

The Luminous Mind in Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka Discourses

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Abstract

With this article I examine Pāli discourse references to luminosity of the mind in the light of their parallels, with a view to discerning early stages in the development of a notion that has had a considerable impact on Buddhist thought and practice.

Introduction

The present paper stands in some degree of continuity with another article in which I examined fire miracles attributed to the Buddha in several discourses.¹ Closer study brought to light instances of such miracles that can be identified as the effect of subsequent developments of the texts in question, quite probably resulting from metaphorical references to fire being interpreted literally.

One example from a Theravāda discourse is the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, where the Buddha departs by levitation after having attained the fire element and then emanates a flame as high as seven palm trees. No reference to

¹ Anālayo 2015.

such attainment or the manifestation of a flame is found in the parallels.²

Another instance of the Buddha emanating fire occurs during a visit to a Brahmā, reported in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya*. Here, too, a manifestation of fire is not part of the description of his visit in the parallel versions.³ Based on a close study of these two instances, I have come to the conclusion that it is fairly probable that these fiery effects are additions to the Theravāda versions of the respective discourses.

The same holds for another example in a Dharmaguptaka discourse. This occurs in a parallel to the *Sakkapañha-sutta* of the *Dirgha-āgama*. The *Dirgha-āgama* discourse depicts the Buddha, on the occasion of a visit paid by the ruler of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, seated in “concentration on fire” such that the whole surrounding mountain appears to be burning.⁴ In the *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its other discourse parallels, the meditative abiding of the Buddha does not result in any externally visible fire effect.

Another instance, in what is probably a Dharmaguptaka discourse, leads me from the topic of fire miracles to luminosity, a theme that will occupy me in the remainder of this article. This instance concerns a depiction of a footprint of the Buddha in a range of early discourses. A Gāndhārī fragment version of this depiction, which can with high probability be assigned to a Dharmaguptaka line of textual transmission,⁵ imbues this footprint with luminescence.⁶ It differs in this respect from its discourse parallels. Again, a description of the wheel-mark on the feet of the previous Buddha Vipasyin in a discourse in the Dharmaguptaka *Dirgha-āgama* differs from its Pāli and Sanskrit fragment parallels by endowing the mark with luminescence.⁷ Similar to the cases surveyed above, closer inspection makes it highly probable that attributing luminescence to a footprint of the present Buddha or the wheel-mark on the feet of the previous Buddha are subsequent developments of the respective texts in the Dharmaguptaka reciter tradition.

These instances point to a propensity among Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciters to improve on early discourse passages by introducing imagery

² DN 24 at DN III 27,12; cf. Anālayo 2015: 23ff.

³ SN 6.5 at SN I 144,17; cf. Anālayo 2015: 20f.

⁴ DĀ 14 at T I 62c12: 入火焰三昧; cf. Anālayo 2015: 13ff.

⁵ Cf. Salomon 1999: 172f and 2014: 13, as well as Cox 2014: 36–39.

⁶ Reconstructed by Allon 2001: 124: *aceata prabh(*a)śp(*a)ra*; cf. Anālayo 2017a: 24f.

⁷ DĀ 1 at T I 5a29: 足下相輪, 千輻成就, 光光相照 (radiance is also mentioned, however, in an Uighur fragment parallel, Shōgaito 1998: 374 line 2); cf. Anālayo 2017a: 84f.

related to fire and luminosity.⁸ In what follows I continue studying this apparent tendency in relation to the notion of luminosity of the mind or meditative practices.⁹

Luminous (*pabha*) Consciousness

An emphasis on imagery related to luminosity among Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciter traditions can be seen in two references to a particular type of consciousness. In the Theravāda discourse collections these two references occur in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*.¹⁰ The latter has a Dharmaguptaka parallel in the *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese.

The first of the two instances, found in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, occurs as part of a contest between Brahmā and the Buddha. The episode as a whole reflects a tendency to mock the claim that Brahmā is all-knowing.¹¹ The *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* begins with the Buddha challenging Baka Brahmā's mistaken belief that his heavenly realm is permanent. A debate ensues, in which both the Buddha and Baka delineate the compass of their respective knowledge. This leads up to a warning by Baka Brahmā that the Buddha will not be able to sustain his vain claim. Next comes the reference with which I am concerned here, which describes an “invisible consciousness”, *viññāṇaṃ*

⁸ Needless to say, highlighting such a tendency in these two traditions does not imply that at times such propensity might not manifest in texts transmitted by other traditions. For example, a recollection of the Buddha in SĀ 1158 at T II 308b28 (from a Mūlasarvāstivāda discourse collection) and SĀ² 81 at T II 401c27 describes the Buddha as endowed with a halo, something not mentioned in the parallel SN 7.1 at SN I 160,10.

⁹ A relationship to wisdom in particular can be found in AN 4.141 at AN II 139,16, according to which *paññā* is superior in luminosity (*pabhā*) to the moon, the sun, and fire. A comparable statement occurs in the otherwise unrelated MĀ 141 at T I 647c23: 諸光明，慧光明為第一，“the luminosity of wisdom is foremost of all luminosities” (although here the moon, sun, and fire are not mentioned explicitly). Another occurrence relates to the Buddha more specifically. SN 1.26 at SN I 15,12 reckons the Buddha to be endowed with splendour (*ābhā*) superior to the sun, the moon, and fire; a comparison found also in the parallels SĀ 1310 at T II 360b29 and SĀ² 309 at T II 478c27 (which employ 光明 or just 明 respectively). Langer 2000: 54 notes a parallelism to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.6, according to which the light (*jyotir*) of the *ātman* is superior to the sun, the moon, and fire (as well as to speech). This parallelism leaves open the possibility that the type of presentation found in SN 1.26 and AN 4.141, as well as their parallels, could be responses to such imagery by way of replacing self-conceptions with either the Awakened One or else wisdom.

¹⁰ Alternatively titled *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* or *Kevaṭṭa-sutta*.

¹¹ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2011a: 12–15.

anidassanam,¹² that is “infinite”, *anantam*, and “luminous in every way”, *sabbato pabham*.¹³ Then Baka Brahmā attempts to vanish from the Buddha’s sight as a way of proving his superiority.

The commentary attributes the reference to a consciousness that is “luminous in every way” to the Buddha.¹⁴ Thus, from the commentarial viewpoint, the narrative denouement is as follows: in reply to Baka Brahmā’s warning that the Buddha will be unable to sustain his claim, the Buddha responds by describing the luminous consciousness. In reply to that description, Baka Brahmā announces that he will now disappear.

However, the Ceylonese, PTS, and Siamese edition read as if the reference to the luminous consciousness were spoken by Baka Brahmā, as they lack the quotative *iti* before and after the passage in question.¹⁵ Without the quotative *iti* demarcating a change of speaker, the luminous consciousness appears to be part of the continuous speech delivered by Baka Brahmā. On this reading, Baka Brahmā would support his warning regarding the vanity of the Buddha’s claim by referring to the luminous consciousness. Then he would try to prove the worth of his declaration on this particular consciousness by attempting to disappear.

The Burmese edition has the quotative *iti* before the reference to the invisible and luminous consciousness, but even this edition lacks a quotative after it. Thus here, too, the reference to this type of consciousness is not fully demarcated as text spoken by the Buddha.

Given the uncertainty that emerges in this way, it remains to be seen how far the content of the proclamation can help to identify its speaker. The passage under discussion in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* qualifies the luminous consciousness as “infinite”, *ananta*. The same term occurs regularly elsewhere in descriptions of the attainment of the sphere of “infinite” space. The other qualification of the luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* is “invisible”, *anidassana*. This also occurs in a description of space, which is

¹² My rendering follows Cone 2010: 560 “(what is) invisible; (what is) not accessible to sight” rather than the more commonly used “non-manifestative”; for a survey of various translations of the term *anidarśana/anidassana* cf. Martini 2011: 145 note 20.

¹³ MN 49 at MN I 329,30.

¹⁴ Ps II 413,6.

¹⁵ Chalmers 1926: 237 and Horner 1967: 392 translate it as part of Brahmā’s speech; similarly Nakamura 1955: 78 takes the present passage “to have been addressed to the Buddha by Brahmā”. According to Bodhi in Ñāṇamoli 1995/2005: 1249 note 512, the Sinhalese Buddha Jayanti has *iti*, but in the printed edition at my disposal this is not the case.

said to be immaterial, *arūpa*, and invisible, *anidassana*, a context where the two terms seem to function as near synonyms.¹⁶

The *Mahānīdāna-sutta* and its parallels, as part of an analysis of notions of a self, recognize the designation of a self that is immaterial and infinite, *arūpa* and *ananta*.¹⁷ In view of the apparent similarity in meaning between the adjectives “immaterial”, *arūpa*, and “invisible”, *anidassana*, a reference to a form of consciousness that is *anidassana* and *ananta* could also reflect such a notion of a self. It follows that an invisible and infinite consciousness need not be expressing a realization of Nirvāṇa, but could also be a claim voiced by someone who has not reached awakening, such as a Brahmā.¹⁸ In other words, the statement in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* could indeed be attributed to Baka Brahmā in as much as neither “invisible”, *anidassana*, nor “infinite”, *ananta*, make it certain that the Buddha must be the speaker. The same is all the more the case for “luminous”, *pabha*. In fact, as pointed out by Brahmāli (2009: 44f)

¹⁶ MN 21 at MN I 127,36: *ākāso arūpī anidassano* and its parallel MĀ 193 at T I 745c16: “this empty space is immaterial, invisible, and without resistance”, 此虛空非色, 不可見, 無對. Here 不可見 could well be a rendering of an original *anidarśana/anidassana*.

