it deposits a seed for a similar cognition to arise in future. This is what is meant by “mutuality”, and it is this mutuality that explains why it is possible to have a vast variety of cognitions without the existence of a real, outer object of cognition.

Overall sense of Verse 18

The ālaya-vijñāna, that contains countless seeds for countless types of cognitions, arises with different potentiality at each moment, being thus the cause for various types of cognitions that immediately follow it in the next moment. These cognitions, in turn, deposit seeds for future cognitions in the ālaya-vijñāna. Thus, the whole process of cognition can be explained in terms of the mutuality between the ālaya-vijñāna and the other types of consciousness.

Verse 19

कर्मणो वासना ग्राहद्वयवासनया सह |

क्षीणे पूर्वविपाके ऽन्यं विपाकं जनयन्ति तत् || १९ ||

karmaṇo vāsanā grāhadvayavāsanayā saha |

kṣīṇe pūrvavipāke 'nyam vipākaṁ janayanti tat || 19 ||

The perfumings from karma, together with the perfuming from the two types of grasping, when the previous maturation has vanished produce another maturation.

padacchedaḥ

karmaṇaḥ, vāsanāḥ, grāha-dvaya-vāsanayā, saha, kṣīṇe, pūrva-vipāke, anyam, vipākam, janayanti, tat

Three causes for new ālaya-vijñāna to exist

This verse elaborates further on how the other consciousnesses work as causes for the continuation of the ālayavijñāna, thus showing that the ālayavijñāna itself does not need a real outer object. The other consciousnesses deposit three types of perfumings (vāsanā) in the ālaya- vijñāna: the perfumings from karma, the perfumings from the grasping at an object to be grasped, and the perfumings from the grasping at a grasper. When a prior moment of ālaya-vijñāna ceases, these three types of perfumings function as causes to generate a new moment.

The perfumings from karma

Sthiramati explains karma as “intention that is either merit, demerit, or immovable”. This definition is significant, because it clarifies that the distinction between karma as intention (mental karma) vs karma as what follows an intention (bodily and verbal karma) is only at a level of conventions where we accept that outer objects (such as bodies and voices) exist; from the level of analysis of the Thirty Verses, all karma should be understood as mental (intention). “Immovable karma” (āneñjya) is the karma produced by meditative absorptions, and is the necessary cause for rebirths in the Form and Formless realm. The seeds produced by these three types of karma, capable of bringing about rebirth in different parts of the Three Realms, are deposited into the ālaya-vijñāna and called “perfumings from karma”. These are considered as the main cause, like the seeds of different plants capable of giving rise to different types of sprouts.

Grasping at an object to be grasped (grāhya)

The conceptual determination that there is an object to be grasped apart from consciousness, existing outside as a continuum of instants, is “grasping at an object to be grasped”.

Grasping at a grasper (grāhaka)

The conceptual determination that the object to be grasped is cognized by consciousness, is “grasping at a grasper” – where the grasper is consciousness.

The perfumings from the twofold grasping

These are the seeds for the future arising of similar grasping at an object to be grasped and a grasper, deposited in the ālayavijñāna by previous moments of that twofold grasping. These are considered to be assisting causes (sahakārin), helping the perfumings from karma in the same way as water, proper climate, etc., will help the seeds of specific plants to mature into sprouts. This also implies that, even if karma-perfumings are there, one will be able to stop the process of saṃsāric rebirth by uprooting the twofold grasping – just like a seed without water cannot turn into a sprout.

Avoidance of the two extremes of eternality and cutting-off (śāśvata and uccheda)

To say that the three-fold perfumings give rise to a new moment of ālaya-vijñāna once the previous one has ceased avoids the extreme of eternality, since it shows that the ālaya-vijñāna is momentary rather than an enduring substance moving from life to life; and it avoids the extreme of cutting-off, because by saying that a new maturation is generated refers to the arising of the first moment of consciousness in a new birth, which therefore is not negated.

Sthiramati’s proofs of the existence of the ālaya-vijñāna

Sthiramati explains that we can know the existence of the ālaya-vijñāna from two sources: from the texts transmitted as Words of the Buddha (āgama) and from proper reasoning (yukti).

Regarding Āgama, he quotes the following verse from the Abhidharmasūtra, probably referring to the Mahāyānasūtra that is also the basis for Ārya Asaṅga's Abhidharmasamuccaya:

The dhātu that exists from beginningless time is the basis of all the dharmas;
that being there, all the destinies can be there, as also the realization of nirvāṇa.

Sthiramati most likely understands the expression “the dhātu that exists from beginningless time” as referring to the ālaya-vijñāna.

Regarding the reasoning, Sthiramati, in brief, argues that neither the occurrence nor the cessation of saṃsāra could be possible without the ālaya-vijñāna. The occurrence of saṃsāra would not be possible because only the ālaya-vijñāna can qualify as the third part of dependent arising in twelve parts, i.e. “consciousness with saṃskāras as its condition”. The reason why only the ālaya-vijñāna could qualify is that neither the “joining consciousness” (pratisandhicitta) nor specific instants among the six consciousness can be that stage in the process. The pratisandhicitta cannot have as its conditions saṃskāras that had ceased long before, while the six consciousness cannot place perfumings upon themselves, since nothing can act upon itself. As for the cessation of saṃsāra, once again this is impossible if there aren't at least two different streams of consciousness where one can positively influence the other, as the truth of the path (a mental state) can do towards the ālaya-vijñāna.

This is a very simplified summary of Sthiramati's argument; in turn, Sthiramati points out that a more extended version of the arguments can be found in his commentary on Vasubandhu's Pañcaskandhaka.

Overall meaning of Verse 19

The ālaya-vijñāna continues from life to life without the necessity of any outer objects of perception, being caused to arise as a new moment of maturation in a new life by the perfumings from karma and the perfumings from the two-fold grasping (at an object to be grasped and at a grasper). Thus, there is no need to accept the existence

of external objects, and the doctrine of the ālaya-vijñāna avoids the two extremes of eternalism and cutting-off.

