

## 9. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ABHIDHARMA

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Today, I will give a brief introduction to the Abhidharma. Generally speaking, there are two systems of Abhidharma—the lower Abhidharma and the higher Abhidharma. The lower Abhidharma is in relation to the Hinayana teaching and is based mainly on Ācārya Vasubandhu's treatise *The Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośa)*. The Mahayana teachings have their own Abhidharma system, the main text of which is Ārya Asaṅga's *Compendium of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccaya)*. However, since people here are particularly interested in *The Treasury of Abhidharma*, I will mainly talk about this text.

The many discourses of the Buddha can be categorized into three groups on the basis of the subject matter expounded in his teachings. For the purpose of guiding mainly our ethical conduct, there is the teaching of the Vinaya; for the purpose of teaching the cultivation of meditative states or samadhi, there are the Sutra teachings; and for the purpose of gaining wisdom, there is the teaching of the Abhidharma.

According to the Mahayana tradition, Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma are three separate groups of teachings. Within the Hinayana tradition, the two main philosophical schools, that is, the Vaibhāṣika and the Sautrāntika,<sup>1</sup> classify the three categories of the Buddha's teachings differently. According to the Vaibhāṣika school, the Abhidharma is based on seven groups of teachings given by the Buddha himself. These seven comprise the Abhidharma piṭaka.

However, according to the other school of the Hinayana, the Sautrāntika, these teachings are not the Buddha's own words. They maintain that since these teachings contain many contradictions and logical inconsistencies, they cannot come directly from the Buddha and therefore must have been compiled later by arhats. For this school, there

is no separate group of teachings given by the Buddha known as the Abhidharma piṭaka. All the teachings relating the training in higher wisdom are originally found within the Vinaya and Sutra teachings, and these are the teachings they accept as forming the Abhidharma piṭaka.

Later, an important Abhidharma treatise known as *The Great Exposition* (*Mahāvibhāṣā*) was written, composed of 100,000 verses and comprising twelve volumes of scriptures. According to some people, this text was composed by a gathering of arhats. According to others, it was a group of scholars who authored them. It seems that this text was only partially translated into Tibetan. It is said, however, that it was translated in its entirety from Sanskrit into Chinese. The Abhidharma teachings found in these twelve volumes were later condensed by Ācārya Vasubandhu in his *Treasury of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośa*). In it, the content of the *Great Exposition* is systematized in a concise and clear form so that the true essence of these teachings could be understood more easily.

#### VASUBANDHU AND THE TREASURY OF ABHIDHARMA

Vasubandhu was an extremely learned scholar who recited the entire *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines* on a daily basis and is said to have mastered 9,900,000 scriptures.

Vasubandhu was born in an area that is now located within the borders of Pakistan. It is said his mother was a very learned and wise woman who thought that the teachings on the Abhidharma were incomplete and needed to be extended in order to be properly understood and widely spread. She made the aspiration to bear a child who would be able to accomplish this. With her first husband, a king, she had one son who became a great Mahayana saint by the name of Asaṅga.<sup>2</sup> With her second husband, a brahmin, she had another son who later became known as Vasubandhu, the author of the *Treasury of Abhidharma*. Both brothers contributed greatly to the dissemination of the Abhidharma teachings.

Although Vasubandhu conducted his studies and taught mainly in present-day Kashmir in India, he is said to have passed away in Nepal. As a matter of fact, the stupa of Vasubandhu remains to this day. It is located at the reverse side of the Svayambunath stupa in Kathmandu; and since it is an important pilgrimage site, I request you to please make a visit to this stupa if you have the chance to do so.