¹⁷ DN 15 at DN II 64,9, with parallels in DĀ 13 at T I 62a23 (which seems to involve a mistranslation of *ānantya/ananta* by way of providing a contrast to *parīta/paritta*, 少, with the term 多), T 14 at T I 244b6, and MĀ 97 at T I 580c9. Already Frauwallner 1953: 236 noted the similarity between the luminous nature of ancient Indian *ātmā* conceptions and the notion of a luminous consciousness that is invisible and infinite. Vetter 1988: 65 comments on the description of consciousness in MN 49 that “this statement corresponds to some descriptions of the great self or the Brahman in the Upaniṣads.” Needless to say, noting such parallelism is only meant to support the suggestion that the statement in MN 49 could indeed be placed into the mouth of Brahmā, without going so far as to consider the entire trajectory discussed here as the sole result of Brahmanical influence. As pointed out by Ruegg 1989: 51f in relation to the luminous mind, it will not do to consider such ideas as entirely “foreign imports at some point in the history of Buddhism under the overwhelming influence of Hinduism and/or Brahmanical philosophy. The problem of the natural luminosity of Mind, the ‘buddhomorphic’ Ground of Awakening and the relation between it and buddhahood as the Fruit of Awakening is in fact too deeply embedded in Buddhist thought, and it is too significant religiously and philosophically, for such an explanation to be wholly satisfactory.”

¹⁸ As already noted by Harvey 1995: 200 and Langer 2000: 52, *anidassana* features as one of the epithets of *Nibbāna* in the *Asaṅkhata-saṃyutta*, SN 43.22 at SN IV 370,7. The counterpart SĀ 890 at T II 224b7 does not include *anidassana/anidarśana* in its corresponding listing. The only term related at all to *dassana/darśana* is 難見, “difficult to see”, which probably goes back to an original *durdṛṣa/duddasa*. This leaves open the possibility, although falling short of any certainty, that the occurrence of *anidassana* in the list in SN 43.22 might reflect a later development, in line with the commentarial understandings of the passages in DN 9 and MN 49 (for a critical examination of which cf. Ñāṇananda 2004: 39–42).

in a discussion of the two discourse references to the invisible consciousness,

due to the qualifiers *ananta* and *pabhā* (sic), *anidassana viññāṇa* is described in a way that resembles the description of certain states of *samādhi* ... it seems plausible, perhaps even likely, that *anidassana viññāṇa* refers to a state of *samādhi*.

In the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, probably reflecting a Sarvāstivāda lineage of textual transmission,¹⁹ the passage in question is indeed spoken by Brahmā.²⁰ His actual proclamation differs, however, reading:²¹

Because I am conscious of infinite objects, have infinite knowledge, infinite vision, infinite discrimination, I know each and every thing distinctly.

The Buddha then rebuffs Brahmā's claim by pointing out that anyone who still has notions of a self does not really know.²²

The *Brahmanimantanika-sutta* could be making basically the same point. If the statement in question should indeed be attributed to Baka Brahmā, the discussion would proceed as follows: the Buddha clarifies that he knows realms that are beyond the ken of Baka Brahmā and then proclaims that, as he knows what does not partake of the earthiness of earth (etc.), he does not appropriate or identify with earth (etc.).²³ In reply, Baka Brahmā warns the Buddha that this claim will turn out to be empty. By way of illustrating this warning, Baka Brahmā refers to the luminous consciousness, presumably standing for a

¹⁹ Cf. Anālayo 2012b: 516–521 (in reply to Chung and Fukita 2011) and 2017b (in reply to Chung 2014 and 2017).

²⁰ Although it needs be noted that a subsequent passage, which clearly has to be attributed to the Buddha, is also presented as if it were spoken by Brahmā; cf. MĀ 78 at T I 548c2.

²¹ MĀ 78 at T I 548b11: 以識無量境界故, 無量知, 無量見, 無量種別, 我各各知別.

²² MĀ 78 at T I 548b13: 梵天, 若有沙門梵志於地有地想, 地是我, 地是我所, 我是地所; 彼計地是我已, 便不知地, “Brahmā, if a recluse or brahmin in regard to earth has a perception of earth as ‘earth is me’, ‘earth is mine’, ‘I belong to earth’, having reckoned earth as self, he in turn does not [truly] know earth.”

²³ This part of the discourse is similar to an exposition in the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*, MN 1 at MN I 5,34, and its parallel EĀ 44.6 at T II 766b11, translated in Pāsādika 2008: 145.

samādhi experience that does not partake of the earthiness of earth (etc.).²⁴ In order to substantiate his superiority, Baka Brahmā then unsuccessfully tries to vanish from the Buddha’s sight.

Although, from the viewpoint of the Pāli commentary mentioned above, it might seem natural to consider the remark on the luminous consciousness as spoken by the Buddha, a coherent reading of the *Brahmanimantaṇṇika-sutta* is possible with the same reference being attributed to Baka Brahmā instead.

Turning to the formulation of the corresponding passage in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the notion of an infinite consciousness is common to the two versions. The qualifications of consciousness as “invisible” and “luminous”, however, are not found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

Of particular interest to my main topic is the absence of any reference to luminosity in this part of the Chinese version. Luminosity does feature in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel at a later point, however, when the Buddha and Brahmā engage in a celestial hide-and-seek. According to both versions, whereas Brahmā was unable to disappear from the Buddha’s vision, the Buddha successfully accomplished this feat. He was able to make himself heard while at the same time remaining invisible to Brahmā and his assembly. Whereas the *Brahmanimantaṇṇika-sutta* does not specify how the Buddha managed to remain invisible, according to the *Madhyama-āgama* version what happened was as follows:²⁵

[The Buddha] sent forth an extremely bright luminosity, illuminating the entire Brahmā [realm] while in turn remaining hidden himself, causing Brahmā and Brahmā’s retinue to hear his voice only, without seeing his appearance.

²⁴ In MN 49 at MN I 329,36 a reference to not partaking of various items includes the heavenly realms about whose existence the Buddha had just informed Brahmā. Thus Brahmā presumably just repeats in his claim the items that the Buddha had listed. In MĀ 78 at T I 548b13 Brahmā’s claim only proceeds up to a mention of the Brahmā world in general, in keeping with the fact that in this version he is the first to list different realms, to which the Buddha then responds with his declaration of non-identification (the corresponding declaration in MN 49 at MN I 329,12 comes before the reference to the invisible consciousness). In MN 49 the proclamation of the luminous consciousness itself comes without any reference to the absence of appropriation or identification. Such a reference would indeed be appropriate only for a statement made by the Buddha, as to be free from appropriation and identification is the result of liberating insight.

²⁵ MĀ 78 at T I 548c14: 放極妙光明, 照一切梵天, 便自隱住, 使諸梵天及梵天眷屬但聞其聲, 而不見其形。

When viewed from its narrative context, the element of luminosity in the *Madhyama-āgama* version serves to explain how the Buddha performed his feat. This is not clear in the Pāli version, which only describes the effect achieved, without explaining the means. In contrast to the function of luminosity in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse as part of a supernormal feat, the qualification of a type of consciousness that is invisible, *anidassana*, as being at the same time also luminous is less self-evident in its narrative context. The point is that if consciousness is invisible, it is less natural for it to manifest luminosity as well, at least as long as such luminescence is understood as something that is visible to others.²⁶ This makes it possible, although by no means certain, that the element of luminosity was originally related to the feat performed by the Buddha.

Be that as it may, from the viewpoint of my main topic it seems fair to conclude that the speaker of the reference to a luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* is uncertain, with considerable evidence not in agreement with the commentarial standpoint that the proclamation should be attributed to the Buddha. Whatever may be the final word on the speaker of this proclamation, the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not qualify consciousness as luminous. In other words, in the case of this discourse the motif of a luminous type of consciousness is only attested in the Theravāda version.

The other of the two references to be discussed in this part of my exploration occurs in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. Here the passage is clearly spoken by the Buddha and the narrative context does seem to concern an experience related to awakening. Whereas, in the case of the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta*, the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel did not qualify consciousness as invisible, in the case of the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* the parallels agree in this respect. This leaves open the possibility, again without implying any certainty, that the reading in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* (and the corresponding commentarial gloss) might have been influenced by the passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* (and its commentary). In fact the episode in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* also mocks the claim that Brahmā

²⁶ Thompson 2015: xxi proposes that “according to Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, the definition of consciousness is that which is luminous and knowing. Luminosity means the ability of consciousness to reveal or disclose.” It seems to me, however, that this is not necessarily the case for early Buddhist thought, where consciousness is something that is receptively aware, not something that actively illuminates, hence luminosity is not part of a general definition of the functions of consciousness. In the same vein, as noted by Berger 2015: 5, “initially, for South Asian Vijñānavāda as well as for foregoing scholastic Buddhism, luminosity was the attainment of a specific moment of enlightenment” and not a general quality of consciousness.

is all-knowing, a thematic similarity that would facilitate an influence of one discourse on the other (or of one commentary on the other) within the Pāli oral tradition.

The suggestion of some possible influence between these two discourses finds support in the fact that the Sanskrit fragment parallel to the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* has a brief reference to not partaking of the earthiness of earth as part of its proclamation of the invisible consciousness.²⁷ The topic of not partaking of the earthiness of earth, as well as of the suchness of various other things, is taken up in detail in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, which clearly is its original context.

Be that as it may, the main plot in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* involves a monk who proceeds through various heavenly realms up to that of Mahābrahmā with the question of where the four elements cease without remainder. His persistent enquiries force Mahābrahmā to admit his inability to answer the question and to direct the monk to the Buddha for an answer. The Buddha reformulates the question such that attention shifts from a particular location where the four elements cease to the type of subjective experience in which the four elements no longer find a footing, and where concepts based on the experience of these four (such as the distinction between beauty and ugliness, etc.) and name-and-form cease. The reply given by the Buddha in a parallel found in the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* is as follows:²⁸

Consciousness that is invisible,
 Infinite, and luminous of its own:
 This ceasing, the four elements cease,
 Coarse and subtle, pretty and ugly cease.
 Herein name-and-form cease.
 Consciousness ceasing, the remainder [i.e. name-and-form] also ceases.

The Pāli editions of the corresponding passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* are

²⁷ Fragment 389v7, Zhou 2008: 9: *taṃ prthivīprthatvena anabhibhūtaṃ*.