Verse 20

येन येन विकल्पेन यद्यद्वस्तु विकल्प्यते |

परिकल्पित एवासौ स्वभावो न स विद्यते || २० ||

yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate |

parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo na sa vidyate || 20 ||

By whichever concept such and such a thing is conceptualized,
that thing is only a thoroughly imagined own-existence: it does not exist.

padacchedaḥ

yena, yena, vikalpena, yat, yat, vastu, vikalpyate, parikalpitaḥ, eva, asau, svabhāvaḥ, na, saḥ, vidyate

The three natures

The Sūtras, most prominently the Sandhinirmocanasūtra, teach that dharmas have three natures: a thoroughly imagined nature, an other-dependent nature, and a completely accomplished nature. In brief: the imagined nature is the non-existent object and agent of grasping; the dependent nature is the activity of imagining those two; the accomplished nature is the non-existence of the imagined in the imagination, and the existence of that non-existence.

This verse is a definition of the thoroughly imagined nature/own-existence (svabhāva), relating it to the doctrine of cognition only.

A note of the word svabhāva

I have translated the term svabhāva as “own-existence” to highlight the elements that make it up: *sva-* means something similar to “own, one’s own” or “on one’s own accord”, depending on context; *-bhāva* can mean existence, an entity, a state, coming into existence (and a few other possible meanings).

In philosophical contexts, generally svabhāva is used to refer to something akin to an essence, an essential nature or characteristic without which a certain thing would not even exist. It can also mean “coming into existence on one’s own accord”, i.e. not depending on anything else but itself.

This multivalence of the term svabhāva is admittedly not well captured by “own-existence”, which is no more than a conventional choice of translation meant to reflect at least the formation of the original term by respecting its having two components and, at least partly, representing their meaning. It is useful to keep in mind the many senses of “own-existence” while reading the section of the Thirty Verses on the “three own-existences”. As we will see, these multiple meanings come into play when explaining the sense in which dharmas have, and do not have, “own-existence”.

The thoroughly imagined own-existence (parikalpita-svabhāva)

“Whichever concepts” refers to all types of concepts, whether they refer to conceptualized objects of cognition that would belong to a person, or those outside; and these are many different possible objects, thus “whichever concepts”.

“Such and such a thing” refers, again, to all different types of conceptualized objects: belonging to a person, outer, etc., up to the most exalted of all possible objects of cognition, i.e. the qualities of a Buddha (buddhadharma).

All of these objects of conceptualizations are called “thoroughly imagined own-existence” since they do not really exist, they are purely imagined entities; their own-existence is not produced by causes and conditions – it is just wrongly imagined.

Overall meaning of Verse 20

Whichever object of conceptualization is conceptualized by various concepts, it is only imagined, since it does not really exist: this non-existent nature is called “thoroughly imagined own-existence” (parikalpita-svabhāva).

Verse 21

परतन्त्रस्वभावस्तु विकल्पः प्रत्ययोद्भवः |

निष्पन्नस्तस्य पूर्वेण सदा रहितता तु या || २१ ||

paratantrasvabhāvas tu vikalpaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ |

niṣpannas tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahitatā tu yā || 21 ||

The other-dependent own-existence, on the other hand, is the concept, arisen due to conditions.

The accomplished is the latter’s being always bereft of the former.

padacchedaḥ

para-tantra-svabhāvaḥ, tu, vikalpaḥ, pratyaya-udbhavaḥ, niṣpannaḥ, tasya, pūrveṇa, sadā, rahitatā, tu, yā

The other-dependent own-existence (paratantra-svabhāva) is the dependent arising of consciousness

Sthiramati clarifies that this refers to the mind and mental states belonging to the Three Realms (Desire, Form, Formless). These do really arise; and since they arise on the basis of causes and conditions, they are called “other-dependent own-existence”: its coming into existence depends on causes and conditions that are other than itself.

Like all other Buddhist systems excepting the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra philosophers uphold that arising from causes and conditions precisely proves the reality of arising of any given entity, differentiating it from entities that are purely imagined, and for whose actual arising there are no causes and conditions, such as a flower in the sky.

The accomplished own-existence (pariniṣpanna-svabhāva)

The accomplished own-existence, which is also a synonym of emptiness, is the absence of what is wrongly imagined in the continuum of momentary consciousness, i.e. the absence of the first svabhāva in the second svabhāva. Dependent arising is empty of an object or agent of grasping: that emptiness is called “thoroughly accomplished own-existence”. In this case, the primary sense of the term svabhāva may be closer to “nature” or “property”, i.e., it is the property of dependent arising to be free from an object to be grasped or a grasper.

Overall meaning of Verse 21

The second of the three natures is the conceptualization itself, that arises from causes and conditions that are other than itself, and thus is called “other-dependent”. The absence of what is conceptualized in the conceptualization, i.e. the absence of the first nature in the second, is the third nature, the “thoroughly accomplished nature”, emptiness.

Verse 22 ab

अत एव स नैवान्यो नानन्यः परतन्त्रतः |

ata eva sa naivānyo nānanyaḥ paratantrataḥ |

Precisely due to this, it is neither other nor not other than the other-dependent.

padacchedaḥ

ataḥ, eva, saḥ, na, eva, anyaḥ, na, ananyaḥ, paratantrataḥ

The accomplished (pariniṣpanna) is neither other than not the same as the dependent (paratantra)

The pariniṣpanna is the nature (dharmatā) of the paratantra; in general the dharmatā is neither different from nor the same as the dharmas of which it is the nature, as Sthiramati explains.

The accomplished (pariniṣpanna) is not other than the dependent (paratantra)

If the accomplished were to be other than the dependent, then the dependent would not be empty of the thoroughly imagined: this is because the accomplished is precisely the fact that the dependent is empty of what is wrongly imagined.

The accomplished (pariniṣpanna) is not the same as the dependent (paratantra)

If the accomplished were to be the same as the dependent, then it could not be the “support of purification” (viśuddhi-āmbana). The accomplished is in fact the support/object (āmbana) of the awareness of Noble Ones in samādhi, allowing for the purification of their mind-stream; the dependent, on the other hand, has the nature of being the process of affliction.

