

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

Remarks on the history of Jaina meditation*

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1. The canonical texts of the Śvetāmbara Jainas contain very little information about meditation. All important passages have been discussed elsewhere (Bronkhorst, 1986: ch. 3), so that a brief restatement of the main results will be sufficient here.

The earliest road to liberation which is still discernible in the texts, esp. in the Āyāraṅga, is a direct response to the idea that suffering is the result of activity. The evil effects of activity are avoided by renouncing activity. In this way no new karman is bound by the soul, and karman that had already been bound is destroyed, as the Uttarajjhayaṇa (29.37/1139) explains. Renouncing activity is done in a most radical way, culminating in motionlessness until death. Motionlessness of the mind is but one aspect of this, which receives but little attention in the old texts. One early passage (Uttarajjhayaṇa 29.72/1174) speaks of ‘pure meditation’ (*sukkajjhāṇa* / Skt. *śukla dhyāna*), which is entered when less than the time of a *muhūrta* is left of life. In this pure meditation only subtle activity remains initially; then — after the activities of mind, speech and body, including breathing, have been stopped — the monk is in pure meditation in which all activity has been cut off, and in which the last remains of karman are being destroyed. The ninth (or eighth) chapter of Āyāraṅga I indicates that meditation (*jhāṇa* / Skt. *dhyāna*) was not confined to the last moments before death. Mahāvīra is here said to meditate ‘day and night’. He is also said to meditate on objects in the external world.

Besides these few early passages there are more extensive descriptions in later classificatory texts. The nature of these texts brought it about that everything that can be covered by the term *jhāṇa* (Skt. *dhyāna*) is here enumerated. This is much more than ‘meditation’ alone; also ‘thinking’ is covered by this term. The resulting enumeration contains four types of *dhyāna*: (i) afflicted (*aṭṭa* / Skt. *ārta*), (ii) wrathful (*rodḍa* / Skt. *raudra*), (iii) pious (*dhamma* / Skt. *dharmya*), (iv) pure (*sukka* / Skt. *śukla*). They are described as follows in the [152] Ṭhāṇaṅga (4.1.61-72/247), and almost identically in the Viyāhapaṇṇatti and Uvavāiṇya:

Afflicted *dhyāna* is of four kinds: (1) [one] is joined with what is not liked and also accompanied by the thought of separation therefrom; (2) [one] is joined with what is liked and also accompanied by the thought of non-separation

* I would like to thank Muni Jambuvijaya who read with me a number of the texts discussed below.

therefrom; (3) [one] is joined with disease and also accompanied by the thought of separation therefrom; (4) [one] is joined with the experience of agreeable pleasures and also accompanied by the thought of non-separation therefrom. These are the four characteristics of afflicted *dhyāna*: crying, grief, weeping, lamentation.

Wrathful *dhyāna* is of four kinds: connected with injury, connected with robbery, connected with theft, connected with the protection [of worldly goods]. These are the four characteristics of wrathful *dhyāna*: [one] has abundant hatred, much hatred, hatred due to ignorance, hatred until the end which is death.

Pious *dhyāna* is of four kinds and has four manifestations: examination of the commandments [of the Jinas], examination of sins, examination of the results [of actions], examination of the forms [of the constituents of the world]. These are the four characteristics of pious *dhyāna*: liking for the commandments [of the Jinas], liking for the natural state, liking for the scriptures, liking for pervasive study [of the sacred texts]. These are the four supports of pious *dhyāna*: recitation, questioning, repetition, reflection. These are the four reflections of pious *dhyāna*: reflection on being alone, reflection on transitoriness, reflection on there being no refuge, reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings.

Pure *dhyāna* is of four kinds and has four manifestations: (i) in which there is consideration of multiplicity and change of object; (ii) in which there is consideration of oneness and no change of object; (iii) in which activity has become subtle and from which there is no return; (iv) in which [all] activity has been cut off and from which one does not fall back. These are the four characteristics of pure meditation: absence of agitation, absence of delusion, discriminating insight, renunciation. These are the four supports of pure meditation: forbearance, freedom, softness, straightness. These are the four reflections of pure meditation: reflection on infinity, reflection on change, reflection on what is inauspicious, reflection on sin.

These four kinds of *dhyāna*, however, came to be looked upon as four types of meditation, enumerated among the different kinds of inner asceticism; so Viyāhapaṇṇatti 25.7.217, 237 f./580, 600 f. and Uvavāiṃya section 30. (The [153] confusion is complete in Āvassaya Sutta 4.23.4, where the monk is made to repent these four types of *dhyāna*; obviously only the first two are such as should be repented, and these are no forms of meditation.) The later tradition, when it looked for canonical guidance regarding meditation, was henceforth confronted with a list of four kinds of ‘meditation’, only the last one of which, viz. ‘pure meditation’, should properly be regarded as such.

