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Diṭṭha Suta Muta Viññāta

The 4 means of cognition
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1 Components of the phrase**1.1 BASIC DEFINITIONS**

1.1.1 The tetrad of cognitive¹ modes—*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* [1.2.3]—and the triad of cognitive modes—*diṭṭha suta muta* [3]—are common models used by the Buddha in his teachings. The nouns and their respective verbs and related forms are as follows:

Pali	Sanskrit	past participle	present tense	
<i>diṭṭha</i>	<i>dr̥ṣṭa</i>	“seen”	* <i>dassati</i>	“sees” ²
<i>suta</i>	<i>śruta</i>	“heard”	<i>suṇāti</i>	“hears”
<i>muta</i>	(<i>mata</i>) ³	“sensed”	<i>munāti = maññati</i>	“senses” [5.2.2]
<i>viññāta</i>	<i>vijñāta</i>	“known”	<i>vijānāti</i>	“cognizes, is conscious of, knows, understands”

This table summarizes the most “developed” senses of the 4 terms, and their most familiar usages in the suttas. Hence, we need to be familiar with these senses before we examine how their usages evolved over time.

We will discuss below how this tetrad is probably at first used by the Buddha to specifically debunk the Upanishadic notion of the eternal soul. [1.2]

1.1.2 These 4 verbs also function as **gerunds or verbal nouns**, as “the seen,” “the heard,” and “the known.” However, as is evident from our study below, the translation of *muta*, because of its Pali usage and pregnant senses (polysemy),⁴ has been problematic, mainly because the word has *no* cognate in Sanskrit nor in English. In other words, it is used in a unique early Buddhist way in the suttas. Hence, translators who understand this difficulty, try to work with near-synonyms or neologisms.

1.1.3 Usages of *muta*

1.1.3.1 We know that these terms deal with cognition, that is, function on a basic level of being *conscious* of an object, even of itself (in the case of the mind) as an object. Such objects are called “the seen” (in the experience with the eye), “the heard” (the ear), and “the known” (the mind). Clearly missing from this list are the experiences of the smell, taste and touch.

¹ “Perception” here is used in a non-technical sense denoting a whole range of cognitive and apperceptive faculties.

² The prefixed asterisk (*) is a reconstruction, a back-formation or found only in lexical works. In other words, the form **dassati* (see PED) does not occur in the Pali Canon, where *dakkhati* (S 1:106, *dakkhasi*) or rarely, *dakkhiti* (Sn 909) (“he sees”) are found instead.

³ Skt *mata*, “thought, believed, imagined, supposed, understood; a thought, idea, opinion, sentiment, view, belief, doctrine” (SED). Clearly, *mata* has a broader sense, closer to *viññāta*.

⁴ On Pali polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2; 2.2).

1.1.3.2 Hence, it makes good logical sense to surmise that *muta*, “the sensed,” must be a broad term for this set of “omitted” senses, that is, those of the nose, the tongue and the body. Interestingly, all these 3 senses work by way of some form of physical “contact.” Smell molecules touch the inner nasal cavity which senses smell; taste-buds on the tongue gives us a sense of taste; and physical impact of solid objects and the “feel” of temperature give us bodily touch. [5]

1.1.3.3 However, *muta* is used at least in a few different ways in the suttas, and hence does not have a fixed sense. In fact, a careful survey of the usages of *muta* in the suttas will show the following **semantic evolution** or different applications of *muta* in the Buddha’s teachings. These usages have been listed in a roughly chronological evolutionary pattern.

This is *not* a historical pattern but more of a usage analysis of these terms, especially *muta*, for a better understanding of the Buddha’s teaching as a whole in terms of right practice. Hence, what we are investigating is not a “technical truth” (how words are used in a philological sense) but rather **a quest for “spiritual truth”** (how their usages express what the Buddha intends to convey to us). The higher purpose of our study, we should be reminded, is ultimately for the sake of attaining at least streamwinning in this life itself.

1.2 THE UPANISHADIC PRELUDE

1.2.1 Scholars and teachers

An understanding of the philological technicalities of the phrase and its components helps us in clarifying the import of what they teach. Our task here is not merely to understand what the words mean or do not mean, or how they relate to other words and parts of words. These are interesting and profitable endeavours for the philologist and scholar surely. But often they stop right there. They are, by definition only interested in “professional truth.”

However, there are scholars—and the tendency to this is growing by the generation—to go beyond merely the professional truth, that is, to go beyond merely expressing oneself within the academic purview, even “academic correctness,” to understand the Buddhist text for what it is and for personal cultivation. Even when the scholar does this in a *personal* capacity, he is a Dharma practitioner. He would be valuable to other practitioners in the same endeavour of understanding the suttas and teachings for spiritual development. Insofar as the academic seeks and share this personal quest, he is a Dharma teacher, too.

1.2.2 The Buddha’s social milieu

1.2.2.1 The Buddha arose in an environment that was rich in religious ferment. There were already centuries of religious traditions, especially investigations and speculations into the nature of life, good and the hereafter. In the Buddha’s own time Indian society around him was maturing to such a stage as individuals even within the brahminical tradition were openly questioning their own beliefs and practices.

It was a time of widespread peace and prosperity—even battles seemed short and purposeful, and peace followed. It was after all, called the “second urbanization” in Indian history. Villages (*gāma*) were growing into market-towns (*nigama*), and cities were burgeoning with specialists, guild systems and a common currency. More people then had surplus wealth and leisure time. Hence, they had more time to think and question themselves, and to question others.