Vasubandhu achieved great fame as a scholar and became known as the second Buddha. He gathered a great number of brilliant disciples, four of

which are known right up to the present day for their extraordinary knowledge of different aspects of the Dharma: Dignāga, Guṇaprabha, Vimuktasena, and Sthiramati.<sup>3</sup> Sthiramati in particular was a highly accomplished scholar. Expressing the confidence he had in his own learning, Sthiramati said that if one placed all his knowledge on one side of a weighing-scale and the knowledge of all other scholars combined on the other side, his side of the scales would still outweigh the other. It is said that in a previous life, at the time of Vasubandhu, Sthiramati was born as a pigeon. When Vasubandhu performed his daily recitation of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines*, this pigeon would sit at the window to listen to his chanting. In its next life, the pigeon was reborn as a boy, who from early childhood kept telling his parents that he wanted to see his teacher. He would ask, “Where is my guru, Vasubandhu?” Hearing this so many times, the parents went in search of the great teacher. When they eventually found Vasubandhu they offered him their child, pleading that the master would accept the boy as his disciple.

Masters like Sthiramati, it is said, are able to express the great confidence they have in their understanding of the Dharma in such powerful ways. The Buddhist scholar Prajñākaramati is believed to have said that merely knowing that someone as greatly learned and accomplished such as himself lives on this Earth should cause one to physically quake and tremble. Those who remain unmoved by this knowledge, he said, are fools indeed.

Sakya Paṇḍita, too, at one time said that he was the only real scholar and that everyone else was a mere reflection of the image of a scholar. Such statements were not made out of pride or in order to show off, but rather to benefit others by expressing the strength that lays in learning and the qualities obtained through it. If someone lacking those qualities were to proclaim themselves to be a great scholar or even an enlightened being, then that person would be no more than a fool: there would be absolutely no benefit from such a statement. However, masters such as Sakya Paṇḍita or Prajñākaramati are able to display the courage and strength that is based on knowing the teachings in order to help others.

Sakya Paṇḍita had an extraordinary connection with Vasubandhu. Over a period of one month, Vasubandhu appeared to Sakya Paṇḍita in dream, teaching him the entire *Treasury of Abhidharma*. Every morning when Sakya Paṇḍita woke up, he had actually memorized the portion of text he was taught and had a clear understanding of its meaning. He said that when he later studied the *Treasury of Abhidharma* under Śākya

Śrībhadrā, the great scholar from Kashmir, he did not learn anything new.

In Tibet there were two transmission lineages of the teaching of the *Treasury of Abhidharma*. One was known as the long lineage that came from India and was passed down from master to disciple and which was spread throughout Tibet. Then there was also one known as the very short lineage which is the one Śākya Paṇḍita received directly from Vasubhandu in his dream. This lineage was also transmitted and spread throughout Tibet.

### ON THE MEANING OF ABHIDHARMA

The term *Abhidharma*<sup>4</sup> has two meanings. The actual Abhidharma is the wisdom that realizes selflessness, that is, the lack of inherent identity. The nominal Abhidharma designated as such on the conventional level refers to the various types of knowledge or wisdom the direct realization of the selfless is based upon. On this nominal level we have the wisdom born from learning, the wisdom born from contemplation, the wisdom born from meditation, and our innate intelligence. On top of these four types of knowledge there are also the Buddha's direct teachings on Abhidharma and the Abhidharma treatises composed by later masters which are given the name "Abhidharma."

In this way, there is the actual Abhidharma which is the direct realization of selflessness, and the designated Abhidharma of which there are two types: the "signified" (that which is being expressed) and the "signifier" (that which expresses it). The "signified" refers to the four types of wisdom, that is, our innate intelligence, and the wisdoms of learning, contemplation, and meditation, and the "signifier" to the Abhidharma teachings found in the Buddha's discourses and the treatises that elucidate them.

Now, why is the Abhidharma of such critical importance? There is no means to overcome our mental affliction except for this kind of wisdom, and without discarding the afflictions we will not be able to abandon saṃsāra. In other words, this wisdom is the single most important tool in attaining liberation, for there can be no liberation without wisdom.

In order for this wisdom to arise, we must understand the *dharmas*, the components of the world. There are two aspects to this knowledge. The first is to know the nature of phenomena, which is the lack of inherent existence or selflessness, and the second is to know what is called the

“extent of phenomena,” which means that we understand the *skandhas* or aggregates, the *dhātus* or elements of perception, and the *āyatanas* or sense bases. In this way, all phenomena are determined in terms of their nature and their extent.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE TREASURY OF ABHIDHARMA

Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Abhidharma* has eight chapters, each dealing with a different topic. The first chapter, “Exposition of the Elements,” explains the five *skandhas* (form, feeling, perception, formative factors, and consciousness), the twelve *āyatanas* or sense bases (the six sense faculties and their respective objects), and the eighteen *dhātus* or elements (the six sense faculties, their respective objects, and the six resultant types of consciousness).