Overall meaning of Verse 22ab

Precisely because the accomplished is the empty nature of the dependent, it is neither different from nor the same as the dependent. If it were different, the dependent would not be empty of what is wrongly imagined, and if it were the same, affliction and purification could not be separately established.

Verse 22c

अनित्यतादिवद्वाच्यो

anityatādivad vācyo

It should be explained just like impermanence, etc.

padacchedaḥ

anityatā-ādi-vat, vācyah

Example: the defining traits of all assembled factors and dharmas

Impermanence, suffering and selflessness are the common philosophical view of all Buddhist schools. These describe the nature of all dharmas, but with some important specifications in the case of the Sarvāstivāda scheme, within which, broadly speaking, the Yogācāra masters too operate.

All assembled factors are impermanent; not all dharmas though, since the unproduced dharmas (asaṃskṛta) are not impermanent.

All dharmas with fluxes are suffering; not all dharmas though, since dharmas without fluxes are those to which afflictions cannot stick, and that therefore can function towards the end of suffering (like the Truth of the Path).

All dharmas, without exception, are selfless, whether produced or unproduced, with fluxes or without fluxes.

The defining traits of all assembled factors and dharmas are not different from the factors and dharmas

Impermanence is not different from the factors; otherwise, the factors would not be impermanent. Similarly, suffering is not different from the dharmas with fluxes, which otherwise would not be painful, and selflessness is not different from the dharmas, which otherwise would have a self.

The defining traits of all assembled factors and dharmas are not the same as the assembled factors and dharmas

Impermanence is not the same as the factors; otherwise, the factors would be absences, of the type “destruction-absence”, i.e. the absence that follows a prior presence. Similarly, suffering and selflessness cannot be identical to what they characterize, which otherwise would lose its other distinguishing features.

Overall meaning of Verse 22c

Impermanence, suffering and selflessness are common-traits applicable to all co-producing factors, all dharmas with fluxes, and all dharmas, respectively. They cannot be said to be different from those dharmas, because otherwise those dharmas would be permanent, pleasant and have a self. They cannot be said to be the same, however, otherwise their own definitions would apply to those dharmas, which would then be

no more than subsequent absences, experiences of suffering, and absences of self, while it is the case that those dharmas have their own distinct defining traits beyond that.

Verse 22d

नादृष्टे ऽस्मिन् स दृश्यते || २२ ||

nādr̥ṣṭe 'smin sa dṛśyate || 22 ||

That is not seen as long as this is not seen.

padacchedaḥ

na, a-dr̥ṣṭe, asmin saḥ, dṛśyate

The progression of purification: conceptual, non-conceptual, and again conceptual awareness

Mahāyāna Buddhism explains the progression of practice by dividing it into: an initial stage, wherein pure non-conceptual meditation has not yet been achieved; the attainment of non-conceptual meditation, which is what Noble Ones experience during samādhi; the conceptual states of Noble Ones, which are the times when they are out of samādhi. This progression is found in a number of different texts, including the famous “Dhāraṇī on Entering Non-Conceptuality” (Nirvikalpa-praveśa-dhāraṇī), quoted by Sthiramati.

The obtainment of non-conceptual meditative states changes the Noble Ones perception even when they are not in those states. The awareness of a Noble One in samādhi is called “supramundane non-conceptual awareness” (lokottara-nirvikalpa-

jñāna) while the awareness of a Noble One outside of samādhi is called “purified mundane awareness obtained afterwards” (laukika-prṣṭhalabdha-śuddha-jñāna).

Supramundane non-conceptual awareness: “seeing” the pariniṣpanna

From the Yogācāra perspective, the samādhi of Noble Ones equals the realization of the pariniṣpanna, i.e. “seeing”, “piercing” (prativedha), directly realizing the nature of the paratantra, which is its freedom from the parikalpita.

The non-conceptual samādhi is described by the Dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-Conceptuality by saying that one sees all dharmas in terms of the sameness of the space/the sky. Sthiramati explains that this is because during this samādhi one sees only the nature (tathatā) of the paratantra, i.e. the pariniṣpanna, that is equal to the sky, having “a single flavor” (eka-rasa).

Purified mundane awareness obtained afterwards: “seeing” the paratantra

The purified awareness that succeeds the non-conceptual samādhi of the Noble Ones is described in the Dhāraṇī of Entering into Non-conceptuality as when one sees all dharmas as being like an illusion, a mirage, a dream, etc. This, Sthiramati explains, refers to actually seeing the paratantra.

This progression also implies that the awareness of ordinary people, who have not yet realized non-conceptuality, sees neither of the two real natures, i.e. neither the pariniṣpanna nor the paratantra, for what it is. Rather, it must be entirely involved in the parikalpita, not having directly realized the absence of an object to be grasped and a grasper.

This meditative progression explains the sense in which the paratantra is not seen as long as the pariniṣpanna has not been seen.

Overall meaning of Verse 22d

As long as one has not obtained the non-conceptual samādhi of the Noble Ones and thus realized the pariniṣpanna, which is the absence of the parikalpita in the paratantra, one will not be able to see the paratantra for what it is through a purified conceptual awareness that follows that non-conceptual experience of emptiness.

Verse 23

त्रिविधस्य स्वभावस्य त्रिविधां निःस्वभावताम् |

सन्धाय सर्वधर्माणां देशिता निःस्वभावता || २३ ||

trividhasya svabhāvasya trividhāṃ niḥsvabhāvatām |

sandhāya sarvadharmāṇāṃ deśitā niḥsvabhāvatā || 23 ||

The lack of own-existence of all the dharmas was taught intending to refer to the threefold lack of own-existence of the threefold own-existence.

padacchedaḥ

trividhasya, svabhāvasya, trividhām, niḥsvabhāvatām, sandhāya, sarva-dharmāṇām, deśitā, niḥ-svabhāvatā

The statements of the Sūtras

Mahāyāna Sūtras often state that all the dharmas, without exception, lack own-existence (niḥsvabhāva), are non-arisen (anutpanna) and non-ceased (aniruddha); such statements are considered synonymous with the emptiness of all dharmas, and are especially frequent in the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras – even the Heart of Wisdom

says that “all dharmas are emptiness, without defining traits, non-arisen, non-ceased [...]”