2. The strange confusion described in section 1 was followed by an even more dramatic development. ‘Pure meditation’ came to be considered inaccessible in the present age (in this world). Sometimes this is stated explicitly, as for example in Hemacandra’s *Yogaśāstra*.¹ More often it is expressed by saying that one has to know the Pūrvas in order to reach the first two stages of pure meditation. The fourteen Pūrvas

¹ *Yogaśāstra* 11.4: *duṣkaram apy ādhunikaiḥ śukladhyānaṃ yathāśāstram*. The editor of the *Yogaśāstra*, Muni Jambuvijaya, quotes in this connection (p. 1149) *Tattvānuśāsana* 36: ... *dhyātuṃ śuklam ihākṣamān aidamṃyuginān uddiśya* ...

once constituted the twelfth Aṅga of the Jaina canon. But they were lost at an early date. Already the Tattvārtha Sūtra (9.40; see Bronkhorst, 1985: 176, 179 f.) states that knowledge of the Pūrvas is a precondition for entering pure meditation. This means that already in the time between 150 and 350 C.E. pure meditation was considered no longer attainable in this world.

Such an early date finds support elsewhere. We have seen that the canonical description of the four *dhyānas* assigns four reflections (*anuprekṣā*) each to *dharmya dhyāna* and *śukla dhyāna*, in the following manner:²

- In *dharmya dhyāna*: (i) reflection on being alone (*egāṇuppehā* / Skt. *ekatvānuprekṣā*)
(ii) reflection on transitoriness (*aṇiccāṇuppehā* / Skt. *anityānuprekṣā*)
(iii) reflection on there being no refuge (*asaraṇāṇuppehā* / Skt. *aśaraṇānuprekṣā*)
(iv) reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings (*saṃsārāṇuppehā* / Skt. *saṃsārānuprekṣā*)
- In *śukla dhyāna*: (i) reflection on infinity (*aṇaṃtavattiyāṇuppehā*)
(ii) reflection on change (*vippariṇāmāṇuppehā*)
(iii) reflection on what is inauspicious (*asubhāṇuppehā*)
(iv) reflection on sin (*avāyāṇuppehā*)

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The Tattvārtha Sūtra (9.7) enumerates twelve reflections. They are:

- (i) reflection on transitoriness (*anityānuprekṣā*)
- (ii) reflection on there being no refuge (*aśaraṇānuprekṣā*)
- (iii) reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings (*saṃsārānuprekṣā*)
- (iv) reflection on being alone (*ekatvānuprekṣā*)
- (v) reflection on the otherness (of body and soul; *anyatvānuprekṣā*)
- (vi) reflection on impurity (*aśucitvānuprekṣā*)
- (vii) reflection on influx (of karman; *āsravānuprekṣā*)
- (viii) reflection on restraint (*saṃvarānuprekṣā*)
- (ix) reflection on the destruction of karman (*nirjarānuprekṣā*)
- (x) reflection on the world (*lokānuprekṣā*)
- (xi) reflection on the difficulty of attaining enlightenment (*bodhidurlabhānuprekṣā*)
- (xii) reflection on the truth well explained by the doctrine (*dharmasvākhyātattvānuprekṣā*)

² The order is slightly different in Uvavāiya section 30.

We see that the Tattvārtha Sūtra includes the four reflections connected with *dharmya dhyāna*, but not the four connected with *śukla dhyāna*.³ This list, in the same or slightly different order, and sometimes substituting *bhāvanā* for *anuprekṣā*, occurs in numerous other works, some of them late-canonical (Mahānisīha, Maraṇasamāhī) or early non-canonical (Kundakunda, Vaṭṭakera, Śivārya).⁴ But the four reflections of *śukla dhyāna* are absent from all these lists. This supports the view that ‘pure meditation’ was no longer attainable when these lists were made. Interestingly, Śivārya’s Bhagavatī-Ārādhana (1705, 1710) describes all the twelve reflections as supports (*ālambana*) of ‘pious meditation’ (*dharmya dhyāna*).