The second chapter, “Exposition of the Faculties,” teaches the *indriyas*, that is, the various types of controlling faculties. First, it explains what are known as the twenty-two controlling faculties related to the person, such as the eye faculty, and so on. Then the text gives an explanation of how compounded phenomena arise in the world. This is followed by an explanation of everything related to cause and result, that is, the six types of causes, the five types of result, and the four conditions.

The third chapter of the *Treasury of Abhidharma* is the “Exposition of the World.” It explains the two aspects of the world of existence, that is, sentient beings living the world and the container worlds they inhabit. First the three realms or planes of existence and the five types of beings are described. This is followed by an explanation of the four modes of birth and of the twelve links of dependent arising. This chapter contains descriptions of the physical appearance and size of sentient beings, as well as of their lifespans. It also includes a general explanation of various measurements, such as how distances are measured in *yojanas*<sup>5</sup> and how time is measured in years and eons (*kalpa*).

The fourth chapter is the “Exposition of Karma.” It explains in detail what types of deeds cause one to be born in the hells, right up to the types of actions that bring about the attainment of buddhahood.

The fifth chapter, the “Exposition of Subtle Increases,” discusses the mental afflictions, or *kleśas*. This chapter has three subdivisions explaining the afflictions themselves, of which there are six root afflictions; the antidotes which enable us to eliminate these afflictions; and the results gained in this way.

The sixth chapter is called “Exposition of the Paths and the Individuals.” The explanation of the paths comprises an exposition of the objects we focus on while cultivating the path, such as the four truths and the two realities, as well as a description of the process of practice in terms of the cultivation of calm abiding and special insight. In the context of special insight, the text explains how insight is cultivated on the four stages of practice, that is, the paths of accumulation, joining, seeing, and cultivation.

In terms of the individuals who cultivate these paths, three types are distinguished: the *śrāvakas* or hearers, the *pratyekabuddhas* or solitary realizers, and *bodhisattvas* following the Mahayana path. This chapter explains that the four pairs of individuals on the śrāvaka path<sup>6</sup> still take birth in samsara, even after they have directly realized the nonexistence of the self.<sup>7</sup> This is not the case with the other two types of realized individuals, that is to say the realized beings on the path of pratyekabuddhas and the noble beings on the Mahayana, which includes both realized bodhisattvas and perfectly awakened buddhas.

The seventh chapter is the “Exposition of *Jñāna*.” When we speak of *jñāna* or awakened awareness, we refer to the arising of a cognition that realizes the nonexistence of the self. The cognition that realizes the four truths in the continuum of the path of cultivation, for instance, is called the awakened awareness of an arhat. In this context, the *Treasury of Abhidharma* explains ten different types of cognition and the excellent qualities of these cognitions.

Generally speaking, we differentiate between *jñāna*, or awakened awareness, and *prajñā*, or wisdom. While *prajñā* refers to one of the fifty-one mental factors,<sup>8</sup> *jñāna* is the transformation of ordinary consciousness into the awakened awareness of a noble being; and it refers to a main mind, that is, that which apprehends the object and is not merely a mental factor. In terms of the five paths—the paths of accumulation, joining, seeing, cultivation, and no further training—*jñāna*, or awakened awareness, relates to the path of no further training, and the ten types of cognition are taught as a branch of this *jñāna*.

The second topic of this chapter are the excellent qualities of these cognitions. They are twofold: common and uncommon. The common qualities are those that are shared by buddhas and other beings alike, and they include various types of supernatural knowledges and so on.<sup>9</sup> The uncommon qualities the eighteen qualities exclusive to a buddha.