The Madhyamaka take these statements to mean that indeed all dharmas are, in ultimate analysis, unreal and non-arisen. The Yogācāra masters, on the other hand, uphold that the other-dependent (paratantra) is real, and that it really arises thanks to prior, real causes and conditions. The statement, therefore, must be interpreted as having been spoken by the Buddha having something more specific or qualified in mind.

The term used by Vasubandhu is sandhāya, which I have translated as “intending to refer to”. It is clearly related to the terms sandhi/abhisandhi, which mean something like “an intention to refer to”, or just an intent. It is also an obvious reference to the 12th Chapter of the “Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras” (Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra), one of the five “Maitreya Treatises”, where the sandhi is subdivided into four types, of which the second type is called “intention regarding the defining traits” (lakṣaṇa-abhisandhi) and is specifically explained as related to those Sūtras where it is said that all dharmas are without own-existence, non-arisen, etc., wherein this is in reference to the three types of non-existence as applicable to the three types of own-existence.

Three types of own-existence and three types of lack of own-existence

By applying the three own-existences doctrine to the interpretation of Sūtra passages stating that all dharmas have no own-existence, Yogācāra masters can show that their doctrine of the reality of the other-dependent is not contradicting the emptiness of all dharmas. As we will see in the next verses, this is thanks to a distinction in the meaning of “own-existence” when applied to the lack of own-existence for the three own-existences; this distinction permits accepting the validity of those Sūtra passages, while at the same time upholding the real arising of the paratantra, i.e. of cognition-only.

Overall meaning of Verse 23

The doctrine that the other-dependent is real and really arises would seem to contradict Sūtra passages where it is said that all dharmas have no own-existence and are non-arisen. However, this difficulty is solved by explaining that the Buddha had in mind three different types of “lack of own-existence”, each of them referring to one of the three own-existences.

Verse 24ab

प्रथमो लक्षणेनैव निःस्वभावो

prathamo lakṣaṇenaiva niḥsvabhāvo

The first has no own-existence just in terms of its defining trait;

padacchedaḥ

prathamahaḥ, lakṣaṇena, eva, niḥsvabhāvaḥ

“Own-existence” (svabhāva) as a characteristic/defining trait

Using the term svabhāva to refer to a defining trait/characteristic is very common in Buddhist texts, both in the Sanskrit and in the Pāli tradition (wherein sabhāva and lakkhaṇa are often synonyms).

“Defining traits”, “marks”, “characteristics”, “defining feature”, “definitions” (all possible translations of lakṣaṇa) are of paramount importance in the Indian intellectual traditions, and not only in philosophy: grammar is sometimes called lakṣaṇa, and any type of intellectual endeavor passes through the discussion of defining traits, including the Buddha’s Words, the Sūtras.

According to a widely accepted non-Mahāyāna Buddhist classification, the Buddha's Words can be understood as expressing two levels of meaning: an indirect one, depending on contextually specific intentions (*ābhiprāyika*) and one that corresponds to the actual defining traits of things (*lākṣaṇika*); this partly overlaps with the distinction between “having a meaning that requires interpretation” (*neyārtha*) versus “having a meaning that is already drawn out” (*nītārtha*).

The Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras teach that things have no defining traits; the Sūtras on which the Yogācāra masters primarily rely, such as the *Sandhinirmocana*, explain that this is in terms of “three characteristics”, i.e. the three “own-existences” discussed earlier on, and should not be understood as an unqualified statement.

The thoroughly imagined nature has no real defining traits

The thoroughly imagined nature is the aspect of dharmas as objects and agents of perception/grasping: these do not exist at all, and thus their putative defining traits, such as that “form has the defining trait of being deformed” or that “feeling has the defining trait of being an experience” (these are the defining traits of the first two aggregates), are simply not real. The *parikalpita-svabhāva*, therefore, has lack of *svabhāva* in the sense of lack of defining traits. It is non-arisen because it is not existent, it is only imagined: it was never there to begin with.

Overall meaning of Verse 24ab

The first among the three own-existences, the thoroughly imagined own-existence, has no own-existence in the sense that it has no applicable defining trait, as it was never there in the first place; it has no arising as it never came into existence.

Verse 24bc

ऽपरः पुनः |

न स्वयम्भाव एतस्येत्

'paraḥ punaḥ |

na svayambhāva etasyety

while for the next,

it means that it has no coming into existence on its own accord.

padacchedaḥ

aparaḥ, punaḥ, na, svayam-bhāvaḥ, etasya, iti

“Own-existence” as coming into existence of one’s own accord

The Sanskrit bhāva can be explained as meaning birth, coming into existence (janman, bhavana); and the sva- part can be taken to be adverbial (svayam), meaning on one’s own accord, by oneself. Thus svabhāva can be understood to mean “coming into existence by oneself”, not depending on causes and condition.

The other-dependent does not come into existence of one’s own accord

The very name of the “other-dependent” indicates that it depends on causes and conditions: these are other than itself, and in this sense it lacks “coming into existence of one’s own accord”, i.e. sva-bhāva as svayam-bhāva.

The other-dependent appears in a way that does not conform to its real nature

Because the way in which it appears, i.e. not as dependent upon causes and conditions, is different from its nature, the other-dependent has “lack of own-existence in terms of arising”, i.e. the way it appears to arise is not the same as the way it really arises.

Overall meaning of Verse 24bc

The other-dependent does not have own-existence in the sense that it does not come into existence on its own; furthermore, since the way it appears to arise does not conform to the way it really arises, it has “lack of own-existence in terms of arising”.