²⁸ DĀ 24 at T I 102c17: 識無形，無量自有光，此滅四大滅，羶細好醜滅，於此名色滅，識滅餘亦滅；parallel to DN 9 at DN I 223,12. For a translation of DĀ 24 cf. Meisig 1995. DiSimone 2016: 155 quotes Karashima to the effect that in the translation of the *Dīrgha-āgama* the character 滅 at times renders *prahāṇa*; cf. also Hirakawa 1997: 738. On such an understanding, one might even wonder if the passage in DĀ 24 has counterparts to both *pabhaṃ* and *pahaṃ* (in its references to 有光 and 此滅). A reference to cessation is also found in the Tibetan parallel, D 4094 ju 65a3 or Q 5595 tu 72a8: 'gog pa, which here occurs just before its version of the line on the invisible consciousness.

divided on the issue of luminosity; they agree with the passage translated above in mentioning the “invisible consciousness”, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*, which is “infinite”, *anantaṃ*. The Ceylonese and PTS editions have the reading *pahaṃ* instead of *pabhaṃ*, “luminous”.²⁹ In a detailed study of this passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* and of its commentarial exegesis, Norman (1987: 29) argues for an original reading *pahaṃ*,³⁰ reasoning that

it is likely that when the canonical texts were translated or transformed into the language of the Theravādin canon, which we call Pāli, the redactors thought that *-paha* was inappropriate to the dialect and they wished to translate it. This caused difficulties, because they had to decide between the three different forms: *-pabha*, *-papha*, and *pabhū*.

Rhys Davids and Stede (1921/1993: 448) s.v. *paha* comment that

it is not at all improbable to take *pahaṇ* as ppr. of *pajahati* (as contracted fr. *pajahaṇ* like *pahatvāna* for *pajahitvāna* at Sn 639), thus meaning ‘giving up entirely’.

Discourse parallels to the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* extant in Sanskrit and Tibetan do not qualify the invisible consciousness as luminous.³¹ The same holds for a

²⁹ The reading *pahaṃ* is adopted by Rhys Davids 1899: 283, Neumann 1906/2004: 157, Franke 1913: 166, and Harvey 1995: 199.

³⁰ In regard to the presently found variant *pahaṃ*, however, Norman 1987: 30 comments: “I do not think that this is a trace of the original pre-Pāli reading. It seems rather to be an error in the Sinhalese scribal tradition, where *ha* and *bha* are very similar and easily confused.”

³¹ Fragment 389v7f, Zhou 2008: 9: *vijñāyānidarśanam anantaṃ sarva<ta>ḥ pṛthum* and D 4094 ju 65a3 or Q 5595 tu 72a8: *rnam par shes pa bstan du med pa mtha' yas pa thams cad du khyab cing khyab pa de 'byung bar mi 'gyur gyi*. Here the readings *pṛthum* and *khyab*, “expansive; pervasive”, correspond to a sense of *pahaṃ* rendered by Rhys Davids 1899: 283 as “accessible”, based on the commentary’s gloss of the term as conveying the sense of a ford, *tiṭṭha*; cf. Sv II 393,18. Regarding the expression *vijñāyānidarśanam* in the Sanskrit fragment, it is perhaps worthy of note that, according to the commentarial gloss on the expression *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*, consciousness here expresses the sense “should be cognized”; cf. Sv II 393,14: *viññātabbhaṃ ti viññāṇaṃ*. This shifts emphasis from consciousness as endowed with certain attributes to the need to experience *anidassana* (in Sn 137 *nidassana* functions as a noun, hence there is no reason why *anidassana* could not function similarly in the present context). Together with the reading *pahaṃ*, this would help reduce the apparent conflict between the first line of the proclamation and the reference in its last line to the cessation of consciousness.

discourse quotation in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*.³² A reference to the present passage in the *Ratnāvalī* also does not mention any luminosity.³³

To summarize, in the passage from the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* the original reading might well have been *pahaṃ*; the notion of luminosity would consequently be a later development. Understood along the lines of the suggestion by Rhys Davids and Stede, the verse might have been a pointer to consciousness “given up in every way”, *sabbato pa(ja)haṃ*, as the condition for the four elements to cease.³⁴ Such an interpretation would better concord with the final line of the same poem in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta*, which concludes that “through the cessation of consciousness”, *viññāṇassa nirodhena*, name-and-form (as well as concepts related to the experience of the four elements) come to cease.³⁵ The whole passage could then be understood to express poetically the cessation mode of dependent arising, according to which name-and-form cease with the cessation of consciousness.

From the viewpoint of my main topic, it seems safe to conclude that the poem in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* originally need not have been concerned with luminosity. In keeping with the passages surveyed at the outset of this article in relation to fire miracles or the luminosity of the feet of a Buddha, and in keeping with the case of the *Brahmanimantanika-sutta*, a comparative study of the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* shows that here, too, the notion of luminosity manifests only in (some editions of) the Theravāda and in the Dharmaguptaka version of the discourse.

Luminous (*pabhassara*) Mind or Mental Qualities

³² T 1545 at T XXVII 671a17: 識不見無邊, 周遍廣大性; the sense conveyed by 廣大 is similar to the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms mentioned in the previous note.

³³ T 1656 at T XXXII 495b15: 如識處無形, 無邊遍一切 and D 4158 *ge* 110a7 or Q 5658 *nge* 133a8: *rnam shes bstan med mtha' yas pa, kun du bdag po de la ni*. Here *bdag po* conveys a sense of “lordship”, corresponding to the sense of *pabhū* identified by Norman 1987: 29 as one of the possible ways in which *pahaṃ* was eventually transformed in Pāli. The Chinese 遍, “pervasive”, seems to be similar to the renderings discussed in the two previous notes.

³⁴ Levman 2014: 387 argues that this would align this last qualification with the preceding two, as “of the three epithets for *viññāṇaṃ*, all are negative compounds (*anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ*) except the last (*sabbato-pahaṃ*). Yet the overall sense of this verse is really a description of *nibbāna* as an absence of consciousness ... therefore it makes more sense to take the third compound as a privative as well.”

³⁵ The understanding of the expression *nirodhena* by Falk 1943/2006: 68 as “the immobilization of” consciousness and the consequent interpretation of the whole phrase as referring to “the transformation of the consciousness-stream into the transcendent, radiant, universal *viññāṇā*” (sic) is unconvincing and clearly influenced by the agenda to argue the thesis that “the transcendent Dharma=Nirvāṇa was conceived in precanonical Buddhism as radiant all-consciousness.”

From the qualification *pabha*, in what follows I turn to occurrences which relate the similar term *pabhassara* to the mind or to meditative qualities or practices.³⁶ One such passage involves the Buddha himself and thereby stands in relation to his fire miracles and footprint, mentioned in the introduction to this article. The passage in question describes an iron ball that has been heated all day such that it becomes more light, soft, workable, and luminous. Similar to the condition of such a heated iron ball, as a result of engaging in a certain meditation practice the Buddha's body becomes more light, soft, workable, and luminous.³⁷ No parallel to this discourse is known to me, wherefore nothing further can be said from a comparative perspective.

Nevertheless, in relation to my present topic I would like to note that for the Buddha's body to become "more luminous", *pabhassarataro*, at least as long as the term is understood in a visible sense,³⁸ seems less straightforward than for the same to be said of a heated iron ball. This is not to deny that in describing the mind a metaphor has its place or that meditation practice can have visible effects on the body. My point is only that when iron is heated up, it will indeed emit light, whereas for a comparable effect to happen with the human body of someone immersed in meditation is considerably less self-evident.

Luminosity of the mind occurs again in the context of a description of concentration in the *Saṅgīti-sutta*. The passage in question concerns one out of four modes of concentration, where attention to the perception of light (*āloka*) leads to cultivating a mind endowed with luminescence (*sappabhāsa*).³⁹ The

³⁶ Although the two terms differ etymologically, the former derived from *bhā* and the latter from *bhās*, for ease of presentation I translate both as "luminous"; in fact Turner 1966/1989: 537 and 540 gives the same translation "shine" for both *bhā* and *bhās*.

³⁷ SN 51.22 at SN V 283,11: *tathāgatassa kāyo lahutarō ceva hoti mudutarō ca kammaniyataro ca pabhassarataro ca*; on the description of the meditation practice that has this effect cf. also Bodhi 2000: 1947 note 277.

³⁸ A visible sense carried by the term *pabhassara* can be seen, for example, in MN 93 at MN II 152,14, where it serves to qualify the flame of a fire. Here a visible form of luminosity or radiance is clearly implied. The parallel MĀ 151 at T I 663a23 reads 有光, which employs the Chinese character 光 used elsewhere in this collection to render *prabhāsvara/pabhassara* (another parallel, T 71, does not have the comparison to the appearance of a fire; cf. Anālayo 2011b: 553).

³⁹ DN 33 at DN III 223,4: *ālokaśāññaṃ manasikaroti ... sappabhāsaṃ cittaṃ bhāveti*; cf. also AN 4.41 at AN II 45,11 and AN 6.29 at AN III 323,17 (no discourse parallel is known to me for either of these two). The expression *sappabhāsa* occurs also in SN 51.11 at SN V 263,27 (etc.), SN 51.12 at SN V 267,14 (etc.), SN 51.14 at SN V 271,15, SN 51.20 at SN V 277,4 (etc.), SN 51.21 at SN V 281,19 (etc.), SN 51.31 at SN V 288,17 (etc.), and SN 51.32 at SN V 289,18 (etc.); for none of these discourses a parallel is known to me. In the case of yet another occurrence in

same type of concentration is also mentioned in Sanskrit fragments of the *Saṅgīti-sūtra*, although these do not give a full exposition of the topic. A full exposition can be found only in the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, an early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma work that contains a wealth of discourse quotations and is based on the *Saṅgīti-sūtra*.⁴⁰ The relevant passage does not relate perception of light to any luminescence.⁴¹

Another passage relevant to my present exploration occurs in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, where a detailed analysis of the elements and of the dependent arising of feelings leads to a profound level of meditative equanimity. The equanimity that has been reached finds illustration in the condition of gold that has been heated and refined by a goldsmith, such that it becomes well and thoroughly refined, faultless, rid of dross, soft, workable, and luminous, ready to be fashioned into any kind of ornament. Similarly, the equanimity reached at this point is pure, bright, soft, workable, and luminous.⁴²

A parallel in the *Madhyama-āgama* also has the example of gold that has been refined by a goldsmith such that it has become pure, extremely malleable, and luminous.⁴³ The same discourse does not, however, qualify the condition of equanimity as luminous.⁴⁴ The same holds for two further parallels extant as an individual translation in Chinese and a discourse quotation in Tibetan, found in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā*; in fact these two versions do not

AN 7.58 at AN IV 86,24, the parallels MĀ 83 at T I 559c23 and T 47 at T I 837a28 do not have a corresponding passage on the cultivation of *ālokaśāññā*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Anālayo 2014a: 86f.