The eighth chapter of the *Treasury* is the “Exposition of Meditative Attainments (*samāpatti*).” It discusses the topic of samadhi, mainly the four *dhyānas*, or common meditative absorptions, and the four formless absorptions.<sup>10</sup> Beyond that, the text also explains the qualities one attains based on these meditative states, such as the four immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity), the eight liberations, and many other such states.

This completes the overview of the Abhidharma intended to give you a general idea of the vast material and knowledge found in the eight chapters of the *Treasury of Abhidharma* with the aspiration that all who read it will be able to study and understand it in its entirety in the future.

### THE FIVE SKANDHAS, THE EIGHTEEN ELEMENTS AND TWELVE SENSE BASES

Let us now return to the first chapter of the *Treasury of Abhidharma* to briefly discuss the fundamental teaching on the five skandhas, the eighteen dhātus, and the twelve āyatanas.

First, we will explain the meaning of these terms. The Sanskrit term *skandha*, or *phung po* in Tibetan, (usually translated as “aggregate”) means “heap” or “bundle,” and refers to a grouping together of various things. The term *dhātu*, or *kham* (*kham*s) in Tibetan, means “element.” Based on its Sanskrit etymology, dhātu is explained to mean “that which sustains a consciousness or cognition.” The third term, *āyatana*, or *kyé ché* (*skye mched*) in Tibetan, is translated as “sense base” and refers to the doors through which the various consciousnesses can arise. This describes the general nature of these terms.

When each of them are in turn subdivided into their constituent parts, we have five skandhas, eighteen dhātus and twelve āyatanas. The five skandhas include all compounded phenomena grouped into the five categories of forms, feelings, perceptions, formative factors, and consciousness.

### THE SKANDHA OF FORM

The first skandha is the skandha of form. Forms are defined as whatever can be affected, changed, or damaged through contact. When two forms meet or come into contact with each other, they will be affected or damaged. When one strikes one material object with another one, both

will be affected by that contact in one way or another. Whatever can be affected or damaged through contact in this way is defined as the skandha of form.

This can be subdivided into eleven types of form: the five sense objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects), the five sense faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and one element known as imperceptible form.<sup>11</sup> As an object of the eye faculty, form can be distinguished according to two aspects, that is, color, such as white, yellow, and so forth, and shape, such as square or round, and so forth. If we analyze these two types of form further we arrive at a total of twenty types of visually perceptible form.

Sound is the object of the ear sense faculty. There are eight different types of sound, which can be grouped into two based to their origin, that is to say whether they come from animate beings or inanimate objects. Sounds from animate beings arise from their bodies, like the sound of the snapping of fingers or the sound of speech. Inanimate sounds are like the sound of the wind blowing, of water rushing over a cliff, or the crackling of fire. Each of these two, animate and inanimate sounds, can further be subdivided based on whether or not the sound carries a meaning. For example, the sound of the snapping of the fingers is just a sound. Similar to an inanimate sound, it doesn't have any specific meaning by itself. Contrary to that, the words I express when I teach the Dharma carry a specific meaning. In addition to that, each of these can be further divided into pleasant sounds and unpleasant sounds. Any sound can be either pleasant to the ear or unpleasant. In this way we can say that there are eight possible aspects to sound.

Odors are of four different types: pleasant, unpleasant, strong, and weak.

Tastes are of six types: sweet, sour, spicy (like chilly), salty, bitter, and astringent (like the medicinal *aru* herb).

Tactile objects are of eleven types. First, we distinguish tactile objects in relation to the four great elements we experience. These are: hardness, which is a tactile object related to the element of earth; heat related to the element of fire; wetness related to the element of water; and movement related to the element of air. Apart from these, we can feel smoothness, roughness, lightness, and heaviness. And finally, there are the physical sensations of coldness (which is the absence of heat), and hunger and thirst within the body, which are thus also tactile objects. These are the eleven types of object perceived by physical contact.

[In addition to the five types of sense objects, the form skandha includes the five sense faculties, which are the subtle matter inside the sense organs (or spread throughout the body in the case of the sense of touch) that allow us to experience the input from the various types of objects.]<sup>12</sup>

The eleventh type of form, called *imperceptible form*, is not in relation to things that are experienced by the five sense faculties, but rather in relation to one's deeds or karma. This group includes vows, non-vows, and neutral deeds. They are called imperceptible because these forms cannot be known or seen by others. This completes and overview of the skandha of form.