Verse 24d/25

अपरा निःस्वभावता ॥ २४ ॥

धर्माणां परमार्थश्च स यतस्तथतापि सः ।

सर्वकालं तथाभावात् सैव विज्ञप्तिमात्रता ॥ २५ ॥

aparā niḥsvabhāvātā ॥ 24 ॥

dharmāṇāṃ paramārthaś ca sa yatas tathatāpi saḥ ।

sarvakālaṃ tathābhāvāt saiva vijñaptimātratā ॥ 25 ॥

There is another type of own-existence-less-ness:

due to being the ultimate of the dharmas; it is also thusness, being thus at all time; that itself is cognition-only-ness.

padacchedaḥ

aparā, niḥsvabhāvatā, dharmāṇām, parama-arthaḥ, ca, saḥ, yataḥ, tathatā, api, saḥ, sarva-kālam, tathā-bhāvāt, sā, eva, vijñapti-mātratā

The pariniṣpanna as the ultimate (paramārtha)

The pariniṣpanna is the referent of the ultimate (paramasya artha), in the sense that it is the object of the supreme type of awareness, the awareness of a Noble One in meditation. Or, it is ultimate/supreme in the sense that, just like the sky, it has everywhere the same taste (ekarasa) and is devoid of stains (vimala). Furthermore, since it is the nature (dharmatā) of the other-dependent dharmas, it is their paramārtha, and thus it is ultimate lack of own-existence because it has the nature of an absence (i.e. the absence of the parikalpita in the paratantra).

The pariniṣpanna as thusness (tathatā)

“Thusness” is in fact just a partial indication: whatever term applies to the Dharmadhātu (such as “emptiness”, “the real limit”, etc.) applies to the pariniṣpanna. It is called “thusness”, specifically, because it is never otherwise, it is always “thus”, in this way, the permanent absence of the parikalpita in the paratantra, identical in the continuum of ordinary people and Noble Ones: it therefore lacks arising, but due to its permanence rather than due to its being identical within non-existence.

The pariniṣpanna as cognition-only-ness (vijñapti-mātratā)

Sthiramati points out that identifying the pariniṣpanna with the fact of cognition-only is meant to express realization of reality: to realize emptiness, to realize the nature of all dharmas, is to realize that they are cognition-only, where the “only” means that there is no object to be perceived, and no perceiver.

Overall meaning of Verses 24d/25

The third nature, the pariniṣpanna, is ultimate (paramārtha) and it is lack of own-existence (niḥsvabhāvatā). This is the same as the fact of being cognition only, free from an object to be grasped and a grasper, that is the ultimate ever identical nature of all dharmas, non-arisen purity.

Verse 26

यावद्विज्ञप्तिमात्रत्वे विज्ञानं नावतिष्ठति |

ग्राहद्वयस्यानुशयस्तावन्न विनिवर्तते || २६ ||

yāvad vijñaptimātratve vijñānam nāvatiṣṭhati |

grāhadvayasyānuśayas tāvan na vinivartate || 26 ||

As long as consciousness does not remain in cognition-only-ness,
for that long the insidious growth of the two types of grasping does not cease.

padacchedaḥ

yāvat, vijñapti-mātratve, vijñānam, na, avatiṣṭhati, grāha-dvayasya, anuśayaḥ, tāvat, na,
vinivartate

Insidious growth (anuśaya)

The term anuśaya is often translated as “latency”: something that “lays down and grows” (śete) “gradually” (anu). This often refers to the afflictions/fluxes in general; Sthiramati clarifies that in this context anuśaya refers to the seed for the arising of a

future twofold grasping, deposited in the ālaya-vijñāna by the twofold grasping itself (grasping at an object to be grasped and grasping at a grasper).

Removing the insidious growths

As long as consciousness does not rest in its own nature, that is in cognition-only-ness, it continues to perceive an object to be grasped and a grasper; for that long, as the yogin's mind is not settled in the non-dual nature of cognition-only, the insidious growths of that dual grasping cannot be overcome. As long as the grasping at something outer is not relinquished, the inner grasping cannot be relinquished: one will still think “I perceive visible form, etc., by means of the eye, etc.”.

Overall meaning of Verse 26

In order to overcome the dual grasping at an object to be grasped and a grasper, it is necessary for the yogin to be able to rest in the nature of the mind, that is cognition-only free from duality.

Verse 27

विज्ञप्तिमात्रमेवेदमित्यपि ह्युपलम्भतः |

स्थापयन्नग्रतः किञ्चित्तन्मात्रे नावतिष्ठते || २७ ||

vijñaptimātram evedam ity api hy upalambhataḥ |

sthāpayann agrataḥ kiñcit tanmātre nāvatiṣṭhate || 27 ||

Since by perceiving even that “this is only just cognition”,
one is placing something in front, one is not remaining in that only.

padacchedaḥ

vijñapti-mātram, eva, idam, iti, api, hi, upalambhataḥ, sthāpayan, agrataḥ, kiñcit, tat-mātre, na, avatiṣṭhate

Perceiving that “mind has no object” is not enough

At this point, one may ask whether perceiving mind-only, bereft of an object, qualifies as “resting in cognition-only-ness”. This is not the case, and Sthiramati points out that this verse is meant for presumptuous people who might misunderstand that they are already resting in pure cognition-only-ness just by having listened to an explanation.

Perception is not compatible with resting in the dharmatā

Even a perception such as “this is only cognition without any object, there is no outer object” does not qualify as resting in cognition-only; it is still the perception of something. Practitioners of meditation may have many different kinds of objects of meditation, such as the various stages of a corpse’s decay when practicing meditation on impurity. “This is only cognition-only” is also one such object of perception, cultivated through listening to prior instruction - it is not a state bereft of an object.

Overall meaning of Verse 27

Even thinking “this is only cognition” means thinking of something, i.e. taking something as an object of the mind, and therefore it is not yet in harmony with the actual reality of cognition-only.