1.2.2.2 The best known of these seekers is, of course, the Buddha himself. Having found the answer to his questions, he offers the inhabitants of the crowded cities and anyone who has spiritual questions

his ready and redeeming answers. Even in his teachings, he continues to question the old systems, especially the brahmanical teachings. Understandably, many of the Buddha’s engaging dialogues and teachings contain references to **the Upanishads** (Skt *upaniṣad*).⁵

It is perfectly proper that the Buddha addressed, even challenges, these ancient traditions and teaching, since what they taught profoundly affects his society. In simple terms, the Buddha had to address the key problems—the wrong views of the old and the wrong ways of the new. He points out why, for example, the Upanishadic teachings about the soul are wrong, and why the costly and bloody sacrifices inspired by the brahmins are unwholesome.⁶

1.2.3 Upanishadic precedents

1.2.3.1 As a rule, whenever we see the phrase, *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*, the Buddha is, as a rule, addressing the falsity and dangers of **the Upanishadic conception of the eternal self** (*attā*; Skt *ātman*). Here is an example. The sage Yajñavalkya explains the abiding self as follows: “You can’t see the seer who does the seeing; you can’t hear the hearer who does the hearing; you can’t think the thinker who does the thinking; and you can’t perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving.”⁷

Further, the Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka has this passage: “it is one’s self (*ātman*) which one should see (*draṣṭavyaḥ*) and hear (*śrotavyaḥ*), and on which one should reflect (*mantavyaḥ*) and concentrate (*nidhidhyāsitaḥ*)” (BĀU 2.4.5, 4,5.6).⁸ This is spoken by the sage Yajñavalkya, who will prove by rational arguments that the *Ātman* cannot be apprehended by any of these conventional ways of knowing (BĀU 2.4.1.4, 4.5.1.5).

From this passage, we can deduce that there are, by those times, seers who believed that the *Ātman* could be known by all these conventional means of knowing. The *Ātman* could be seen or perceived by looking at your reflection in a pan of water (ChU 8.8.1) or when touching the body and feeling its warmth (ChU 3.13.8). It could be heard when we close our ears and hear something like a hum or blazing fire (ChU id).

The *Ātman* could be conceived and understood rationally by thinking—just as in the case of a man falsely accused of being a thief and is tested with a heated axe. On account of his truthfulness (this is his *Ātman*), when he touches the axes, it burns him not (ChU 6.16.3). It is not only his *Ātman*; it is the “self is the all” (*ātmayam idaṃ sarvaṃ*)—“You are that (*tat tvam asi*).” (ChU 6.14.3, 6.16.3).

To the statement, “the self is the all,” the Buddha responds with **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

To the statement, “you are that,” the Buddha declares, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (*n’etaṃ mama, n’eso’ham asmi, na mēso attā’ti*).⁹

1.2.3.2 Using these very same terms—*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*—the Buddha, in his teachings, again and again explains and exhorts us not to make the mistakes of the Upanishadic speculators and their brahminical descendents, the class-minded materialistic priests. When we fall into the wrong views and ways of the speculative seers and manipulative brahmins, we are not only losing our way from the spiritual path, but we *become* those speculative seers and manipulative brahmins ourselves. This is known as the **brahminization** of Buddhism.

⁵ See “Did the Buddha ‘borrow’ ideas from the Upaniṣads?,” SD 6.15 (5); **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3), SD 21.3 (3).

⁶ See eg **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3), SD 21.3.

⁷ *Na dṛṣṭer draṣṭāram paśyeh | na śruteḥ śrotāram śrṇuyāḥ | na mater mantāram manvīthā | na vijñāter vijñātāram vijñānīyāḥ* (BĀU 3.4.2). The tetrad of *draṣṭa śrota manta vijñāta* recurs at BĀU 3.7.23, 4.3.32.

⁸ BĀU tr from P Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upaniṣads*, Delhi, 1998:69, 129.

⁹ **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62,3 passim), SD 3.11. See DEB: n’etaṃ mama

Our understanding of the true meaning and purpose of *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is not merely doctrinal but also practical. When we diligently work towards a proper understanding of this phrase in its precious context, we have the key to dismantling the phantoms of an abiding self or some eternal essence or supreme being or cosmic buddhas. We can help undo the *brahminization* of Buddhism and heal the spiritually sick and guide the spiritually lost on that account.

2 The cognition tetrad

2.1 THE 4 MODES OF COGNITION

2.1.1 Basic definitions

2.1.1.1 The commentary on **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29), and many other commentarial passages, similarly explain the 4 terms—*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*—as follows:

<i>diṭṭhan'ti rūp'āyatanam</i>	"The seen" means the form-base;
<i>sutan'ti sadd'āyatanam</i>	"the heard" means the sound-base;
<i>mutan'ti mutvā patvā</i>	"the sensed" means, having felt, having attained,
<i>gahetabbato gandh'āyatanam</i>	on account of what is to be grasped, the smell-base,
<i>ras'āyatanam phoṭṭhabb'āyatanam</i>	the taste-base, the touch-base;
<i>viññātan'ti</i>	"the known" means
<i>sukha, dukkh'ādi, dhamm'āyatanam</i>	the mind-base comprising pleasure, pain, etc.
	(DA 3:914; cf MA 1:36 f; SA 2:237; AA 3:31; UA 91; ItA 2:187; SnA 498)

Hence, our working definition of *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is "**the seen, the heard, the sensed and the known.**" These translations, as a rule, fit well into all the passages that apply the "*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*" phrase, where the context clearly refers to the 6 sense-bases, that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind.

2.1.1.2 A couple of notes on the translation of *muta* should be made here.

Firstly, the translation of "**sensed**" for *muta* is not a satisfactory one because "sensed" has a broad meaning and may well refer to any of the physical sense-experiences. However, it is clear that such an application does not arise in any of the suttas. Hence, this is a mere technicality, so that it is safe for us to get used to the sense of *muta* as being limited to "the smelled, the tasted and the touched."

The idea that a certain translation is "satisfactory," even "perfect," or not, lies not in the translation itself—not in the words themselves—but how we use such words. The reality is that there is no "perfect" translation: all translations are new works; they are not the original text. *Traduttore traditore*, "The translator is a traitor!"¹⁰

2.1.1.3 Occasionally, we may even translate *muta* as "**felt**" (the participle of "feel") (SA 1:270,11). "To feel" here is defined as "In a wider sense: to perceive, or be affected with the sensation by (an object) through the senses which (like that of touch) are not referred to any special 'organ'" (OED). In our case, the "felt" may arise from the experience of the nose, the tongue or the body, as in the translation of **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** passage [2.1.3.3]. At least two translators have rendered *muta* as "felt." [5.1.1]

¹⁰ Cf a similar saying in Hungarian: *fordítás ferdítés*, roughly translates as "A translation is a distortion."