⁴¹ T 1536 at T XXVI 395c18: 於光明想俱行心一境性，若習若修堅作常作精勤修習； translated in Stache-Rosen 1968: 113. The Chinese parallels to DN 33 do not mention this particular set of four types of concentration and are thus of no further help.

⁴² MN 140 at MN III 243,11: *athāparam upekkhā* (E: *upekhā*) *yeva avasissati parisuddhā pariyodātā mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassarā ca*.

⁴³ MĀ 162 at T I 691c12: 令淨，極使柔軟而有光明。

⁴⁴ Throughout this part of the discourse, MĀ 162 keeps referring to “this pure equanimity”, 此清淨捨, without employing any other qualification; cf. T I 691c6+8+17+19+22+25. Although in Chinese translations the terms “pure” and “luminous” are not necessarily clearly distinguished (cf. the discussion in Silk 2015: 135–140), in the present context 清淨 corresponds to *parisuddha* (or *pariyodāta*) in MN 140 and is not a rendering of *prabhāsvara/pabhassara*. This can be confirmed by consulting the same passage in a Tibetan parallel, D 4094 *ju* 39b6 and Q 5595 *tu* 43a6, which reads: *tshor ba btang snyoms 'di ltar yongs su dag cing byang bas*. Here the relevant term is *yongs su dag*, “pure”. The same holds for the corresponding passage in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupsthāna-sūtra*, Stuart 2015: 272 (§4.1.6): *etām upekṣām, evaṃ parisuddhām evaṃ paryavadātām*.

even qualify the gold as luminous.⁴⁵

From a comparative perspective, the fact that the Pāli version stands alone in attributing luminosity to equanimity makes it less probable that this difference should be attributed to a loss, or even intentional deletion, on the side of the reciter traditions responsible for the transmission of the other three versions, which otherwise are sufficiently different from each other as to make it clear that they do not stem from the same reciter lineage.⁴⁶ A more straightforward explanation would be the assumption that an addition to the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* has taken place, as this requires a change to occur only in one reciter lineage.

Nevertheless, before drawing a firm conclusion it seems wise to explore the matter further. Regarding the option of an intentional deletion, another discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama* and another discourse quotation in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā* agree with their Pāli parallel, the *Upakkilesa-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, in describing inner light or luminescence experienced during meditation.⁴⁷ In the passage in question the Buddha reports his own experiences in this respect, as a way of giving instructions to a group of monastics who had similar meditative visions. This makes it fairly safe to set aside the possibility that the reciters of the *Madhyama-āgama* or those transmitting the discourses now found as quotations in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā* would have had a problem in principle with such descriptions and therefore a wish to delete such a reference intentionally in their versions of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*.

Examining the possibility of textual loss, the parallels to the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* show no evident signs of having lost text at this juncture. By way of illustration, here is the relevant part in the *Madhyama-āgama* version:⁴⁸

This gold has been heated and refined in various ways by the goldsmith so that it has become pure, extremely malleable, and luminous. That goldsmith accordingly fashions it into embroidery

⁴⁵ T 511 at T XIV 780c5 and D 4094 *ju* 39b4 and Q 5595 *tu* 43a4.

⁴⁶ Nattier 2008: 165 note 6 points out that T 511 “contains additional material not found in either” MN 140 or MĀ 162.

⁴⁷ MĀ 72 at T I 536c20 uses 光明, the same expression as in MĀ 162 (cf. above note 43). MN 128 at MN III 157,31 employs the term *obhāsa*, from the same root *bhās* as *pabhassara*. The discourse quotation in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā*, D 4094 *ju* 276a4 or Q 5595 *thu* 20a6, which only parallels this part of the discourse, has *snang ba*.

⁴⁸ MĀ 162 at T I 691c13: 此金者，於金師以數數足火熟煉令淨，極使柔軟而有光明已。彼金師者，隨所施設，或縫繒綵，嚴飾新衣，指環，臂釧，瓔珞，寶鬘，隨意所作。如是，比丘，彼比丘作是念：我此清淨捨移入無量空處。

to adorn a new garment, or a finger ring, an arm bracelet, a necklace, or a jewelled hair ornament, working it according to his wishes.

Monastics, in the same way that monastic reflects: “With this pure equanimity of mine, I could proceed to enter the sphere of infinite space ...”

Turning to the option of an addition on the side of the Pāli tradition, a closer inspection of the relevant passage in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* brings to light an irregularity in the description of the state of equanimity reached, which is qualified as follows:

parisuddhā pariyodātā mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassarā ca,
pure, bright, soft and workable and luminous.

My overly literal translation is on purpose, in order to reflect the fact that the first two qualities “pure” and “bright” follow each other directly. In contrast, the qualities “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous” are related to each other with the conjunction “and”, *ca*. Such irregularity is a fairly certain marker of the fact that two lists have been merged.⁴⁹ In the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* such merger holds not only for the description of equanimity, but also for the gold simile, where the three qualities “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous” come with the conjunction *ca*, but the preceding qualities are without it.⁵⁰

In the section that describes the cultivation of the sphere of infinite space based on such equanimity, however, the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* uses only the two qualities “pure” and “bright”.⁵¹ This confirms that the original description of the equanimity was only concerned with these two qualities, which in the passage given above follow each other without the conjunction *ca*. Clearly, the other three qualities are later additions.

The overall picture that emerges from the above considerations is as follows: at some stage the entire description of equanimity would have been without a

⁴⁹ For a similar case of addition to a list, evident from the irregular use of *ca*, cf. Anālayo 2014a: 101f.

⁵⁰ MN 140 at MN III 243,18: *dhantaṃ sudhantaṃ* (E^c: *suddhantaṃ*) *niddhantaṃ* (all three terms not in S^c) *nīhaṭaṃ* (S^c: *nīhaṭaṃ*) *ninnītakasāvaṃ* (C^c: *nīhaṭakasāvaṃ*) *mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassaraṃ ca*.

⁵¹ MN 140 at MN III 243,25: *imañ ce ahaṃ upekkhaṃ* (E^c: *upekkaṃ*) *evaṃ parisuddhaṃ evaṃ pariyodātaṃ ākāsaññācāyatanaṃ upasaṃhareyyaṃ*.

reference to luminosity. This stage is still reflected in the individual translation and the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭṭhā*. In the *Madhyama-āgama* version, an addition of the quality of luminosity to the gold simile did not spill over into the description of equanimity. In the case of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, however, not only the gold, but also the equanimity came to be qualified as luminous.

Whereas the application of the quality “luminous” to gold simply draws out another facet of its condition after it has been thoroughly refined, the same does not hold equally for equanimity. At least I do not find it easy to see in what sense equanimity itself can be considered luminous, as long as this qualification refers to the same externally visible luminosity that can be perceived when seeing refined gold. The present instance is thereby similar to the case of the Buddha’s body, mentioned earlier, where the qualification “more luminous” fits a heated iron ball more naturally than a human body. This does not imply that both descriptions could not be read in a metaphorical sense by the reciters of these passages and their audience. My point is only that to qualify heated iron or purified gold as luminous is more straightforward and thus probably the point of origin for this qualification.

In this way these two examples give the impression that an apparent propensity among Theravāda reciters to use fire and light imagery also found expression in a tendency to relate luminosity to the mind or meditation, a tendency also evident in the same tradition’s version of the *Sanḅhīti-sutta*. To explore this possibility further, another three Pāli discourses can be examined, which also compare the mind to gold that is “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous”.⁵² In each of these three cases, this set of three qualities comes with the conjunction “and”, *ca*. Unlike the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, however, these three are not preceded by other qualities, so that no comparable irregularity in the pattern of listing could manifest and then be discerned.⁵³

Only one of these Pāli discourses has a parallel, which is found in the *Samyukta-āgama*, probably transmitted within a Mūlasarvāstivāda reciter lineage. In agreement with the Pāli version, this *Samyukta-āgama* discourse compares training in the higher mind (*adhicitta*) to a goldsmith who refines gold. The Pāli version, which in some editions comprises two distinct and consecutive

⁵² SN 46.33 at SN V 92,3, AN 3.100.11–15 at AN I 257,25, and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,4.

⁵³ The set of three is followed by noting that the gold and the mind are not *pabhaṅgu*, “brittle”, where the conjunction “and”, *ca*, also occurs. This is clearly another quality appropriate for a description of gold and thus, if an addition should have occurred, it would have been part of that.

discourses, applies the set of qualities “soft, workable, and luminous” to the refined gold and to the cultivated mind.⁵⁴ The *Samyukta-āgama* parallel also uses these qualifications for the gold. It does not, however, apply them to the mind.⁵⁵ As a result, in the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse the mind is not qualified as “luminous”.

This confirms the impression that there is a recurrent pattern among Pāli discourses to apply a qualification appropriate for gold to the Buddha’s body, concentration, equanimity, and the mind. This is in line with the pattern mentioned in the introduction to this article, in that Theravāda (and Dharmaguptaka) reciters appear to have had a predilection for fiery and luminous effects. In the Theravāda tradition, this predilection even seems to have led to qualifying concentration, equanimity, and the mind as luminous, and whenever a parallel can be consulted, the qualification “luminous” is not applied to concentration, equanimity, or the mind. In the case of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, closer inspection makes it quite certain that the Pāli version has undergone an expansion by incorporating additional qualities in its description of equanimity, one of which is precisely its “luminous” quality.