### THE SKANDHA OF FEELING

The second skandha is the skandha of feeling or sensation. It refers to the experience of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings that arise as a result of previous deeds. These can be further grouped into five categories: pleasant and unpleasant sensations, happiness and unhappiness, and neutral feelings. The first two are in relation to the physical body, that is, physical sensations of pleasure and unpleasant sensations and pain, such as cutting one's body. The next two are in relation to the mind, experiencing some form of mental happiness and unhappiness. These are rather gross feelings that are easy to identify. The last one is a neutral feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

### THE SKANDHA OF PERCEPTION

The third skandha is the skandha of perception or discrimination. Each and every phenomenon in the world has its own distinguishing features and is therefore unique in this sense. These features are called signs or characteristics of the object. That which apprehends these signs is called perception. Heat, for instance, is the sign of fire. Based on the presence of heat, we know "this is fire." In this case, the perception would be the thought "fire," which in turn is based on the apprehension of heat. Other examples of perceptions are notions like, "This is a male," "This is a female," "This is a father," and so on.

Perceptions are of six types, based on the six types of consciousness, from perceptions based on the visual consciousness up to and including perceptions based on the mental consciousness.

### THE SKANDHA OF FORMATIVE FACTORS

The fourth skandha is the skandha of formative factors.<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, formative factors are of two kind: those arising from or with the mind (called *mental factors*), and those that do not arise from the mind.<sup>14</sup>

The mental factors active with the mind are the forces that direct the mind toward an object. They function like servants or assistants whose responsibility it is to bring their master to another country. In the same way, mental factors lead the mind to an object and make it apprehend that object. They are called formative factors because they “form” the mind in relation to an object. The *Treasury* lists forty-six different mental factors.<sup>15</sup> Within these forty-six, forty-four are listed exclusively under the skandha of formative factors, while perception and feeling are also skandhas in their own right.<sup>16</sup>

### THE SKANDHA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The fifth skandha is the skandha of consciousness. It is defined as “that which knows the object.” The eye consciousness, for instance, is that which knows form. According to the Hinayana tradition the skandha of consciousness contains six categories, relating to the six sense faculties (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative, somatic, and mental).

### THE EIGHTEEN DHĀTUAS AND TWELVE ĀYATANAS

Another way of categorizing the various phenomena are the eighteen dhātus or elements. They are the six objects: forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and objects of the mind; the sense faculties: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; and the six types of consciousness arising when the faculties and their related objects interact: the visual consciousness when the eye faculty meets a form, the auditory consciousness, the gustative consciousness, the olfactory consciousness, the somatic consciousness, and the mental consciousness.

There are also what are known as the twelve sense bases. This is actually a repetition of the eighteen elements minus the six types of consciousness. In other words, the twelve sense bases refer to the six objects and the six sense faculties.

The eighteen elements and the twelve sense bases are mainly subdivisions of the five skandhas. The only type of phenomena included in the eighteen

elements of perception and the twelve sense bases not included in the five skandhas are the three uncompound phenomena (space and the two types of cessation).<sup>17</sup> Except for these three, everything else is taught at the time of describing the five skandhas, which include all compounded phenomena.

This concludes the brief overview of the Abhidharma. When one first comes to a market one hasn't been to before, one would start by walking around to see what is to be found there. Similarly, this brief introduction is like a short walk through the pages of the Abhidharma to see what it has to offer.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**QUESTION:** Could you explain the concept of “cause” and how it relates to dependent arising?