There is also the possibility that “felt” refers specifically to the sensation involving *touch*. Buddha-ghosa, in his **Samyutta Commentary**, for example, explains *paṭigha* (“the sensed”) as comprising smell and taste (*gandha, rasa*), and *muta* as “the felt”¹¹ (that is, through direct contact) denoting a tactile object (*phoṭṭhabb’ārammaṇa*, SA 1:269). [4.2.1]

2.1.1.4 Although it is possible to translate *muta* as “**cognized**,” no one (from the list we have compiled) seems to have done so [5.1.1]. This is probably because “cognized” is too specific and technical, while *muta* has a broad application. However, the term *cognized* very well applies to the function of consciousness on every one of the 6 sense-faculties—those of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Hence, it is to leave it at that. [2.1.3]

2.1.1.5 The Pāli-English Dictionary (PED), in its definition of *diṭṭha*, makes this helpful note on all the 4 terms, *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*, thus:

Since sight is the principal sense of perception as well as of apperception (cf *cakkhu*), that which is seen is the chief representation of any sense-impression, & *diṭṭha* combined with *suta* (heard) and *muta* (sensed by means of smell, taste & touch), to which *viññāta* (apperceived by the mind) is often joined, gives a complete analysis of that which comprises all means of cognition & recognition. Thus *diṭṭha + suta* stands collectively for the whole series (Sn 778, 812, 897, 1079; Pv 4.13); *diṭṭha suta muta* (see Nc 298 for detail & cf *diṭṭhiyā sutiyaṃ ñāṇena*) (Sn 790, 901, 914, 1082, 1086, 1122, *na tuyhaṃ adiṭṭhaṃ asutaṃ amutaṃ kiñcanaṃ atthi* = “you are omniscient”); *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* in the same sense as Sn 1122 in *yaṃ sadevakassa lokassa diṭṭha suta muta viññāta sabbam taṃ tathāgatena abhisambuddhaṃ* of the cognitive powers of the Tathāgata (D 3:134 = Nc 276 = It 121; D 3:232; Sn 1086, 1122). (PED: sv *diṭṭha*; normalized)

2.1.1.6 It is helpful that the PED informs us that *muta* means “sensed by means of smell, taste & touch.” Along with sight, hearing and knowing, *muta* completes the set of 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*). It is clearly evident from the suttas that the Buddha was well aware of the 6 sense-faculties as being discrete senses—at no time did the Buddha “vaguely conceived” them, as suggested by Mrs Rhys Davids [2.4.2].

The next interesting point here is that the PED uses “perception” and “apperception.” *Apperception* has almost the same sense as consciousness, or seems to straddle between perception and consciousness, that is, “conscious perception.” Neither “conception” nor “cognition” are mentioned in the PED definition. This is perhaps understandable because at the time of the compilation of the PED (1921-1925), western psychology was not as we know it today.

2.1.1.7 Today, we understand enough of the psychological meanings of cognition, conception and perception to use them to refer to **cognition** (cognize, etc) for the fundamental working of consciousness at the “sense-consciousness” level [2.1.3]; **perception** for *saññā* (although some may prefer “apperception”);¹² and **conception** for *maññanā* [2.1.3.3].

But these are not hard-and-fast definitions—*saññā* in *n’eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana*, for example, is universally and correctly rendered as “consciousness” rather than “perception.” Despite such definitions and technicalities, the first and final arbiter of a good translation is its context. This is a vital “rule of context” to remember when reading and translating Pali.

¹¹ Bodhi’s tr: S:B 282.

¹² On *saññā*, see SD 17.4.

2.1.2 Vinaya definition

2.1.2.1 Since the Vinaya defines monastic conduct, regulates procedures and arbitrate disciplinary and legal cases, defining the cognition tetrad is a natural part of its function. The Vinaya definition of *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is found in its section dealing with **Pācittiya 1** (the rule against intentional lying). This definition is also followed by **the Cūḷa Niddesa** commentary on Sn 1086a (Hemaka Sutta, Sn 5.9), thus:

<i>diṭṭham</i> nāma cakkhunā diṭṭham	<i>diṭṭha</i> means seeing with the eye;
<i>sutam</i> nāma sotena sutam	<i>suta</i> means hearing with the ear,
<i>mutam</i> nāma ghānena ghāyitam	<i>muta</i> means what is smelt by the nose, what is tasted by
<i>jivhāya sāyitam kāyena phutṭham</i>	the tongue, what is touched [felt] by the body,
<i>viññātam</i> nāma manasā viññātam	<i>viññāta</i> means what is known by the mind.
	(V 4:2,25 f ≈ Nc:Be 127,10)

Clearly what we have here is a conveniently abridged listing of the 6 ways of sense-cognition.

2.1.2.3 These **4 ways of cognition**, then, are how we know *light, sound, matter and thoughts*. Both light and sound are, of course, regarded as matter, too. What is sensed is “physical matter” (the earth element, that is, resistance), the seen is only *light* as visual forms (the water element, that is, cohesiveness);¹³ the heard is only *vibration* (the wind element, that is, motion); and what is known by the mind is simple *change* (the fire element as decay).

This is not a scientific description, but a metaphorical representation of how we experience the physical and mental worlds. The world (*loka*), as **the Rohitassa Sutta** (S 2.26) tells us is this very fathom-long body, along with its perception and mind,” the Buddha declares to be the world, its arising, its ending and the way leading to its ending.¹⁴ This is all there is, and all that we need to know.

In **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), the Buddha declares that the all (*sabba*)—our whole world—comprises our 6 senses and their respective sense-objects.¹⁵ This is to say that our means of knowledge are the 6 sense-faculties, and what we can know are the 6 sense-objects. This is all that can be *seen, heard, sensed and known* by us.

2.1.3 Cognition, perception, conception

2.1.3.1 We have noted why *muta* should not be translated as “cognized” [2.1.1.4] and the usage of “cognition” [2.1.1.7]. We will here further examine cognition here.

Cognition is a convenient word for *viññāna* on a basic level of sense-consciousness. The workings of the senses and the mind on a basic conscious level are all cognitive process—a fundamental “knowing” of forms and colours, sounds and vibrations, smells and fragrance, taste and temperature, touch, texture and mental processes. Again, we can notice here how the last 3 physical senses tend to overlap or help one another [5.5.3].