The reasons why ‘pure meditation’ came to be looked upon as no longer attainable in this world seem clear. It appears to be the almost unavoidable consequence of the gradual exaltation of the Jina, and of the state of liberation preached by him, which took place. A comparable development took place in Buddhism, where early already superhuman qualities came to be ascribed to Arhants (see Bareau, 1957) and release was postponed to a next life.⁵

Whatever the reason why ‘pure meditation’ became excluded from actual practice, it is clear that all existing practice had henceforth to be assimilated to the descriptions of ‘pious meditation’. (‘Afflicted *dhyāna*’ and ‘wrathful [155] *dhyāna*’ were, very understandably, considered bad forms of meditation.) This means that two historical developments -- (i) the addition of ‘pious meditation’ under the heading ‘meditation’ (*dhyāna*); (ii) the exclusion of ‘pure meditation’ from it -- left later meditators with a canonical ‘description of meditation’ which was never meant for such a purpose.⁶

3. It can cause no surprise that the practice of meditation has often been neglected in the subsequent history of Jainism. Yet Jainism never totally abandoned it. Adelheid Mette has recently (1987) drawn attention to a legend from the early post-canonical Āvaśyakacūrṇi, in which Mahāvīra’s main disciple Gotama emphasizes the importance of control of thought (*dhyānanigraha*) above outward signs of penance. This tendency persisted. A number of later Jaina works deal with meditation. But how did these later authors treat the subject? One option was to simply repeat the canonical classification,

³ Perhaps *aśucitva-* must be identified with *asubha-* or *asubhaya-*, as it is substituted by the latter in at least one text; see Upadhye, 1960: Intr. p. 14 (Maraṇasamāhī).

⁴ See Upadhye, 1960: Intr.

⁵ In later times the reason adduced for this was often that liberation would become possible after rebirth in the time of a future Buddha, esp. Maitreya; see Kloppenborg, 1982: 47.

⁶ This is not to say that the canonical description of ‘pure meditation’ is very satisfactory. Hemacandra (Yogaśāstra 11.11), for example, rightly points out that the last two stages of ‘pure meditation’ concern the body rather than the mind.

thus simply ignoring the problem. Several authors, however, chose other solutions, such as the following:

(i) An obvious step to take was to drop afflicted (*ārta*) and wrathful (*raudra*) *dhyāna* from the canonical classification, and retain only pious (*dharmya*) and pure (*śukla*) *dhyāna*. This is done in Vīrasena's Dhavalā on Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama sūtra 5.4.26 (XIII, pp. 70-88). Another interesting feature of the description in the Dhavalā is that the only difference between pious and pure meditation is stated to lie in the duration: short in the former, long in the latter (pp. 74-75). It is of course needless to point out that nothing in the canonical description of these two forms of meditation warrants such an idea.

(ii) An extension of the canonical description are the four types of *dhyāna* called *piṇḍastha*, *padastha*, *rūpastha* and *rūpātīta*. They are often looked upon as belonging under the fourth manifestation of *dharmya dhyāna*, 'examination of forms' (*saṃsthānavicaya*). They are mentioned in a number of works, among them Yogīndudeva's Yogasāra (v. 98) and Śubhacandra's Jñānārṇava (ch. 37-40). The lengthy description of these forms of meditation in the Jñānārṇava shows that they consist in visualizing objects and mantras inside and outside the body; the *rūpātīta* meditation, more in particular, has as [156] object 'the highest self' (*paramātman*) which consists of consciousness and bliss (*cidānandamaya*) and is without form (*amūrta*). The suspicion of influence from similar forms of Hindu meditation seems justified. We find the same four kinds of meditation mentioned and comparably described in a number of texts, among them the Kubjikāmata Tantra ch. 17-19, the Mālinīvijayottara Tantra ch. 2 and 19, Abhinavagupta's Tantrāloka 10.241 f., the Navacakreśvara Tantra (Mahāprajña, 1978: 9) and the Gurugītā (vv. 119 f.).⁷ Note that by adopting these forms of meditation the Jainas could interpret *dharmya dhyāna* as a form of real 'meditation', not of 'thinking' (see section 1 above).

(iii) A far more drastic departure from the scriptures is made by Haribhadra in his Yogadr̥ṣṭisamuccaya. Haribhadra does not deny that what he writes goes beyond the scriptures:⁸

v. 5: This [kind of Yoga] called '[Yoga of] competence' is best; its means have been indicated in the scriptures [but] its range goes beyond them in matters of detail because of the abundance of energy.

⁷ See further Goudriaan, 1979: 61; 1981: 54; Gupta, 1979: 178.

⁸ Yogadr̥ṣṭisamuccaya vv. 5-6: *śāstrasandarśitopāyas tadatikrāntagocarah/ śaktyudrekād viśeṣeṇa sāmāthyākhyo'yam uttamah //5// siddhyākhyapadasamprāptihetubhedā na tattvataḥ/ śāstrād evāvagamyaṅte sarvathaiveha yogibhiḥ //6//*

v. 6: The precise causes leading to the state called *siddhi* are not in their totality correctly understood by the Yogins from the scriptures alone.