**ANSWER:** In the Abhidharma, we speak of six types of cause. The first one is called acting cause. The acting cause for seeing, for example, is the eye faculty, which is not the physical eye or the eyeball per se, but a subtle substance within the eye which has the power to make the eye function. That is the acting cause. Of the six types of cause, the acting cause is the first and principal one; the others are supporting causes. The second cause is the one known as the cause which arises simultaneously with the result.<sup>18</sup> The third cause is called cause of equal status. This cause is of the same type of status as the result. For example, when you produce faith, this faith is based on a previous moment of faith. This means that the cause, that is, a previous moment of faith, and the result, that is, the present moment of faith, are of equal status. The fourth cause is known as the congruent or similar cause. This type of cause is related to mind and mental factors, and the continuity of the mental stream of consciousness. It refers to the previous moment of mind, based on which the next moment of mind can arise. The fifth cause is known as the driving cause, or literally, the cause that goes everywhere. This is related to the mental afflictions and the way they proliferate. For example, a moment of desire will only generate a next moment of desire. This means that from the specific moment of any given affliction, such as desire or hatred, more afflictions of the same type will be produced later. The sixth cause is known as the ripening cause. It refers to the wholesome and unwholesome deeds performed

in previous lives that produce the experiences of happiness and suffering in this life.

There is no special relationship between these six types of causes and the twelve links of dependent arising. The twelve links are, however, an example of how things arise in this world; how each of these causes produce specific results. In this sense we can find these six types of causes within the twelve links of dependent arising, but there is no direct relationship between them.

QUESTION: Could you please explain the difference between physical and mental sensations?

ANSWER: From a general point of view, if something happens to our physical body, for instance when we are struck by a stone or one of our fingers gets cut, then we experience physical suffering. When someone says something mean to us, on the other hand, our mind becomes unhappy and we experience mental unhappiness. From the point of view of consciousness, from among the six types of consciousness, anything that happens in relation to the first five types of consciousness, that is, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative, and somatic, translates into physical sensations, from happiness to suffering. Anything that happens in relation to the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness, produces mental happiness or suffering. In this way we can differentiate the types of suffering or happiness in relation to the five types of consciousness together or the sixth one by itself.

QUESTION: Could you kindly give us some examples of how the understanding of the Abhidharma could be useful in our day to day practice and not remain as simply some abstract, profound teaching which is alien to our everyday experience?

ANSWER: From the point of view of your worldly life, if you want to get a better job for instance, there is no need to learn the Abhidharma. However, if you wish to gain liberation then it is necessary to study it. The reason for this is when we think of ourselves, we always think there is some “I” or “self” or “soul” that exists here. However, when we analyze the five skandhas, the eighteen elements, and the twelve sense bases, we can clearly differentiate each aspect of these physical and mental phenomena we label “I.” When we describe each of these in their own forms we can never find a self within them. All we find are

the five skandhas, the twelve sense bases, and the eighteen elements, but we cannot find the “I.” The whole purpose of the Abhidharma then is for us to understand that this “I” we hold to does not exist. In this way it allows us to gain liberation from samsara.

From a worldly point of view, the study of the Abhidharma might enable us to teach Buddhist philosophy in a university. Besides that, there is no really need to study it.

Generally speaking, the Abhidharma is the foundation for the Buddha’s teaching. It is like the source that allows us to understand well the entire range of the Buddhist doctrine. From among the three baskets of the Buddhist doctrine—Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma—the Abhidharma is also referred to as the “grandmother” or “source” (*mano*), because it functions as the basis.

If we limit our studies to the other parts of the Dharma we will not have complete understanding of the teachings. It is like looking out through only one window of a house: we would only get a partial view of the world outside. However, if we were to get on top of the house, we would have a complete view of the surroundings, a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the outside world. In the same way, if we study the Abhidharma teachings we will be able to understand well all the other teachings of the Buddha.

*Translated by Christian Bernert.*

27. *Container world* means the outer world excluding sentient beings.
28. This refers to the *Public Explication of Mind Training*. See Jinpa 2006:388.
29. This expression refers to the five types of objects perceived through our five sense faculties.