The secondary function of cognition in Buddhist psychology is that of **conception** or conceiving ideas and views (*maññanā*). This is also the level of karma-formations (*saṅkhārā*), when such conceivings are rooted in greed, hate or delusion. They are karmically potent and significant—we will have to bear the

¹³ Light waves, as we know, arise or “travel” in waves like water.

¹⁴ S 2.26,9,1:62 (SD 7.2); also in **Rohitassa Ss 1+2** (A 4.45+46),SD 52.8a+52.8b.

¹⁵ S 35.20 (SD 7.1).

fruits of such actions in due course, or when we habitually commit them, we *become* our karma. What we conceive, we bring forth; what we bring forth, becomes us.¹⁶

2.1.3.2 Viññāna is usually translated as “consciousness,” and this should not pose any problem, since we are already very familiar with this usage. **Idiom** is defined by usage and age—*viññāna* as consciousness has become idiomatic after a century of usage. But we are generally less familiar with other words—rather important ones on account of their usage—related to *viññāna* as consciousness.

Just as the Buddha has naturalized¹⁷ many brahminical terms—such as brahma, brahmin, karma and attā—the usage of modern psychological terms—such as consciousness, the preconscious, the unconscious and the subconscious¹⁸—should not bear their academic baggage, a karma which tends to change according to academic developments. They are merely words, expressions or conventions (*vohāra*) with Buddhist lives of their own, expressing concepts and significance that go back to the Buddha himself.¹⁹

2.1.3.3 The Mūla,pariyāya Sutta (M 1), in an interesting passage, shows us how from mere cognizing, we go on to conceiving. The well-known tetrad *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*—**the 4 modes of cognition** or cognition tetrad—forms an important section in the Sutta (§§19-22), which shows how the unawakened conceive views through them, that is, by way of the 4 self-views. These are **the 4 modes of conception**, that is:²⁰

- (1) he conceives himself *as* ⟨the seen | the heard | the sensed | the known⟩,
- (2) he conceives himself *in* ⟨the seen | the heard | the felt | the known⟩,
- (3) he conceives himself *apart from* ⟨the seen | the heard | the felt | the known⟩,
- (4) he conceives, ⟨the seen | the heard | the felt | the known⟩ *is mine*. (M 1,19-22), SD 11.8

2.1.3.4 Each of these 4 statements is elaborated in its own passage forming a special section dealing with *conception* following the 4 means of cognition—that is, the seen (*diṭṭha*), the heard (*suta*), the sensed [felt] (*muta*) and the known (*viññāta*). The “**sensed**” or “**felt**” (*muta*) comprises the data of smell, taste and touch; “**thought**,” the data of introspection, abstract thought and imagination. The objects of perception are “conceived” when they are known in terms of “this is mine,” “I am this” and “this is my self” or in other ways that generate craving, conceit and views, which in turn fuel such conceivings (*maññanā*).²¹

2.1.4 “Disowning” I, me and mine

2.1.4.1 The Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22) gives a more elaborate and instructive version of the same process of conceiving [2.1.3.3], by way of **the 5 aggregates**, thus:

“Bhikshus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma, who has regard for true individuals and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma:

¹⁶ See **Karma**, SD 18.1.

¹⁷ On the Buddha’s “natural adaptation” of such words, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

¹⁸ On these terms, see SD 17.8a (6.1); **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (1).

¹⁹ It should be noted that the “3rd wave” of modern psychology is significantly indebted to Buddhism in their appropriation and adaptation from Buddhist doctrines and meditations.

²⁰ See SD 3.13 (5.2.2).

²¹ See V 4:2 & V:H 2:166 n3 where they are called “ignoble statements” (*anariya vohāra*); also SD 19.1 (4.3).

regards form thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 He regards feeling, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 He regards perception, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 He regards formations, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 He regards what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 And this ground for views, namely,
 ‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, ever-lasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as *eternity*’ —
 this, too, he regards thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’
 Regarding them thus, he is not anxious [agitated] regarding what is non-existent.”
 (M 22,16-17),SD 3.13

2.1.4.2 The suttas do not usually regard such conceptions as *maññanā* because this is wholesome conceiving—a process we can colloquially call “disowning”—avoiding the idea and usage of “I, me, mine”—that is, not identifying with any of the aggregates. Interestingly, the Sutta also includes the disowning of “**what is seen, hear, sensed, known**” (the 4 modes of cognition). This is famously formulated in **the Bāhiya teaching**,²² the main part of which runs thus:

In the seen	there will only be the seen;	<i>diṭṭhe</i>	<i>diṭṭha,mattam bhavissati;</i>
in the heard	there will only be the heard;	<i>sute</i>	<i>suta,mattam bhavissati;</i>
in the sensed	there will only be the sensed;	<i>mute</i>	<i>muta,mattam bhavissati;</i>
in the known	there will only be the known.	<i>viññāte</i>	<i>viññāta,mattam bhavissati.</i>

(U 1.10,16), SD 33.7²³

This verse is the crux of the sutta and of satipatthana practice. When we cognize the seen, the heard, the sensed or the known as “This is mine” (*etam mama*), there is craving (*tanhā*); when any of them is cognized as “This I am” (*eso’ham asmi*), there is conceit (*māna*); when cognized as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*), there is wrong view (*diṭṭhi*). This is the teachings of **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 3:68).²⁴ When properly done, such a practice does not generate “beliefs” but are direct experiences of reality.²⁵

In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door, not to be attended to. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is, an experience of reality (*param’attha*). When it reaches the mind-door and is evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings us suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, we would, in due course, see the 3 characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.²⁶

²² See **(Arahatta) Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/8), SD 33.7.

²³ This teaching is also given to Māluṅkya,putta, where here, **(Arahatta) Māluṅkya,putta S** (S 35.95,12/4:73) + SD 5.9 (3). Having heard this teaching, it is said that Bāhiya becomes an arhat, while Māluṅkya,putta attains arhathood during his ensuing solitary retreat. On the Bāhiya teaching, see **(Arahatta) Bāhiya S** (U 1.10,15-17) + SD 33.7 (1).

²⁴ **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2.