The perspective that has emerged so far provides a background for assessing another reference to the luminous mind, found in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. This reference involves consecutive passages placed at the transition from chapter 5 to chapter 6 of the Ones in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. No parallels to these passages are extant from other discourse collections. The fifth and sixth chapters in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, in which these passages occur, assemble various short sayings, where it is not always easy to say at what point a particular teaching or discourse ends and another begins.

The first passage in question proclaims that the mind is luminous and defiled by adventitious defilements, followed by the next passage stating that the mind is luminous and freed from adventitious defilements.⁵⁶ The expression “defiled by defilements”, *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ*, occurs in two of the three Pāli

⁵⁴ AN 3.100.2 at AN I 254,7: *taṃ hoti jātarūpaṃ ... muduṃ* (B^c and C^c: *mudu*, S^c: *muduṃ*) *ca hoti kammaniyaṃ* (E^c: *kammanīyaṃ*) *ca pabhassaraṃ ca* (again at AN 3.100.13 at AN I 257,24) and AN 3.100.12 at AN I 257,6: *taṃ hoti cittaṃ muduṃ ca kammaniyaṃ* (C^c: *kammaññaṃ*, E^c: *kammanīyaṃ*) *ca pabhassaraṃ ca*.

⁵⁵ SĀ 1246 at T II 341c23 describes the gold as “soft, not brittle, luminous, and workable according to one’s wish”, 輕軟, 不斷, 光澤, 屈伸隨意; for a counterpart in the *Yogācārabhūmi* cf. Delhey 2009: 225 and 387 (§4.2.10.1.1) and T 1579 at T XXX 343c19.

⁵⁶ AN 1.5.9–10 at AN I 10,5.

discourses mentioned above that compare the luminous condition of the mind to refined gold.⁵⁷ Although in the present instance the image of the refined gold is no longer mentioned, the notion of the luminosity of the mind and the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*, seem to be inspired by the gold simile. The simile lists iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver as defilements of gold. These can be considered adventitious in the sense of being extraneous and needing to be removed for the gold to become refined and luminous.

The statement on the luminous mind recurs in the immediately ensuing section of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* with additional specifications. The whole passage reads as follows:⁵⁸

This mind is luminous, monastics, and it is defiled by adventitious defilements; an unlearned worldling does not understand that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is no cultivation of the mind for an unlearned worldling.

This mind is luminous, monastics, and it is freed from adventitious defilements; a learned noble disciple understands that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is cultivation of the mind for a learned noble disciple.

In view of what a comparative study of other references to the luminous mind has brought to light, it seems fair to propose, as a working hypothesis, that the present passage could be building on the same tendency of Pāli discourses to apply a qualification originating from a simile about gold to the mind. The present passage in fact takes this qualification considerably further than the other Pāli discourses examined so far, as it singles out the luminosity of the mind for special attention and no longer mentions other qualities such as

⁵⁷ SN 46.33 at SN V 92,22 and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,18. A similar usage can be found in AN 4.50 at AN II 53,14, where recluses and brahmins are described as *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhā*, a predicament illustrated through a comparison with the moon and the sun. The expression *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham* applied to the mind, however, seems to be specific to the comparison with refined gold found in SN 46.33 and AN 5.23 and the passage under discussion in AN 1.5.9–10 and AN 1.6.1–2.

⁵⁸ AN 1.6.1–2 at AN I 10,10: *pabhassaram idaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham. taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. tasmā assutavato puthujanassa cittabhāvanā natthī ti vadāmi ti* (B° adds *pathamaṃ*). *pabhassaram idaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ. taṃ sutavā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. tasmā sutavato ariyasāvakassa cittabhāvanā atthī ti vadāmi ti* (B° adds *dutiyaṃ*).

softness and workability.⁵⁹ In order to explore this working hypothesis further, the implications of the above proclamation need to be examined against the background of the type of thought and doctrine reflected in other discourses.

Notable here is the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*. In the context of the gold simile, such a qualification would indeed be meaningful. As mentioned above, defilements like iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver can be considered “adventitious” to gold in the sense that they are extrinsic to it and can exist independently of it. The same does not hold in the same way for mental defilements, however, inasmuch as these cannot exist independently of the mind.⁶⁰ Yet this is what the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*, to some extent conveys, as it employs a term which in its usage elsewhere in the *Vinaya* and other Pāli discourses expresses the sense of a recently arrived visitor.⁶¹ From the viewpoint of this usage, it could even seem as if the luminous mind was somehow in existence earlier and the defilements are a sort of visitor that came later.⁶² The idea that a mental defilement could somehow be set apart from the mind in which it occurs is to my knowledge not attested anywhere else in the early discourses.

Luminosity makes its appearance in a Buddhist evolution myth, if it can be called such, found in the *Aggañña-sutta* and its parallels. The tale describes

⁵⁹ Interestingly, these are mentioned in a preceding passage, where they occur without a reference to luminosity; cf. AN 1.5.7 at AN I 9,32: *cittam, bhikkhave, bhāvitaṃ bahulīkataṃ muduñ* (B^e, C^e, and E^e: *mudu*) *ca hoti kammaniyañ* (B^e, C^e, and E^e: *kammaññañ*) *ca*. Unlike AN 1.5.9–10, AN 1.5.7 has a counterpart in Sanskrit fragments; cf. Tripāthī 1995: 121 (§2.3): *(cittam hi bhikṣavaḥ subhāvitaṃ mṛ(du bhavati karmaṇyaṃ)*. This makes it possible, although far from certain, that the apparent tendency in Theravāda discourses to add luminosity to such descriptions has in this case led to an adjacent passage on its own, instead of becoming part of AN 1.5.7 itself.

⁶⁰ Sferra 1999: 88 summarizes criticism raised in texts of late Indian Buddhism as follows: “impurities, like everything else, do not possess an independent reality ... they could not exist if there were no mind. The adventitious nature of attachment, and so forth, exists in relation to the mind. After all, it is the mind that becomes attached.”

⁶¹ Cf., e.g., Vin II 210,11ff, where monastics who arrive for a visit are qualified as *āgantuka* to distinguish them from resident monastics. A similar usage can be seen, e.g., in MN 67 at MN I 456,16. The motif of visitors occurs also in a simile of a guesthouse that serves to illustrate the arising of various feelings in the body; cf. SN 36.14 at SN IV 219,9 and its parallel SĀ 472 at T II 120c9. Both versions do not apply the qualification *āgantuka*/客 to feelings themselves. On the guest/host motif in Chán (禪) cf., e.g., Berger 2015: 145–147.

⁶² This finds reflection in a comment on the *pabhassara citta* in AN 1.6.1–2 by Amaro 2003: 72 to the effect that “the things that appear to defile this purity are only visitors passing through, just wandering or drifting by.”

how, during one of the cyclic destructions of the material world, living beings are reborn in a higher heaven, corresponding to the second absorption. In that heaven they live in a self-luminous (*sayampabhā*) condition until the material world reappears again and they are in turn reborn on earth.⁶³ Due to greed, these self-luminous beings gradually degenerate and eventually materialize as human beings. The arising of greed already shows that these self-luminous beings are not free from defilements.

Again, a discourse in the *Dīrgha-āgama* depicts how, during a great conflagration that consumes the entire earth, the flames reach up to this particular celestial realm such that several of its inhabitants become afraid.⁶⁴ Fear is one of the “defilements”, *upakkilesa*, listed in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallel.⁶⁵ This confirms that these self-luminous beings could not be reckoned as free from defilements. The same conclusion emerges also from a passage in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, according to which some inhabitants of this celestial realm could even be reborn in hell, as animals, or as hungry ghosts.⁶⁶ Such rebirth would not be possible if the self-luminous beings had been free from defilements. Hence the notion of an originally luminous mind that in some form was in existence before defilements manifested could not be a reflection of this evolution myth. Instead, it seems to be the result of a literal application of the gold simile to the mind.

In fact for any of these beings to be reborn at all, be it as humans or in lower realms, shows that they are not free from craving for existence. Of such craving for existence, no beginning point can be discerned, before which there was no craving for existence.⁶⁷ The same holds for the faring on in the round of rebirths, which extends so far back into the past that a beginning point cannot be determined.⁶⁸ In other words, according to early Buddhist epistemology it would

⁶³ Cf., e.g., DN 27 at DN III 84,29 and its parallels DĀ 5 at T I 37c1, T 10 at T I 218b17, MĀ 154 at T I 674b18, and D 4094 *ju* 192b2 or Q 5595 *tu* 219b5. The luminous condition of celestial realms recurs elsewhere in the early discourses; cf. also, e.g., MN 50 at MN I 337,26 and its parallels MĀ 131 at T I 622b10, T 66 at T I 866b7, and T 67 at T I 868c4, or SN 6.5 at SN I 145,24 and its parallels SĀ 1196 at T II 325a18 and SĀ² 109 at T II 413a9.

⁶⁴ DĀ 30 at T I 138b25.

⁶⁵ MN 128 at MN III 158,25 and MĀ 72 at T I 537c16.

⁶⁶ AN 4.123 at AN II 127,10. This discourse does not seem to have a parallel properly speaking; the distantly related MĀ 168 at T I 700c17 only describes rebirth in this celestial realm, but does not broach the topic of what happens subsequently.

⁶⁷ AN 10.62 at AN V 116,15 and its parallels MĀ 52 at T I 487c27 and T 36 at T I 819c23.