Verse 28

यदा त्वालम्बनं ज्ञानं नैवोपलभते तदा ।

स्थितं विज्ञानमात्रत्वे ग्राह्याभावे तदग्रहात् ॥ २८ ॥

yadā tv ālambanam jñānam naivopalabhate tadā |

sthitam vijñānamātratve grāhyābhāve tadagrahāt || 28 ||

On the other hand, when awareness does not apprehend a support, then it is placed within consciousness-only-ness, since in the absence of an object of perception, it does not perceive that.

padacchedaḥ

yadā, tu, ālambanam, jñānam, na, eva, upalabhate, tadā, sthitam, vijñāna-mātra-tve, grāhya-abhāve, tat-agrahāt

Non-conceptual awareness is objectless

Non-conceptual awareness has no object/support, be it the Teachings, some advice received, or the ordinary objects like visual forms, sounds, etc. This is thanks to seeing things as they are – and is not simply due to an inability to see an object, as it may be the case, for example, for someone blind from birth. “Doesn’t apprehend”, Sthiramati explains, means the one doesn’t see, doesn’t perceive/grasp at, doesn’t cling to/have any attraction towards it.

Non-conceptual awareness rests in the nature of consciousness-only

As all of consciousness’ grasping is at that time abandoned, one remains in the nature of the mind (citta-dharmatā).

Non-conceptual awareness is perceiver-less

A grasper can be there only as long as there is an object to be grasped; as there exists no possible object to be grasped, the grasper must also be considered to be no more than an illusion. If the mind is free from the conceptualization of objects, but not from the sense that there is a possible “grasper”, it is not genuinely free from all conceptualization.

“Grasper” here does not refer to a “person”, but to the mind as normally understood by the Buddhist systems. According to most Buddhist schools, the mind is the perceiver of an object – where perceiver can just mean the most prominent factor in the activity of perception, the one that is foremost and leads the process (i.e., the agent of perception). Thus, a moment of dependently arisen mind is understood as a grasper/perceiver, demonstrating that there is no permanent “person” who perceives.

For the Yogācāra, not only the momentary, dependently arisen mind is not an enduring person; it is also not a grasper, a perceiver, an agent of perception, as there is nothing to be perceived in the first place. In the absence of an object to be grasped, the absence of a grasper is also realized, and thus mind rests in its own nature, free from duality; thus, the insidious growths of attachment to object and agent of grasping are being destroyed.

Overall meaning of Verse 28

For the mind to actually rest in its own non-dual nature, it must not be directed towards any object, including the Teachings of Cognition-Only; when the mind is no more directed towards any object, it also realizes the absence of a perceiver, and thus is placed in its own non-dual cognition-only-ness.

Verse 29

अचित्तो ऽनुपलम्भो ऽसौ ज्ञानं लोकोत्तरं च तत् ।

आश्रयस्य परावृत्तिर्द्विधादौष्ठुल्यहानितः ॥ २९ ॥

acitto 'nupalambho 'sau jñānaṁ lokottaraṁ ca tat |

āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhādauṣṭhulyahānitaḥ || 29 ||

That is the mind-less non-perception; it is supramundane awareness;

it is the revolution of the basis, thanks to the destruction of the twofold badness.

padacchedaḥ

a-cittaḥ, an-upalambhaḥ, asau, jñānam, loka-uttaram, ca, tat, āśrayasya, parāvṛttiḥ,
dvidhā-dauṣṭhulya-hānitaḥ

Mind-less non-perception

The state of the mind resting in its own non-dual nature is also called “mind-less non-perception”; because the mind as a perceiver is not there, and because there is no perception of any object of perception.

Supramundane awareness

This awareness is not mundane, because it does not occur in the “world”, i.e. in ordinary states; and it has gone beyond the world because it is non-conceptual.

Revolution of the basis

The basis here refers to the ālaya-vijñāna: its revolution means that it turns from the state of being the subtle imprint of duality, maturation of badness, to the workability that is the non- dual awareness, the Dharma-kāya. There can be different types of revolution of the basis, though, according to what type of “badness” is removed.

Destruction of the twofold badness

“Badness” refers to the obscurations, which are two: the afflictions themselves are obscurations as they block liberation, while the obscurations to objects of knowledge block omniscience. By “badness” is meant non-workability, non-readiness towards beneficial activity; it can be the badness pertaining to Śrāvakas and Pratyakabuddhas (i.e. the obscuration that consists in afflictions), removing which one obtains the fruit of the Śrāvaka or Pratyakabuddha path, i.e. the Body of Liberation; or. the badness pertaining to Bodhisattvas (i.e. the obscuration to possible objects of knowledge), removing which one obtains the fruit of the Bodhisattva path, i.e. the Dharmakāya of an Omniscient Buddha.

Overall meaning of Verse 29

According to different stages of the path, from the Path of Seeing onwards, resting in the mind’s nature of cognition can be understood to correspond to different states as mentioned in the Sūtras: the state where there is no perceiver-mind and no perception of an object; the non-conceptual state that has transcended the world; and the revolution of the basis, which is obtained by removing the two types of “badness”, the unworkability of the ālaya-vijñāna that is its two-fold obscuration, turning the ālaya-vijñāna into a beneficial, supremely workable state, the Dharma-kāya.

Verse 30

स एवानास्रवो धातुरचिन्त्यः कुशलो ध्रुवः ।

सुखो विमुक्तिकायो ऽसौ धर्माख्यो ऽयं महामुनेः ॥ ३० ॥

sa evānāsravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ ।

sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yaṁ mahāmuneḥ ॥ 30 ॥

That itself is the dhātu without fluxes, inconceivable, virtuous, permanent;
it is the blissful body of liberation, and this is called “Dharma” for the Great
Muni.

padacchedaḥ

saḥ, eva, an-āsravaḥ, dhātuḥ, a-cintyaḥ, kuśalaḥ, dhruvaḥ, sukhaḥ, vimukti-kāyaḥ, asau,
dharma-ākhyāḥ, ayam, mahā-muneḥ

The dhātu without fluxes

That, in the form of the revolution of the basis, is said to be “without fluxes” (i.e. without afflictions) because the badness has been removed, thus all fluxes are gone. It is called dhātu because it is the cause of all the qualities of the Noble Ones – this explanation takes the term dhātu to mean something like a point of origin or cause, and follows the first chapter of the Madhyāntavibhāga.

Inconceivable

It is “inconceivable” due to three reasons: it is not within the realm of speculation/reasoning (tarka); it is to be experienced by oneself; there is no adequate example for it.

Virtuous

It is “virtuous” due to three reasons: it is the support of purification; it offers safety; it consists in dharmas without fluxes.