²⁵ See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

²⁶ See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta*, tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

2.2 COGNITION AND THE 4 BIASES

2.2.1 Self-identity

2.2.1.1 Thus, from what we cognize—what we see, hear, sense and know—we tend to **conceive** views, especially **the 4 self-views**, rooted in the 4 biases (*agati*) (greed, hate, delusion and fear),²⁷ which can be summarized in the following manner:

	<u>conceptual modes</u>	<u>biases</u>
(1) We conceive ourselves <i>as</i> X	identification	delusion <i>mohâgati</i>
(2) We conceive ourselves <i>in</i> X	projection	fear <i>bhayâgati</i>
(3) We conceive ourselves <i>apart from</i> X	objectification	hate <i>dosâgati</i>
(4) We conceive X as <i>mine</i>	transference	greed <i>chandâgati</i>

2.2.1.2 The **Paṭisambhidā, magga** gives a variation of these 4 conceptual modes, but reflecting the same idea, as evident in this comparative table:

	<u>4 basic modes of self-identity</u> <u>(regarding the 5 aggregates)</u>	<u>explanation</u>
(1) We conceive ourselves <i>as</i> X	(1) form (etc) <i>is</i> the self	lamp's flame = flame-colour
(2) We conceive ourselves <i>in</i> X	(3) the self <i>is in</i> form	a jewel in a casket
(3) We conceive ourselves <i>apart from</i> X	(4) <i>form</i> <i>is in</i> the self	the scent <i>is in</i> the flower
(4) We conceive X as <i>mine</i>	(2) the self <i>possesses</i> form	a tree possesses a shadow

2.2.1.3 Putting all these teachings together, we may reflect thus:

(1) When we conceive ourselves or a self as X (say, as some kind of soul), it is an identification rooted in *delusion*, because there is no eternal essence. We are ourselves like *the colour of a flame*, no different from it.

(2) When we conceive ourselves or a self as being in X (say, in some kind of universal soul), it is a projection of our *fear* into something we see as being safe; but this is a *delusion*, too, since there is no such universal soul. We view this self or soul in our body like *a jewel in its casket*.

(3) When we conceive ourselves (that is, eg, our body) as being apart from X (from such a personal or a universal soul), it is an objectification rooted in *hate*, such as seeing ourselves as being “impure,” “evil” or “sinful,” and that this *other* being or state is pure, etc. We imagine our self or soul to be able to exist separately from our body (but not the other way around)—just as a flower's scent can still be detected even outside or without the flower (the scent comes from the flower).

For example, we view that some kind of separate eternal soul inhabits our body. This is a delusion because we have conceived all these ideas, imagining ourselves (our body, etc) to be corrupt, and this “other” to be pure, etc.

(4) When we conceive X as “mine,” we imagine that we possess that self or soul and have control over it—like a tree possessing a shadow. This is a psychological transference in the sense that we “transfer” desirable qualities we once experienced, say, in the love and security of a parent onto such that soul or creator of such a soul.

²⁷ See **Sigal'ovāda S** (D 31,4+5), SD 4.1; **Āgati S 1** (A 4.17), SD 89.7; **Āgati S 2** (A 4.18), **Āgati S 3** (A 4.19); **Bhatt'ud-desaka S** (A 4.20); **Saṅgaha Bala S** (A 9.5,6.4) n, SD 2.21; SD 31.12 (6.4.1.3).

The reality is that we have no real control over our self, body, mind or existence. The tree has no control of its shadow, which depends on the light shining on it. This light may be said to represent our past actions (karma) and present conditions (*paccaya*).

When these conceptual modes—identification, projection, objectification and transference—are applied to each of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness), we get a total of **20 self-views**.²⁸

2.2.2 The 3 unwholesome roots

2.2.2.1 Whenever we commit bad (“fall into bias,” *agatiṃ gacchati*) or omit to do good (when we should); hence, we do what should not be done—this is called “falling into a bias” (*agati, gamana*)—it is invariably rooted in one of the 4 biases (*agati*) or motives (*thāna*) of greed, hate, delusion or fear.

Greed or lust (*lobha*) acts as a bias when we habitually measure satisfaction in terms of “having” rather than “being”—that happiness, for example, is possessing a lot of money, instead of actually *enjoying* what we have to its optimum extent. As the Buddha says, “Contentment is the greatest wealth” (*santuṭṭhī paramaṃ dhanam*, **Dh 204b**). Greed, then, means never having enough and never enjoying what we have.

Hate is the opposite side of the same coin as greed. As we go in quest for what we lust after, hate pushes away whatever we see as not helping greed, not giving us pleasure. The power of greed can be so great that it generates such strong hate that is willing and able to reject, even destroy, whatever we see as distracting us from the path of greed.

While hate is the easiest to overcome—it weakens once we acknowledge it—greed is more deceptive and more difficult to acknowledge. Greed is constantly fed by **delusion** with ideas of the permanence of what is really impermanent, of the pleasure of what is really unsatisfactory, and the essence of what is basically non-self. These are the universal characteristics of all conditioned existence: whatever exists is necessarily impermanent. Whatever is impermanent will pass away. Indeed, everything in this world is conditioned, and hence impermanent, and will pass away.

2.2.2.2 Delusion works by distracting us from the real presence of things—what we *see, hear, feel* [*sense*] or *know* can only happen here and now. We can only *see, hear, feel* or *know* whatever is impermanent. Impermanence is change; change is the flux and movement of reality. Only when things change we can *know* it meaningfully as sight, sound, feeling [*sensing*] and knowledge. **Knowledge** is always that of change.

When delusion hides change from us, distracting us with greed and hate—grasping what we see as pleasurable and worthwhile, rejecting what we see as lacking pleasure and value—it generates and sustains **ignorance** in us. This ignorance is our not knowing what is really going on right here before our very eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

Delusion spurs us to run to the glorious past so that we desire to resurrect it, or the painful past we want to avoid or destroy; delusion spurs us to jump into the hopeful future to imagine possible glory or boundless pleasure that await us. The reality is that the past is dead and gone, and the future never comes.

2.2.2.3 Looking for the dead past and never-coming future, we are lost to the present, too. As we keep looking back into the past and wishing for the future, we fail to live in this presence of contentment

²⁸ On the 20 kinds of self-views, see SD 19.1 (2.2).