⁶⁸ Cf., e.g., SN 15.3 at SN II 179,21 and its parallels SĀ 938 at T II 240c26 and SĀ² 331 at T II 486a19, part of a corresponding statement has been preserved in Sanskrit fragment SHT 1.167

not be possible to identify a time in the past at which a supposedly luminous mind was already in existence and after which only it came to be defiled by craving. Once a time in the past when craving and defilements have not been present in the mind is not discernible, there seems little scope to postulate that the mind is naturally pure. Instead, one might even say that it is naturally defiled. But since defilements are conditioned phenomena, they can be removed. That is, purity and freedom from defilements is a potentiality of the mind that requires being brought about through meditative cultivation, rather than being a return to an already existing inherent nature.

Yet this is to some extent a sense conveyed by the identification of cultivation of the mind in the *Ānguttara-nikāya* passage with knowing its luminous condition. In the early discourses in general the task is to purify the mind gradually through various practices, to be cultivated by avoiding the two extremes of excessive striving and undue laxity. In contrast, the present passage could give the impression that recognition of luminosity is what really matters for “cultivation of the mind”. Although this is just a nuance in the above passage, later tradition will articulate this more fully, in that “cultivation of the mind” comes to be concerned with recognition of its alleged innate purity. I will return to this below.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels list various states of mind for mindful contemplation, distinguishing between, for example, mind with lust, *sarāgaṃ cittaṃ*, and mind without lust, *vītarāgaṃ cittaṃ*.⁶⁹ The contrast between “with lust” and “without lust” made in this way shows that early Buddhist thought was able to express the possibility of mental purification and freedom from defilements without needing to postulate an essential nature of the mind that is in principle unaffected by defilements. By way of illustration, just as for fruit to ripen there is no need to postulate that the ripe fruit already exists in the corresponding flower that has just blossomed on a tree, so for a mind to become purified there is no need to postulate that an intrinsic purity already exists in its present defiled state. Instead of creating a contrast between an allegedly inherent nature of the mind and defilements set apart as something adventitious, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and other early discourses the mind is simply viewed as an impermanent and conditioned process that can occur either “with” or else

R3, Waldschmidt, Clawiter, and Holzmann 1965, 95. Another parallel, EĀ 51.1 at T II 814a28, has no counterpart to the introductory statement, although the rest of the discourse makes it clear that the same basic principle holds.

⁶⁹ MN 10 at MN I 59,30, MĀ 98 at T I 584a6, and EĀ 21.1 at T II 568c22.

“without” defilements. Here *citta* simply refers to a contingent mental state.

Moreover, a state of mind with lust or any other such defilement would not be luminous. According to the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, the presence of any out of a range of defilements (*upakkilesa*) results in a loss of whatever inner light or luminescence (*obhāsa*) had been experienced during meditation.⁷⁰ This confirms that, from the perspective reflected in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, a mind defiled by defilements does not remain in a condition of luminosity.⁷¹ In other words, the luminous mind can be expected to lose its pure condition once a defilement manifests in it.⁷²

In this way the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels show that early Buddhist thought does recognize meditative experience of light or luminescence, but these are meditative visions rather than an intrinsic quality of the mind. In fact references to mental experiences of luminosity are cross-cultural phenomena,⁷³ thus my exploration in this article is certainly not meant to deny the subjective validity of such experiences. My intention is only to discern developments in the interpretation of these experiences. From the viewpoint of the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, it seems clear that inner experiences of luminosity come into being through successful cultivation of concentration and the temporary absence of defilements, but with the arising of defilements and the consequent loss of concentration they disappear.

The simile of refining gold in two Pāli discourses, mentioned earlier,⁷⁴ confirms the presentation in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels. According to both of these Pāli discourses, when in a defiled condition the mind is not

⁷⁰ MN 128 at MN III 158,4, MĀ 72 at T I 536c28, and a parallel to this part of the discourse in D 4094 *ju* 276b1 or Q 5595 *thu* 20b2.

⁷¹ According to the *Atthasālinī*, As 140,27, however, the luminous mind is pure even when in an unwholesome condition, just as a tributary is similar to the river. The simile does not seem to be particularly successful in resolving the problem of how to account for the coexistence of luminosity and defilement.

⁷² An objection along these lines can be found in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 140b24, or else in the so-called Spitzer fragment, rendered by Franco 2000: 95f as: “what is luminous cannot be defiled” and “at the time when it is defiled it is not luminous ... nor are the defiled and the non-defiled apprehended at the same time ... therefore, how could it be known that a luminous consciousness is defiled?” Keenan 1982: 11 formulates the same problem from the viewpoint of early Yogācāra as follows: “If the mind is originally pure, then how is one to account for empirical defilement?”

⁷³ For a study of luminosity of the mind in Indian and Chinese thought cf. Berger 2015.

⁷⁴ Cf. above note 52.

luminous and, comparable to defiled gold that is not fit for work, such a defiled mind does not become rightly concentrated.⁷⁵ In other words, here luminosity of the mind reflects the successful achievement of concentration.

The same holds for the statement on the luminous mind in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage translated above, where “cultivation of the mind” stands for developing concentration. In its present formulation, the reference to luminosity does not imply a form of awakening.⁷⁶ As pointed out by Karunaratne (1999: 219):

what is meant by lustrous and pure mind (*pabhassara/prakṛtipariśuddha*) is not a state of mind which is absolutely pure, nor the pure mind which is synonymous with emancipation. It may be explained as pure only in the sense, and to the extent, that it is not disturbed or influenced by external stimuli.

Similarly Shih Ru-nien (2009: 168) explains that

the Pali texts only emphasize the knowledge of the innate purity of the mind as a prerequisite step in the cultivation of the mind and the restoration of the purity of the mind is not the end of religious practices. As a matter of fact, after the removal of the defilements, the mind is not only pure, tranquil, and luminous but also soft, pliant, and adaptable. It then becomes suitable for the destruction of all the *āsavas* or the cultivation of the seven limbs of wisdom, and the like. This means that the tranquil, luminous, and pliable mind is just the basis for further religious practices.

Another point worth further exploration is the contrast, drawn in the passage from the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, between the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple regarding cultivation of the mind. The unlearned worldling does not know the luminous condition of the defiled mind as it really is,

⁷⁵ SN 46.33 at SN V 92,23 and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,20 present the gain of concentration by the mind free from being defiled by any of the five hindrances as instrumental for progress to the destruction of the influxes.

⁷⁶ Such implications are sometimes read into the passage; cf., e.g., Dutt 1960/1971: 285, who assumes that the description in AN 1.6.1–2 points to “the original pure state of mind, to which the perfect reverts after thoroughly purifying his mind of all impurities.” Yet the formulation in AN 1.6.1–2 provides no basis for such suggestions, given that, in its usage in the early discourses, the expression “noble disciple” is not confined to those who have attained a level of awakening.

whereas the noble disciple knows the luminous condition of the undefiled mind as it really is. Here the worldling fails at something that would seem quite difficult. How could a worldling be expected to know that the mind is luminous when it is in a defiled condition? In contrast, the noble disciple faces what appears to be a much easier task, namely recognition of the luminous mind when it is not defiled.

Such unequal treatment is unusual. Other Pāli discourses that also draw a contrast between the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple, in regard to knowing something as it really is, concern the same task.⁷⁷ This is indeed what one would expect, in that the difference between the two should manifest in relation to the same requirement. Applied to the present context, a proposal in line with the procedure adopted elsewhere in the discourses would be that the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple differ in their ability to distinguish between a defiled mind and a mind that is not defiled. Whereas the worldling is not able to recognize this indeed crucial difference, the noble disciple does recognize it. Such a contrast could be expressed in a statement of this type:

This mind is defiled by defilements, monastics; an unlearned worldling does not understand that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is no cultivation of the mind for an unlearned worldling.

This mind is freed from defilements, monastics; a learned noble disciple understands that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is cultivation of the mind for a learned noble disciple.

A statement of this type would be fully in line with the position taken in other early discourses. Lack of understanding of what defiles the mind will make it indeed impossible for the worldling to cultivate it. In contrast, understanding what defiles the mind enables the noble disciple to take advantage of those moments when it is free from defilements in order to lead it into deeper concentration. It is only once the qualification “luminous” is applied to the mind and the defilements consequently become “adventitious” that the tasks faced by the worldling and the noble disciple come to differ substantially.

The various points explored so far make it, in my view, safe to conclude

⁷⁷ Cf., e.g., MN 64 at MN I 433,22 or else a series of consecutive discourse, SN 22.126–134 at SN III 171,6.

that the working hypothesis mentioned earlier is indeed correct. In other words, the present passage in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* does seem to be distinctly late. It builds on and further expands a notion resulting from a description of gold that led to the addition of a qualification of the mind as “luminous”. At the time of the coming into being of this apparent addition, the resultant phrasing in the passage in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* need not have carried any special implications. In line with other instances surveyed earlier, it can be assumed to have been just another instance where the fascination exerted by the imagery of luminous gold and its potential as a metaphor influenced the wording of a description originally not concerned with any luminosity of the mind.

Given that the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels describe inner experiences of light during meditation, a qualification of the mind as luminous is hardly problematic in itself. Even though the use of the same qualification is less straightforward when applied to equanimity or the body of the Buddha, leaving room for a more metaphorical understanding could still accommodate such instances. What does make the above *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage problematic, however, is the actual formulation that results from this apparent addition, as this can be read in ways that reify the ‘real’ mind as naturally pure and luminous, rather than being simply a series of different states, none of which is more real or natural than the other.

Such a reading would in turn have invested the actual formulation resulting from the introduction of the motif of luminosity in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage with increased significance. Once the imagery of luminescence designates a nature of the mind considered to be unaffected by defilements and hence intrinsically pure, inner light-experiences of the type described in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels could easily have come to be invested with an increased degree of importance. Instead of being just a reflection of having achieved some degree of concentration, they can be seen as rather profound realizations, authenticating a practitioner as having become a truly noble disciple acquainted with what it takes to cultivate the mind.

Another and perhaps even more powerful stimulant for an increasing interest in the mode of description found in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage under discussion would have been the coming into vogue of the theory of momentariness.⁷⁸ Once the mind is conceptualized as a series of discrete mind-moments that pass away as soon as they arise, something has to be found to explain continuity, in order

⁷⁸ On the emergence and early stages of this theory cf. von Rospatt 1995.

to account for memory, identity, and rebirth. A search in this direction would naturally have led to an increased interest in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage's description of a mind that apparently remains in a condition of luminosity independent of the arising and passing away of any defilements.