Permanent

It is permanent in the sense that it is never exhausted.

Blissful

Precisely because it is not impermanent, it is blissful.

Body of liberation

For the Śrāvakas this is called “body of liberation”, obtained by removing the obscurations that are afflictions.

The Dharmakāya

For the Buddhas, this is called Dharmakāya, the Dharma-body, obtained by removing both the obscurations that are afflictions, as well as the obscurations to objects of knowledge. It is also called Dharmakāya for the Bodhisattvas, who are not tormented even while they have not yet abandoned saṃsāra and who have obtained greatness in respect to all dharmas.

Overall meaning of Verse 30

The mind resting in its non-dual nature, when reaching different degrees of purity, acquires different names, up to the state of Buddhahood, where it is called Dharmakāya.

Sanskrit text in Roman script

The Sanskrit text is as per Buescher (2007), except for a single emendation.

ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate |
vijñānapariṇāme 'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā || 1 ||
vipāko mananākhyāś ca vijñaptir viṣayasya ca |
tatrālayākhyam vijñānam vipākaḥ sarvabījakam || 2 ||
asamviditakopādīsthānavijñaptikam ca tat |
sadā sparśamanaskāravitsañjñācetanānvitam || 3 ||
upekṣā vedanā tatrānivṛtāvākṛtam ca tat |
tathā sparśādayas tac ca vartate srotasaughavat || 4 ||
tasya vyāvṛttir arhattve tad āśritya pravartate |
tadālambariṃ manonāma vijñānam mananātmakam || 5 ||
kleśaiś caturbhiḥ sahitam nivṛtāvākṛtaiḥ sadā |
ātmadr̥ṣṭyātmamohātmanānātmāsnehasañjñitaiḥ || 6 ||
yatrajas tanmayair anyaiḥ sparśādyaiś cārhatō na tat |
na nirodhasamāpattau mārge lokottare na ca || 7 ||
dvitīyaḥ pariṇāmo 'yam tṛtīyaḥ ṣaḍvidhasya yā |
viṣayasyopalabdhiḥ sā kuśalākuśalādvayā || 8 ||
sarvatragair viniyataiḥ kuśalaiś caitasair asau |
samprayuktā tathā kleśair upakleśais trivedanā || 9 ||
ādyāḥ sparśādayaś chandādhimokṣasmṛtayaḥ saha |
samādhidhībhyāṃ niyatāḥ śraddhātha hrīr apatrapā || 10 ||

alobhādi trayam vīryam praśrabdhiḥ sāpramādikā |
ahimsā kuśalāḥ kleśā rāgapratighamūḍhayaḥ || 11 ||
mānadṛgvicikitsās ca krodhopanahane punaḥ |
mrakṣaḥ pradāśa īrṣyātha mātsaryam saha māyayā || 12 ||
sāṭhyam mado vihiṁsāhrīr atrapā styānam uddhavaḥ |
āsraddhyam atha kausīdyaṁ pramādo muṣitā smṛtiḥ || 13 ||
vikṣepo 'samprajanyaṁ ca kaukṛtyaṁ middham eva ca |
vitarkaś ca vicāraś cety upakleśā dvaye dvidhā || 14 ||
pañcānām mūlavijñāne yathāpratyaṁ udbhavaḥ |
vijñānānām saha na vā taraṅgāṇām yathā jale || 15 ||
manovijñānasambhūtiḥ sarvadāsañjñikād ṛte |
samāpattidvayān middhān mūrchanād apy acittakāt || 16 ||
vijñānapariṇāmo 'yaṁ vikalpo yad vikalpyate |
tena tan nāsti tenedaṁ sarvaṁ vijñaptimātrakam || 17 ||
sarvabījaṁ hi vijñānaṁ pariṇāmaṁ¹ tathā tathā |
yāty anyonyavaśād yena vikalpaḥ sa sa jāyate || 18 ||
karmaṇo vāsanā grāhadvayavāsanayā saha |
kṣīṇe pūrvavipāke 'nyaṁ vipākaṁ janayanti tat || 19 ||
yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate |
parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo na sa vidyate || 20 ||

¹ pariṇāmaṁ] em. Buescher reads pariṇāmas: this, I believe, is not supported by the likely syntax of the verse, by Sthiramati's commentary, or by the Tibetan translation, and makes the argument hard to make sense of. I thank Harunaga Isaacson for confirming my impression that pariṇāmaṁ is a better reading.

paratantrasvabhāvas tu vikalpaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ |
 niṣpannas tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahitatā tu yā || 21 ||
 ata eva sa naivānyo nānanyaḥ paratantrataḥ |
 anityatādivad vācyo nādr̥ṣṭe 'smin sa dr̥śyate || 22 ||
 trividhasya svabhāvasya trividhām niḥsvabhāvatām |
 sandhāya sarvadharmāṇām deśitā niḥsvabhāvatā || 23 ||
 prathamo lakṣaṇenaiva niḥsvabhāvo 'paraḥ punaḥ |
 na svayambhāva etasyety aparā niḥsvabhāvatā || 24 ||
 dharmāṇām paramārthaś ca sa yatas tathatāpi saḥ |
 sarvakālam tathābhāvāt saiva vijñaptimātratā || 25 ||
 yāvad vijñaptimātratve vijñānam nāvatiṣṭhati |
 grāhadvayasyānuśayas tāvan na vinivartate || 26 ||
 vijñaptimātram evedam ity api hy upalambhataḥ |
 sthāpayann agrataḥ kiñcit tanmātre nāvatiṣṭhate || 27 ||
 yadā tv ālambanam jñānam naivopalabhate tadā |
 sthitam vijñānamātratve grāhyābhāve tadagrahāt || 28 ||
 acitto 'nupalambho 'sau jñānam lokottaram ca tat |
 āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhādauṣṭhulyahānitaḥ || 29 ||
 sa evānāsravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ |
 sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yam mahāmuneḥ || 30 ||