[2.2.2.1]. Unanchored to the present, the only true reality, we are blown about by the winds of **the 16 doubts**. The suttas mention the following speculations that we habitually have:²⁹

- (1) “Was I in the past?”
- (2) “Was I not in the past?”
- (3) “What was I in the past?”
- (4) “How was I in the past?”
- (5) “Having been what, did I become what in the past? [What was I before I became such and such in the past?]”
- (6) “Will I be in the future?”
- (7) “Am I *not* in the future?”
- (8) “What will I be in the future?”
- (9) “How will I be in the future?”
- (10) “Having been *what*, will I become what in the future? [What now would lead me to that future state?]”
- (11) “Am I?”³⁰
- (12) “Am I *not*?”
- (13) “What am I?”
- (14) “How am I?”
- (15) “Where has this being come from?”
- (16) “Where will it [this being] go?”

2.2.3 Fear

2.2.3.1 The 4 biases [2.2.1] are an extension of the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala, mūla*) or greed, hate and delusion, with **fear** as the 4th bias or motivation for doing the bad and unwholesome. Modern psychology defines **fear** as feelings “elicited by tangible, realistic dangers, as opposed to **anxiety**, which often arises out of proportion to the actual threat or danger involved.”³¹ However, “fear” as a bias in the set of 4 biases contains both fear as a reaction to real dangers, with a significant dose of anxiety.

2.2.3.2 Fear, often paired or overlapping with **guilt** (an anxiety over perceived wrongdoing), is a common conditioned reaction of faithful believers in some supreme being, to whom one’s devotion must be channeled—as a slave to his master or a serf to his feudal lord. Fear, then, works on our baser emotions rooted in greed, hate and delusion. We must fear the supreme being, that is, our desire is that of devotion to him. Hate, then, should be directed to his perceived unbelievers and enemies.

Even in a more “open” system like Buddhism, a believer or practitioner may feel fear when he mistakes the precepts to be commandments to be obeyed or rituals that purifies one, and mistakes meditation as attracting magical powers or a means of communicating with Buddha in other realms, and so on. Or, fear could arise when we are devoted to a guru, and feel that we have not followed his teachings or executed his instructions.

²⁹ These are the **16 doubts**: **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,7 f), SD 30.3; **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,23), SD 7.10; **Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.20), SD 39.5. On *present and future* conceivings, see **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,31/3:246), SD 4.17; **Samanupassanā Sutta** (S 22.47/3:47), SD 26.12; **Yava,kalāpī S** (S 35.258,8-12/4:202 f), SD 40a.3.

³⁰ Comy: He doubts his own aggregates, or his own existence (MA 1:69).

³¹ *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2nd ed, 2001:245 Fear.

We simply need to be reminded here that in early Buddhism, the teaching is always above the teacher.³² Our respect for the teaching entails that we should study, practise and realise it for ourself. Just like the Buddha and the arhats, we, too should walk the same path of awakening, or at least aspire to head for that path in this life itself.³³

2.3 OCCURRENCES OF THE PHRASE

The phrase *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* occurs in such discourses as follows (not a comprehensive list):

Pāsādika Sutta	D 29/3:135	SD 40a.6
Mūla,pariyāya Sutta	M 1,43-46/1:4 f	SD 11.8
Alagaddūpama Sutta	M 22,15(5)/1:135 f	SD 3.13
Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta	M 143,14/3:261	SD 23.9
Vata Sutta	S 24.1/3:203	
Etam Mama Sutta	S 24.2/3:204	
No Ca Me Siyā Sutta	S 24.4/3:206	
N’atthi Dinna Sutta	S 24.5/3:208	SD 65.16
Karoto Sutta	S 24.6/3:209	SD 23.10
Hetu Sutta	S 24.7/3:210	SD 23.6
Mahā Diṭṭhi Sutta	S 24.8/3:213	
Sassata Diṭṭhi Sutta	S 24.9/3:213	
Asassata Diṭṭhi Sutta	S 24.9/3:214	
N’eva Hoti Na Na Hoti Tathāgata Sutta	S 24.18/3:216	
Bahu,kāra Sutta	A 4.24/2:24, 25 ×4	
Anariya Vohāra Sutta 1	A 4.247/2:246	SD 53.6
Ariya Vohāra Sutta 1	A 4.248/2:246	SD 53.6
Anariya Vohāra Sutta 2	A 4.249/2:246	SD 53.6
Ariya Vohāra Sutta 2	A 4.250/2:246	SD 53.6
Anariya Vohāra Sutta 3	A 8.67/4:307	SD 53.6
Ariya Vohāra Sutta 3	A 8.68/4:307	SD 53.6
Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 1	A 11.7/5:320 (×8)	SD 53.20a
Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 2	A 11.8/5:321 f (×4)	SD 53.20b
Sandha Sutta	A 11.9/5:324-326 (×5)	SD 82.5
Samādhi Sutta 1	A 11.19/5:355 f (×4)	
Samādhi Sutta 2	A 11.20/5:356 (×4)	
Samādhi Sutta 3	A 11.21/5:357 f (×4)	
(Tathāgata) Loka Sutta	It 4.13/112/121	SD 15.7
Vibhaṅga (Abhidhamma)	Vbh 939/376, 1036-1037/429 (×5)	
Parivāra (Vinaya)	V 5:125	

³² See **The teacher or the teaching?** SD 3.14.

³³ **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

2.4 DHAMMA, SAṄGAṆĪ

2.4.1 The Dhamma, saṅgaṇī defines the 4 modes of cognition as follows:

*Rūp'āyatanam diṭṭham,
sadd'āyatanam sutam,
gandh'āyatanam rasāyatanam
phoṭṭhabb'āyatanam mutam,
sabbam rūpam manasā viññātam rūpam.*

The form-base is “the seen”;
the sound-base is “the heard”;
the smell-base, the taste-base, and
the touch-base are “the sensed”;³⁴
all form is form known by the mind.³⁵
(Dhs §961/177)

2.4.2 Commenting on her own translation of the above passage [2.4.1], **C A F Rhys Davids**, in *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* (1900, 3rd ed, 1974), her Dhamma, saṅgaṇī translation, notes:

I am under the impression that the first three members of this group are survivals of an older tradition, belonging to an age when the five senses had not been co-ordinated by psychological analysis comparable to that effected by the earlier Buddhist school, and when *mano* and its functions, expressed here (in part) by this old past participle, were more vaguely conceived.