## 9. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ABHIDHARMA

1. The Vaibhāṣika (lit. “followers of the explanation”) school has its name from the Abhidharma *Mahāvibhāṣā* literature believed to have been taught by the Buddha himself. Sautrāntika means “followers of the sutras.” They do not accept the Buddha as the author of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, claiming that its teachings are contained in the sutras.
2. Asaṅga was the author of the *Compendium of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccaya)*.
3. Dignāga was a great master of Buddhist logic and epistemology; Guṇaprabha was renowned for his knowledge of the Vinaya; Vimuktasena, for his expertise in the science of the Prajñāpāramitā; and Sthiramati for his learning in general and his numerous authoritative commentaries.
4. The Sanskrit term *abhidharma* is composed of the prefix *abhi-*, which can mean ‘special’ or ‘higher’, and *dharma*, which can mean ‘teaching’, ‘phenomenon’ or ‘property’.
5. An ancient Indian measurement unit corresponding roughly to between 10 and 15 km.
6. On the vehicle of the śrāvakas four successive levels of accomplishment are distinguished: stream-winner, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat. Each of these levels is further divided into two parts: *approach*, when the practitioner is about to enter the stage, and *abiding*, when that stage has been obtained. These are the four pairs of individuals on the śrāvakayāna.
7. These four pairs of individuals all have attained the path of seeing, which is tantamount to the direct realization of selflessness. This chapter discusses at length how non-returners and even certain types of arhats take birth within the conditioned realms of samsara.
8. See below for an explanation of mental factors.
9. The five types of common supernatural knowledge are: the divine eye, the divine ear, knowing others’ minds, recollecting previous lives, and the ability to perform miracles. The sixth type, the perfect knowledge of the exhaustion of afflictions, is exclusive to a buddha.
10. The four dhyānas are increasingly subtle states of meditative absorption. They are simply called first, second, third, and fourth dhyāna. The four samadhis related to the formless realm are: limitless space, limitless consciousness, perception of nothingness, and the state of neither perception nor non-perception.
11. Imperceptible form refers to a group of phenomena, including forms perceived in dreams or through samādhi as well as vows, which fulfill only the Vaibhāṣika school’s definition of the form skandha.

12. This paragraph on the five sense faculties was added by the translator.
13. The Sanskrit term is *saṃskāra* and has been translated in many ways including “formation, (pre) disposition, conditioning, compositional factor.”
14. The formative factors dissociated from mind, which includes notions like “time,” “arising,” “ceasing,” “continuing,” “life faculty” and others, are not discussed here. The nature and status of these factors is debated amongst scholars.
15. These forty-six mental factors are grouped into six categories dependent on whether or not they are present in every moment of consciousness, how they relate to the objects of perception, and on whether they are wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral. These six categories are: ten ever-present factors, ten wholesome factors, six root afflictions, two unwholesome factors, ten lesser afflictions, and eight undetermined factors. Asaṅga’s *Compendium of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccaya)* gives another list composed of fifty-one mental factors.
16. The reason the Buddha listed feelings and perceptions separately is that these two are of particular importance regarding the way we experience the world. Feelings and perceptions are very closely related to the experience of suffering and happiness, and are therefore treated separately.
17. The two types of cessation are analytical cessation, which is, for instance, the cessation of suffering resulting from insight, and non-analytical cessation, which is the mere absence of a phenomenon due to the lack of causes and conditions.
18. An example for this type of cause would be the elements which compose a resultant object. These elements arise simultaneously with the object they form.

## **10. REFINING THE VIEW: ON THE FOUR SCHOOLS OF BUDDHIST THOUGHT WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MADHYAMAKA IN TIBET**

1. Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (1092–1158) was the first of the five founding masters of the Sakya tradition.
2. Rendawa Shönnu Lodrö (1349–1412) was an important master of the Sakya tradition, famous in particular for his writings on Madhyamaka philosophy. He was one of the main teachers of Jé Tsongkhapa, the father of the Gelug school.
3. There are five skandhas or types of phenomena comprising all elements of experience. Of these five, one, namely the form skandha, is of physical nature, and four are of mental nature, i.e., sensations, perceptions, formative factors and consciousness.
4. The Vaibhāṣikas accept three types of uncompounded phenomena: space, cessation that results from insight (like the cessation of attachment due to the insight into impermanence), and cessation that results from a lack of conditions (like the cessation of attachment due to the mere absence of objects of attachment).
5. Among the five skandhas, these phenomena are listed in the group of formative factors dissociated from mind according to the Vaibhāṣika system.