Faced with the problems resulting from the theory of momentariness, the Theravāda commentarial tradition relied on the notion of the *bhavaṅga* to explain continuity alongside rapidly arising and disappearing mind-moments.⁷⁹ The commentary on the passage under discussion from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* identifies the *bhavaṅga* with the luminous mind.⁸⁰ This confirms that the apparent application of the gold imagery to the present passage came to carry implications for later tradition that can safely be assumed not to have been originally intended.

In line with the shared interest between Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka discourses in imagery related to fire and luminosity, a parallel to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage under discussion can be found in the **Sāriputrābhidharma*, an Abhidharma treatise quite probably representing the Dharmaguptaka tradition.⁸¹ The relevant part proceeds as follows:⁸²

The mind is by nature pure; it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Because of being unlearned, a worldling is unable to know and see it as it really is and does not cultivate the mind. Because of being learned, a noble disciple is able to know and see it as it really is and cultivates the mind.

⁷⁹ According to Gethin 1994: 29, “the notion of *bhavaṅga* is, in part at least, intended to provide some account of why I am me and why I continue to behave like me; it is surely intended to give some theoretical basis for observed consistency in behaviour patterns, character traits and the habitual mental states of a given individual.” In sum, in the words of Gethin 1994: 31, the “notion of *bhavaṅga* as explicitly expounded in the Theravādin Abhidhamma seems certainly intended to provide some account of psychological continuity.”

⁸⁰ Mp I 60,10; on which Gethin 1994: 34 comments that this commentarial identification “seems to raise more questions than it answers. For example, in the case of beings reborn in the ‘descents’ where *bhavaṅga* is always unwholesome resultant, how can it be said to be defiled in name only and not truly defiled? In what sense is it pure, clear or radiant?”

⁸¹ Bureau 1950.

⁸² T 1548 at T XXVIII 697b18: 心性清淨, 為客塵染. 凡夫未聞故, 不能如實知見亦無修心. 聖人聞故, 如實知見亦有修心. 心性清淨, 離客塵垢. 凡夫未聞故, 不能如實知見亦無修心. 聖人聞故, 能如實知見亦有修心; the first part of this passage has already been translated by Silk 2015: 121. The quoted text occurs at the outset of the Chapter on the Mind (心品) and is not explicitly marked as a discourse quotation. Nevertheless, it might well go back to a no longer extant Dharmaguptaka discourse parallel to AN 1.6.1–2.

The mind is by nature pure; it is freed from adventitious defilements. Because of being unlearned, a worldling is unable to know and see it as it really is and does not cultivate the mind. Because of being learned, a noble disciple is able to know and see it as it really is and cultivates the mind.

The use of the qualification “pure” would more naturally reflect an original reading like *(vi)śuddhi/(vi)suddhi*, although due to the uncertainties involved with translation into Chinese it is also quite possible that the original had instead a term corresponding to *prabhāsvara/pabhassara*. In later tradition both notions occur similarly and manifest in a range of texts.

These two notions often come together with a specification also found in the **Śāriputrābhidharma*, namely the qualification “by nature”, 性 (*prakṛti*). The mind is “by nature” or “intrinsicly” pure or luminous. This makes explicit an understanding of the luminous or pure mind and its relation to cultivation of the mind that in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage is not yet articulated, but can easily be read into it. The true nature of the mind is to be pure and/or luminous, and it is recognition of this nature that becomes the object of knowledge and vision, and hence of cultivation of the mind.

The presentation in the **Śāriputrābhidharma* of the contrast between the noble disciple and the worldling also evens out a problem in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage, discussed above, where the worldling’s lack of knowledge relates only to the defiled luminous mind and the noble disciple’s insight only to the undefiled luminous mind. In the passage in the **Śāriputrābhidharma* the worldling is ignorant of the luminous mind with and without defilements, whereas the noble disciple has understanding of both of these conditions. This is clearly the more meaningful presentation, which in turn makes it quite possible that the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage reflects an interim stage when the “luminosity” of the mind and the “adventitious” nature of defilements have recently been combined with the contrast between the worldling’s and the noble disciple’s cultivation of the mind, and the results of this move have not yet been fully smoothed out.

Luminosity in Later Traditions

Perhaps precisely due to its uniqueness among the teachings found in other early discourses in general, the contrast between the luminous nature of the mind and the adventitious character of its defilements has had considerable impact on later

tradition.⁸³ The notion of a luminous mind defiled by adventitious defilement became a tenet upheld also by the Mahāsāṅghikas and the Vibhajyavādins.⁸⁴

The same impact can also be seen in a range of texts and forms of practice, a comprehensive survey of which is not possible within the scope of this article. Hence in what follows I merely take up a few snapshots, chosen somewhat at random, in order to exemplify some of the trends that appear to have their starting point in the notion of the luminous mind, in itself apparently a derivative of the simile of purifying gold.

A highlighting of the mind as luminous by nature occurs, for example, in a quote in the *Ratnagoṭṭravibhāga*, according to which “the mind is by nature luminous, it is defiled by adventitious defilements.”⁸⁵ A reference to the luminous mind in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* occurs in close proximity to an allusion to the splendour of gold.⁸⁶ Although the two are not directly related, it seems fair enough to take this as a reflection of the relationship between the luminous mind and the simile of refined gold, attested in the Pāli discourses surveyed above.⁸⁷

Given that the contrast between the worldling and the noble disciple is of less relevance with later tradition, once the aspiration to Buddhahood has come center stage, it is only natural that the *Sāgaramatipariṭṭhā*, as quoted in the *Ratnagoṭṭravibhāga*, considers the distinct vision of the luminous condition of the mind as a quality of bodhisattvas. Thus “the bodhisattva understands the by nature luminous mind of beings and furthermore sees that it is defiled by adventitious defilements.”⁸⁸

⁸³ For surveys of relevant passages cf. Ruegg 1969: 411–454 and Radich 2016: 268–279.

⁸⁴ Bareau 1955: 67f and 175; cf. also Lamotte 1962: 53. Frauwallner 1951: 152 refers to Vasumitra’s *Samaya-bhedoparacana cakra* for the Mahāsāṅghika position; cf. T 2031 at T XXXIX 15c27: 心性本淨客隨煩惱之所雜染。

⁸⁵ Nakamura 1961: 87,13: *prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam āgantukair upakleśair upakliśyata iti*; with the Tibetan counterpart in Nakamura 1967: 87,10: *sems kyi rang bzhin ni ’od gsal ba ste, glo bur gyi nyon mongs pas nyon mongs pa ’o*, and the Chinese version in T 1611 at T XXXI 833a29: 自性清淨心, 客塵煩惱染。

⁸⁶ In Nanjio 1923: 358,5 a reference to the *prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam* is followed in the next verse two lines below by illustrating the *ālaya* with the example of the splendour of gold, *kāntir yathā suvarṇasya jātarūpaṃ*; cf. also, e.g., T 672 at T XVI 637c1+3.

⁸⁷ On the gold simile in later traditions cf. Goméz 1987/1991.

⁸⁸ Nakamura 1961: 95,22: *bodhisattvaḥ sattvānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām cittasya prajānāti, tām punar āgantukopakleśopakliṣṭām paśyati*; Nakamura 1967: 95,15: *byang chub sems dpa’ sems can rnamz kyi sems rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal bar rab tu shes te, ’on kyang glo bur gyi nye ba ’i nyon mongs pas nyon mongs par mthong ngo*, and T 1611 at T XXXI 834b5: 菩薩摩訶薩亦復如是, 如實知見一切眾生自性清淨光明淨心, 而為客塵煩惱所染。The source of the quote would be D 152 *pha* 85a6 or Q 819 *pu* 91a4: *byang chub sems dpa’ yang sems can thams cad kyi*

A passage in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* proposes that the luminous mind is neither conjoined with lust, aversion, and delusion, nor disjoined from these.⁸⁹ This sets a contrast to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels, mentioned above. In these texts, the mind can be conjoined with lust, aversion or delusion, or disjoined from it. They do not conceive of a mind as apart from these two alternatives.

Another quote in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* proclaims that this intrinsic nature of the mind is without causes and conditions and hence also beyond arising and cessation.⁹⁰ The *Anūnatvāpūṇatvanirdeśaparivarta* provides an additional example for the powerful influence of the notion of a mind that is by nature pure. In the words of Silk (2015: 40),

ultimately the intrinsically pure mind is identified with the *dharmadhātu* itself ... this mind which is so fouled by defilements is actually pure and luminous just as is the *dharmadhātu*, the pure ground of being itself, virtually identical with Buddhahood ...

the initial and innate state of the mind is equivalent to awakening, and realizing this means that no further practice is necessary.

The idea that no further practice is necessary, together with the emphasis on the need to realize the true nature of the mind, have had considerable impact on how cultivation of the mind came to be conceptualized in various practice lineages. Before surveying a few selected examples, I would like to clarify that my intention in what follows is decidedly not to debunk various meditation traditions or to pretend that they are not based on, or conducive to, genuinely transformative experiences. My aim is only to explore the degree to which the

sems rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal bar rab tu shes la de yang zlo bur gyi nye ba'i nyon mongs pas nyon mongs pa can du byas par mthong ngo and T 400 at T XIII 511a14: 菩薩亦復如是，了知眾生心之自性，本來清淨明澈潔白，但為客塵煩惱之所覆蔽。

⁸⁹ Dutt 1934: 121,15: *śāriputra āha: kā punar āyusman subhūte cittasya prabhāsvaratā? subhūtir āha: yad āyusman śāriputra cittaṃ na rāgena saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ, na dveṣeṇa (saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ) na mohena (saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ) ... iyaṃ śāriputra cittasya prabhāsvaratā* (the elided passage lists also other items, such as the underlying tendencies, fetters, etc.); cf. also T 223 at T XIII 233c23: 舍利弗語須菩提：云何名心相常淨？須菩提言：若菩薩知是心相與婬怒癡不合不離 ... 舍利弗，是名菩薩心相常淨。

⁹⁰ Nakamura 1961: 87,17: *yā punaḥ sā prakṛtis tasyā na hetur na pratayo na sāmagrī notpādo na nirodhaḥ*; Nakamura 1967: 87,13: *rang bzhin gang yin pa de ni rgyu med pa, rkyen med pa, tshogs pa med pa, skye ba med pa, 'gag pa med pa'o*, and T 1611 at T XXXI 833b3: 彼自性清淨心無因無緣故，無和合不生不滅。

powerful imagery of the luminous and/or pure nature of the mind continues to influence the discourse on meditation practice and experience in these traditions.