In the Prāśna Upaniṣad, eg which is probably older than the Abhidhamma, either the five senses are grouped as above under *manas*, eye and ear, or the last two are alone held worthy to rank with the divine elements of life.

If it be contended that the former interpretation is not plausible, it should be remembered that, in the (?) older Bṛhad,āraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.5.3), it is said that by *manas* we know when we are *touched* from behind. It is as though the tradition were endeavouring to say, smell, taste, touching, *without* the aid either of sight or of hearing, require a greater effort of inference, of mental construction, of imagination, to realize the external cause, or potential concrete mental percept, than either sight or hearing.
(Dhs:RD 221 n1)

We have already noted the Upanishadic precedents [1.2.3].

2.4.3 Sets of senses

2.4.3.1 It is clear from the suttas, that **the cognition tetrad** of “the seen, the heard, the sensed, and the known” is only used in the context of disproving or rejecting the notion of an abiding self, or to help us understand that all our experiences are “non-self,” with an *ātman* (P *attā*). In other words, it is used almost specifically against the Upanishadic teachings of the abiding *ātman* [1.2.3.1].

2.4.3.2 The fundamental early Buddhist teaching on the human senses are that they comprise the 5 physical senses and the mind, together forming the 6 “internal sense-bases,” and their respective 6 “external sense-objects,” thus:

³⁴ Comy explains *muta* as “having considered the sense of that which is to be known” (*munitvā jānitabbaṭṭhena*) and “on account of arisen knowledge when touched (by a sense-contact)” (*phusitvā pi ñāṇ'uppatti, kāranato*). (DhsA 338)

³⁵ Ie, that which should be known with the mind-consciousness (*mano, viññāṇena jānitabbaṃ*, DhsA 338)

<u>Sense-bases</u>		<u>Sense-objects</u>	
eye	<i>cakkhu</i>	form	<i>rūpa</i>
ear	<i>sota</i>	sound	<i>sadda</i>
nose	<i>ghāna</i>	smell	<i>gandhā</i>
tongue	<i>jivhā</i>	taste	<i>rasa</i>
body	<i>kāya</i>	touch	<i>phoṭṭhabba</i>
mind	<i>mano</i>	mind-object	<i>dhamma</i> (D 3:243; M 3:216; Vbh 70)

2.4.3.3 Based on this dodecade of 6 internal sense-bases and 6 external sense-objects, the Buddha gives numerous teachings based on variations of it. We have many suttas that work with the 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*),³⁶ or 12 sense-bases (*dvādas-āyatana*),³⁷ or 18 elements (*aṭṭharasa dhātu*),³⁸ or even beyond these, expanding the list to include the respective sense-contacts (*phassa*) and then showing how craving arises.³⁹ Beyond this, we have the formula of dependent arising and their conditional links (*pacca-yā-kāra*) totaling up to 12.⁴⁰

In short, while the Upanishads were still struggling with the 4 means of cognition, the Buddha had already conceived the 6 sense-faculties and their variations. However, the cognition tetrad also serve as a convenient shorthand for the 6 sense-bases and their 12 sense-bases, such as in **the Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1) [2.1.3.3] and **the (Arahatta) Māluṅkya,putta Sutta** (S 35.95) [2.1.4.2]. For a fuller exposition of the non-self nature of our whole being, the Buddha would use the full 18-element formula or go beyond that, as in **the Bahu Dhātuka Sutta** (M 115) and **the Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 137).⁴¹

3 The cognition triad

3.1 THE COGNITION TRIAD IN SUTTA NIPĀTA

3.1.1 Occurrence and provenance

3.1.1.1 The less common phrase or **cognition triad**—*diṭṭha suta muta* (that is, without *viññāta*)—probably older, occurs in the Canon only in the Sutta Nipāta, where throughout it means “seen, heard or thought”:

Suddh’aṭṭhaka Sutta	Sn 793	Comy: Nm 96,13
Param’aṭṭhaka Sutta	Sn 798c	Comy: Nm 106,14
Jarā Sutta	Sn 813b	Comy: Nm 137,21
Mahā Viyūha Sutta	Sn 901b, 914b	Comy: Nm 315,5, 334,8
Nanda Māṇava Pucchā	Sn 1083c	Comy: Nc:Be 25:121,8

These suttas are preserved in the oldest strata of the Pali Tipitaka. The first 4 suttas are from **the Aṭṭhaka Vagga** (S ch 4), while the 5th is from **the Pārāyana Vagga** (Sn ch 5). The fact that they are quoted by name in the Vinaya (V 1:196), the Saṃyutta (S 3:9,12) and the Udāna (U 5), shows that they have

³⁶ **Saḷāyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,4), SD 29.5

³⁷ See eg **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

³⁸ See **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115,4), SD 29.1a.

³⁹ See **Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,4+5), SD 29.5

⁴⁰ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

⁴¹ M 115 (M 137), SD 29.5 & M 137 (SD 29.1a).

existed as independent works before being incorporated into the Sutta Nipāta. They probably existed even during the Buddha's own time.⁴²

3.1.1.2 These suttas from the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga [3.1.1.1] record the Buddha as teaching precepts and practices in contrast to the brahminical teachings of the Upanishads with which his audience are familiar (often enough from the questions that they ask). **The cognition triad** of *diṭṭha suta muta* is clearly the Buddha's answer (in opposition) to the Upanishadic doctrines of (*draṣṭa śrota manta*), for example, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where it says: "As a pupil, he is one who sees, hears, thinks, understands, performs sacrifices and perceives."⁴³

3.1.2 The cognition triad and the 3 doors

3.1.2.1 The triad of "seen, heard, thought" (*diṭṭha,suta,muta*) are an early version of the "3 doors" (*dvāra*) or karma, that is, those of body (*kāya*), speech (*vācā*) and mind (*citta*). Of the cognition triad, *diṭṭha*, "the seen" obliquely refers to the body or form, the "seen." This somewhat awkward triad in understandably later replaced by the germane term, "the 3 doors" (*dvāra*) of karmic action.