Haribhadra then proceeds to collect information on ‘this best form of Yoga’ from ‘various works on Yoga’, as he admits towards the end of his book (v. 207). The course of Yoga which he describes consists of eight stages. These stages are said to correspond with the eight stages mentioned in works by other authors, among them Patañjali.⁹ All these stages cover of course far more than meditation alone, but even in the last stages nothing resembling the canonical descriptions of meditation shows up. Haribhadra’s break with tradition is complete in this respect.

(iv) Hemacandra’s Yogaśāstra constitutes a special case. Hemacandra describes traditional forms of meditation in chapters (*prakāśa*) 7 to 11. He follows here to a large extent earlier texts like, in particular, the Jñānārṇava; this means that he includes forms of meditation such as *piṇḍastha*, *padastha*, *rūpastha* and *rūpātīta*. What makes Hemacandra special is his twelfth chapter. It begins with a verse which deserves to be quoted:

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What is learnt from the ocean of scriptures [and] from the mouth of the teacher has here been completely shown; now [however] the pure truth as it has been obtained through experience will be explained.¹⁰

From what follows in chapter 12 it is clear that something quite different from what precedes is introduced. Most noteworthy is Hemacandra’s insistence on not using constraint. If one exerts no restraint on the mind it will reach peace, not otherwise:

Wherever the mind goes, don’t restrain it from [going] there; for what is restrained becomes stronger, what is not restrained becomes peaceful.
The mind is like an elephant in rut, which becomes stronger when restrained with effort, but comes to peace after satisfying its needs without restraint.¹¹

Nothing could better illustrate the remarkability of Hemacandra’s views in the context of Jainism than the example of an elephant which must satisfy its sexual needs. Equally remarkable is verse 51, where Hemacandra expresses indifference concerning the question whether the result of these practices is liberation or not:

⁹ The authors and their lists of stages are enumerated in Haribhadra’s own commentary on v. 16 and tabulated in K. K. Dixit’s edition, also under v. 16.

¹⁰ Yogaśāstra 12.1: *śrutasiṅhor gurumukhato yad adhigataṃ tad iha darśitaṃ samyak/ anubhavasiddham idānīm prakāśyate tattvam idam amalāṃ//*

¹¹ Yogaśāstra 12.27-28: *ceto’pi yatra yatra pravartate no tatas tato vāryam/ adhikībhavati hi vāritam avāritam śāntim upayāti// matto hastī yatnān nivāryamāṇo’dhikībhavati yadvat/ anivāritas tu kāmān labdhvā sāmīyati manas tadvat//*

It may be liberation or not, but it certainly is the highest bliss, in which all forms of happiness appear as if nothing.¹²

The editor of the *Yogaśāstra*, Muni Jambuvijaya, has found very similar ideas, often expressed in virtually identical words, in a work entitled *Amanaska Yoga*, which is attributed to Gorakṣa Nātha. It seems therefore that Hemacandra introduced again new practices into the Jaina tradition, besides or perhaps rather instead of the traditional practices. These 'traditional' practices included in this case the additions made by such authors as Śubhacandra.

4. These few examples must suffice to show that the history of Jaina meditation is not continuous. The canonical description which came to be held authoritative was itself the result of scholastic activity which had little understanding for the practice of meditation. Those later authors who had a practical interest in meditation felt free to work rather independently from the [158] canonical description, often borrowing elements from non-Jaina schools of meditation.

One of the reasons for this peculiar development was, as we have seen, the hand which people of greater scholastic than meditational capability had in the development and interpretation of the canonical texts. Another factor must have been the relatively minor role played by meditation in Jaina circles. It is true that every now and then there were individuals who had a strong interest in its practice and this might sometimes lead to some kind of 'revival' in a certain period and region, such as we seem to be witnessing today among the Terapanthis of northern India.¹³ But these individuals had to start almost from scratch, so to say. They had to look for a teacher, among the Jains but perhaps more often elsewhere. They also had to decide in how far the canonical guidelines could be considered adequate. This led to the peculiar developments to which attention was drawn in the preceding pages.

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Note: I have had access to a rather limited number of texts on Jaina meditation. For this reason I include in this bibliography some general works on Jaina meditation which may help those interested in finding further information: Jainendra Siddhānta Kośa, Dige (1981), *Mahāprajñā* (1978: 7-12 (Prastuti)), Mehatā and Kāpaḍiyā (1968: 227-66), Tatia (1951).

¹² *Yogaśāstra* 12.51: *mokṣo'stu mā'stu yadi vā paramānandas tu vidyate sa khalu/ yasmin nikhilasukhāni pratibhāsante na kiñcid iva//*

¹³ See the various publications of Yuvācārya Mahāprajñā. This 'revival' may not be unconnected with the interest in meditation among non-Indians; see e.g. *Mahāprajñā*, 1980b: 3.

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