trimśikāvijñaptikārikāḥ samāptāḥ | kṛtir iyam ācāryavasubandhoḥ ||

Sanskrit text in Devanāgarī

आत्मधर्मोपचारो हि विविधो यः प्रवर्तते ।
विज्ञानपरिणामे ऽसौ परिणामः स च त्रिधा ॥ १ ॥
विपाको मननाख्यश्च विज्ञप्तिर्विषयस्य च ।
तत्रालयाख्यं विज्ञानं विपाकः सर्वबीजकम् ॥ २ ॥
असंविदितकोपादिस्थानविज्ञप्तिकं च तत् ।
सदा स्पर्शमनस्कारवित्सञ्ज्ञाचेतनान्वितम् ॥ ३ ॥
उपेक्षा वेदना तत्रानिवृताव्याकृतं च तत् ।
तथा स्पर्शादयस्तच्च वर्तते स्रोतसौघवत् ॥ ४ ॥
तस्य व्यावृत्तिरहत्त्वे तदाश्रित्य प्रवर्तते ।
तदालम्बं मनोनाम विज्ञानं मननात्मकम् ॥ ५ ॥
क्लेशैश्चतुर्भिः सहितं निवृताव्याकृतैः सदा ।
आत्मदृष्ट्यात्ममोहात्ममानात्मस्नेहसञ्ज्ञितैः ॥ ६ ॥
यत्रजस्तन्मयैरन्यैः स्पर्शाद्यैश्चार्हतो न तत् ।
न निरोधसमापत्तौ मार्गे लोकोत्तरे न च ॥ ७ ॥
द्वितीयः परिणामो ऽयं तृतीयः षड्विधस्य या ।
विषयस्योपलब्धिः सा कुशलाकुशलाद्वया ॥ ८ ॥
सर्वत्रगैर्विनियतैः कुशलैश्चैतसैरसौ ।
सम्प्रयुक्ता तथा क्लेशैरुपक्लेशैस्त्रिवेदना ॥ ९ ॥

आद्याः स्पर्शादियश्छन्दाधिमोक्षस्मृतयः सह |
 समाधिधीभ्यां नियताः श्रद्धाथ हीरपत्रपा || १० ||
 अलोभादि त्रयं वीर्यं प्रश्रब्धिः साप्रमादिका |
 अहिंसा कुशलाः क्लेशा रागप्रतिघमूढयः || ११ ||
 मानदृग्विचिकित्साश्च क्रोधोपनहने पुनः |
 म्रक्षः प्रदाश ईर्ष्याथ मात्सर्यं सह मायया || १२ ||
 शाठ्यं मदो विहिंसाहीरत्रपा स्त्यानमुद्भवः |
 आश्रद्ध्यमथ कौसीद्यं प्रमादो मुषिता स्मृतिः || १३ ||
 विक्षेपो ऽसम्प्रजन्यं च कौकृत्यं मिद्धमेव च |
 वितर्कश्च विचारश्चेत्युपक्लेशा द्वये द्विधा || १४ ||
 पञ्चानां मूलविज्ञाने यथाप्रत्ययमुद्भवः |
 विज्ञानानां सह न वा तरङ्गाणां यथा जले || १५ ||
 मनोविज्ञानसम्भूतिः सर्वदासञ्जिकादृते |
 समापत्तिद्वयान्मिद्धान्मूर्च्छनादप्यचित्तकात् || १६ ||
 विज्ञानपरिणामो ऽयं विकल्पो यद्विकल्प्यते |
 तेन तन्नास्ति तेनेदं सर्वं विज्ञप्तिमात्रकम् || १७ ||
 सर्वबीजं हि विज्ञानं परिणामं तथा तथा |
 यात्यन्योन्यवशाद्येन विकल्पः स स जायते || १८ ||
 कर्मणो वासना ग्राहद्वयवासनया सह |
 क्षीणे पूर्वविपाके ऽन्यं विपाकं जनयन्ति तत् || १९ ||

येन येन विकल्पेन यद्यद्वस्तु विकल्प्यते |
 परिकल्पित एवासौ स्वभावो न स विद्यते || २० ||
 परतन्त्रस्वभावस्तु विकल्पः प्रत्ययोद्भवः |
 निष्पन्नस्तस्य पूर्वेण सदा रहितता तु या || २१ ||
 अत एव स नैवान्यो नानन्यः परतन्त्रतः |
 अनित्यतादिवद्वाच्यो नादृष्टे ऽस्मिन् स दृश्यते || २२ ||
 त्रिविधस्य स्वभावस्य त्रिविधां निःस्वभावताम् |
 सन्धाय सर्वधर्माणां देशिता निःस्वभावता || २३ ||
 प्रथमो लक्षणेनैव निःस्वभावो ऽपरः पुनः |
 न स्वयम्भाव एतस्येत्यपरा निःस्वभावता || २४ ||
 धर्माणां परमार्थश्च स यतस्तथतापि सः |
 सर्वकालं तथाभावात् सैव विज्ञप्तिमात्रता || २५ ||
 यावद्विज्ञप्तिमात्रत्वे विज्ञानं नावतिष्ठति |
 ग्राहद्वयस्यानुशयस्तावन्न विनिवर्तते || २६ ||
 विज्ञप्तिमात्रमेवेदमित्यपि ह्युपलम्भतः |
 स्थापयन्नग्रतः किञ्चित्तन्मात्रे नावतिष्ठते || २७ ||
 यदा त्वालम्बनं ज्ञानं नैवोपलभते तदा |
 स्थितं विज्ञानमात्रत्वे ग्राह्याभावे तदग्रहात् || २८ ||
 अचित्तो ऽनुपलम्भो ऽसौ ज्ञानं लोकोत्तरं च तत् |
 आश्रयस्य परावृत्तिर्द्विधादौष्ठुल्यहानितः || २९ ||

स एवानास्रवो धातुरचिन्त्यः कुशलो ध्रुवः ।

सुखो विमुक्तिकायो ऽसौ धर्माख्यो ऽयं महामुनेः ॥ ३० ॥

त्रिंशिकाविज्ञप्तिकारिकाः समाप्ताः । कृतिरियमाचार्यवसुबन्धोः ॥

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