The first topic in my survey is *rdzogs chen*, the Great Perfection. Hatchell (2014: 52) comments on the historically early stages in the development of this particular approach to mental cultivation that

the earliest stratum of the Great Perfection ... presents a blend of radical emptiness and speculation on the agency of a luminous awareness in the universe ... it also shows a disinterest in specifying any kind of structured practices ... rather, the tradition argues, there is nothing to do and nothing to strive for, so the reality ... will manifest in its immediacy just by relaxing and letting go.

According to a *mahāmudrā* text by the eleventh-century Maitrīpa:⁹¹

The naturally luminous jewel [of this] nature of mind, which is self-awareness, is bright, pure and unobstructed. Natural luminosity is not found through [any] conceptual [state of] meditation or non-meditation: It is the uncontrived, undistracted ease in undistracted non-meditation.

Not to conceptualize anything, not to intend anything, not to grasp anything, devoid of conceptual analysis, and nothing that needs to be done, this is self-luminous awareness, the ornament of natural liberation without having to correct or modify [anything].

Ten centuries later the Tibetan Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche explains (1989: 78):

In Dzogchen the way one behaves in the state of presence is the Fruit, and there is nothing else to obtain. When one has this knowledge, one discovers that everything was always already accomplished from the very beginning. The self-perfected state is the inherent quality of the condition of ‘what is’; there is nothing to be perfected, and all one needs to do is to have real knowledge of this condition.

With what follows I turn from *rdzogs chen* to the Chán (禪) traditions. Sharf

⁹¹ Mathes 2016: 277 (§I.20f) and 291 (§II.40).

(2014: 939) explains that

early Chan documents employ a variety of related analogies to illustrate the nature and inherent purity of mind: the mind is like a mirror covered by dust; one must focus on the innate luminosity of the mirror rather than the fleeting images that appear within it ... in meditation, one attends to the abiding luminosity of mind or consciousness, which is to realize one's inherent buddha-nature.

In twelfth century China, master Hóngzhì (宏智) offered the following instructions:⁹²

Completely and silently be at ease. In true thusness separate yourself from all causes and conditions. Brightly luminous without defilements, you directly penetrate and are liberated. You have from the beginning been in this place; it is not something that is new to you today. From the time before the vast eon when you dwelled in your old [original] home, everything is completely clear, unobscured, numinous, and singularly bright.

At roughly the same time in Korea, master Jinul (知訥) clarified that⁹³

the true mind is like space, for it neither ends nor changes. Therefore it is said, "These hundred bones will crumble and return to fire and wind. But One Thing is eternally numinous and covers heaven and earth" ... The nature of the mind is unstained; it is originally whole and complete in itself ...

In the case of a person who has had an awakening, although he still has adventitious defilements, these have all been purified into cream.

In Japan in the eighteenth century, master Hakuin expressed such awakening in poetic form:⁹⁴

He who bears witness to the nature of the Self as Originating

⁹² McRae 2003: 137.

⁹³ Buswell 1983: 140f and 149.

⁹⁴ Shaw 1963: 183.

Essence,
To such an one singing and dancing are alike the voice of the Law.
He has opened the gate of the Absolute Undifferentiated Nature,
When that happens what is there to seek?
Whether one goes or returns there is no 'elsewhere'.
The very body he has is indeed Buddha.

In order to communicate to others how to realize this intrinsic and already present original nature of the mind, some practice traditions employ specific means for this purpose, be this cryptic sayings in order to point to the luminous and/or pure nature of the mind or else other ways of jolting the practitioner in one way or another to its successful recognition. Well-known in this respect is the employment of the *kōan*, a Japanese term corresponding to the *gōng'àn* (公案) in Chinese, a “public case” that involves a “key phrase” or “head word”, *huàtóu* (話頭). Late Chinese master Sheng Yen (2009: 4) explains:

In Chan, a gong'an is an episode or case in the life of a Chan master, an episode that often bears directly upon the enlightenment of that master ... the early Chan masters would extract the essential point or the critical phrase or word from a gong'an and use it as a tool for practice. A huatou may consists of a fragment—a question or a word—derived from a gong'an ... to practice huatou the practitioner recites the sentence or fragment in a questioning manner but without theorizing or analyzing in order to find an answer ... to investigate the huatou means to examine that which occurs before thoughts arise. But what is that which lies before thoughts arise? What does the huatou point to? Our original, liberated mind.

In line with notions evident in the passages quoted above, Sheng Yen (2009: 158) points out that

from the perspective of pure mind, there is no such thing as defiled mind. Pure mind is simply the fundamental, original state of being that has always been there. Furthermore, it is not something that is gained after some time of practice—it has been there all the time ... therefore, the point of practice is not to acquire this pure mind or to gain enlightenment; it is rather more like restoring the mind's original state of purity ... the mind realizes its natural state of purity.

Korean master Sung Bae Park (2009: 49) clarifies that

attaining enlightenment requires nothing other than giving up the search for it. At the moment we stop seeking, enlightenment is there. What is enlightenment? It means returning to our original nature.

According to Japanese master Suzuki (1950/1994: 25 and 29), such enlightenment, *satori*, has the following characteristics:

The *satori* experience is thus always characterized by irrationality, inexplicability, and incommunicability ... [it is] an inner perception, which takes place in the most interior part of consciousness ... though the *satori* experience is sometimes expressed in negative terms, it is essentially an affirmative attitude towards all things that exist; it accepts them as they come regardless of their moral values ... [it] essentially consists in doing away with the opposition of two terms in whatsoever sense.

Regarding the relationship drawn in this quote between *satori* and consciousness, it is of interest to note that, according to an explanation by Hakuin, it is in particular the *ālaya-vijñāna* which is to be transformed by the experience of *satori*.⁹⁵

The appeal of the luminous or pure mind has exerted its attraction not only among Mahāyāna traditions. As pointed out by Gethin (1994: 32),

the fact that the Theravādin commentarial tradition unequivocally states that the radiant mind of the *Aṅguttara* passage is *bhavaṅga-citta* ... adds weight to the suggestion that the notions of *bhavaṅga-citta* and *ālaya-vijñāna* have some sort of common ancestry within the history of Buddhist thought.

A position held by some members of the Theravāda tradition in Thailand stands in continuity with the passages surveyed above, as evident in the following statements by Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno:⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Waddel 2009: 131: “each of us is endowed with eight consciousnesses ... the eighth or ‘storehouse’ consciousness exists in a passive state of utter blankness, dull and unknowing, like a vast pool of still clear water, without any movement whatever ... if a student pursues his religious practice diligently and is able to break through this dark cavern of the mind, it suddenly transforms into a great perfect mirror wisdom shining forth with perfect brilliance in the attainment of enlightenment.”

⁹⁶ Mahā Boowa (no date) pages 93 and 78.

where is the real substance behind the shadows of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*? Drive on further! Their real substance is in the *citta* ... the *citta* by its very nature is *amata*—Undying—even when it still has *kilesas* ...

the *kilesas* can't destroy the *citta* ... this nature is unassailable, absolute and permanent ... this nature is complete, perfect and immaculately pure.

Conclusion

A reference to an invisible and luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantānika-sutta* could well be a proclamation attributable to Brahmā, a proclamation that in the Chinese parallel does not qualify consciousness as luminous. Another reference to an invisible consciousness in the *Kevaddha-sutta*, here expressing an experience related to awakening, seems to have originally not been associated with luminosity.

A comparative study of passages that compare the condition of a mind free from defilements to the luminosity of refined gold reveals a development where a quality, originally applied to gold, appears to have been attributed to the mind as well. The resultant notion of the mind's luminosity would in turn have inspired a proclamation in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* on cultivation of the mind requiring a recognition of its luminous nature, which stands in contrast to the adventitious nature of defilements. In several respects this proclamation does not sit easily with early Buddhist thought in the way this is reflected in other discourses. Although at present only attested in a Theravāda discourse collection, in keeping with a predilection for light imagery shared by the Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciter traditions, a quotation in the **Śāriputrābhidharma* makes it clear that this proclamation was also known and accepted in Dharmaguptaka thought.

The attraction exerted by the resultant presentation appears to have had a substantial impact on later traditions, both Mahāyāna and Theravāda. Further developments of the notion of an original purity eventually gave rise to approaches to cultivation of the mind informed by an emphasis on the need to recognize its allegedly true nature as equalling awakening.

The present study shows once again the value of a historical-critical study of the Pāli discourses in the light of their parallels in order to develop informed

hypotheses regarding early stages in the development of Buddhist thought.⁹⁷

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
E ^e	PTS edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
S ^e	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>

⁹⁷ Drawing on the same source material and approach, in Anālayo 2010 and 2017a I have explored the beginnings of the bodhisattva ideal. Even the practice of self-immolation or the aspiration to be born in the Pure Land can be traced back to beginning points reflected in some early discourses; cf. Anālayo 2012a and forthcoming. The same source material of the early discourses is also relevant to *Vinaya* study; in fact the assumption that texts on monastic discipline are “in-house” literature that is best read in isolation can easily lead to unbalanced assessments; cf. Anālayo 2014b. Thus it does seem worthwhile to include the early discourses among the source material that can potentially shed light on the beginning stages of a range of developments in the Buddhist traditions.

T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
◇	emendation
□	supplementation

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