This cognitive triad and the karmic triad are, in these early texts synonymous in the sense that they refer to the "whole being" of a person, especially in term of whether he is completely pure or not. When one is purified in terms of body, speech and mind—the seen, heard and thought—one is liberated.

3.1.2.2 In all the commentarial passages of the Mahā Niddesa and the Cūḷa Niddesa glossing on the phrase, *diṭṭha suta muta*, speak of Māra as referring to our defilements, and that purity (that is, awakening) arises when one "has given up the all by way of purity of the seen, hear and thought" (*ye sabbā diṭṭha,suta,muta,suddhiyo pahāya*, Nc:Be 25:121,11). The "all" (*sabba*) here refers to the world as our sense-experiences, that is, body, speech and mind represented by the cognition triad, *diṭṭha,suta,muta*.

The cognition triad refers to our whole being in terms of karma. In giving up the world of "the seen, heard and thought," we leave behind all our karma, and awaken to nirvana. Clearly, *muta* cannot refer to what is "sensed"—the tasted, the smelled and the thought—since they are already implied therein.

3.2 THE VERB FOR MUTA

3.2.1 The British Pali scholar, **R C Childers**, in his *Dictionary of the Pali Language* (1875), takes *muta* as the "participle of the perfect passive" of *munāti*, defining it as "thought, supposed, considered." Understandably, he renders *diṭṭham sutam mutam* as "seen, heard, thought," and further quotes *amute muta, vāditā*, "one who says he has thought when he has not thought."⁴⁴

Childers is helpful in identifying *munāti* as the verb of *muta*, since it is rather obscure [1.1.1]. The verbs of the other three—the seen, the heard and the known—are *dassati* (or *passati*), *suṇāti* and *vijānāti* respectively, and are well known. [5.2]

⁴² See Ency Bsm: Aṭṭhaka Vagga & Pārāyana Vagga; see also Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, Aṭṭhakavagga.

⁴³ *Upasīdan draṣṭā bhavati śrotā bhavati mantā bhavati boddhā bhavati kartā bhavati vijñātā bhavati* (CU 7.8.1). The phrase *draṣṭa śrota manta* recurs at CU 7.9.1,

⁴⁴ The terminology appears in a set of 4 statements or discourses (as in **Mūla,pariyāya S**, M 1.3/1:19-22) ; only the first is mentioned here, viz, **Saṅgīti S**, D 3:232: as the 3rd of the 4 ignoble modes of expression, *anariya,vohāra*), D 33,1.11(43); **Vohāra S 1** (A 4.250/2:246); also at **Anariya Vohāra S** (A 8.67/4:306), **Ariya Vohāra S** (A 8.67/4:307); **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 939/376, 1036-1037/430); **Parivāra** (V 5:125).

3.2.2 Some 40 years later, the German orientalist, **W Geiger**, makes the same note in his *A Pali Grammar* (1916; rev 1994), thus:

muta, “thought” (Sn 714), *muti*, “thought” (Sn 846), *mutimā* (Sn 321) = Skt *matimān*, should be regarded only as dialectical side-forms of *mata* [past participle of *maññati*], etc. (1994 §18.1)

3.2.3 However, it seems that ***muta*** means “the thought” only when in **the cognition triad**—*diṭṭha suta muta*—as the phrase is used in the Sutta Nipāta verses we have noted [3.1.1]. In **the cognition tetrad** of *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*, the component *muta* has only one sense: “the sensed (or the felt)” [2.1.1].

However, as we shall soon see, *muta* has a troubled childhood and growth [5]. While it means “the sensed” in **the cognition tetrad**, it again means “the thought” in the company of the rare phrase ***diṭṭha suta paṭigha muta*** [5.3.1] and has other senses when used alone [5].

3.4 I B Horner, in her Vinaya translation, notes of *muta*:

The Old Commentary’s definition of *muta* shows that the sense-functions of nose, tongue and body had been differentiated by the time that it was compiled. Hence I translated *muta* by “sensed” and not by “thought,” although etymologically “thought” may be more correct. Possibly *muta*, as a term covering these three sense-functions, dates from a time prior to their differentiation. That *muta* does not include the sense-functions of the eye and ear suggests that these were recognized earlier than the others, their specific terminology emerging earlier. Cf VA 736; and *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, 2nd ed, 221 n1, for *muta* pointing to an older tradition of a time when the five senses had not been co-ordinated. (V:H 2:166 n5; normalized)

And in a following note, she adds:

At eight Sn passages, *diṭṭha suta muta* are combined, sometimes with other items, but not with *viññāta*. The first three may therefore belong to some old tradition, originally threefold, of *viññāta* is here a function.⁴⁵ (V:H 166 n5, normalized)

We have already noted some of the “eight Sn passages” [3.1], and will not examine the changes in the meaning of *muta* in other usages and contexts.

4 The evolution of sense awareness

4.1 THE BUDDHA’S PROGRESSIVE APPROACH

4.1.1 From our discussion thus far, we can safely surmise that with the Buddha’s teachings, there arises a comprehensive awareness of the sense faculties, as we know them today. Even the early Upanishads do not refer to the 5 physical senses (*pañc’indriya*), although they allude to the mind. We can more or less see, on a close examination of the early Buddhist texts, some kind of evolution of the awareness of the human senses.

⁴⁵ She adds: “See S 1:270 = Tha 1216, where *diṭṭha suta muta* are combined with *paṭigha*; and cf SA 1:270. See also *Psalms of the Brethren* [Tha:RD] 398 n9; *Kindred Sayings* [S:RD] 1:237 n1; and *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, 2nd ed, 211 n1, for Upaniṣad refs.” (Normalized)

4.1.2 Amongst some of the oldest Buddhist texts, especially in the discourses of the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga—such as the Suddh'aṭṭhaka Sutta (Sn 793) and the Nanda Māṇava Pucchā (Sn 1083)—we only see the threefold modes of perception (diṭṭha suta muta) [3], with the omission of *viññāta*. Apparently, in the early years of his ministry, the Buddha resorts to a simplified or abridged perception-formula, accommodating the common understanding of the human faculties at that time.

4.1.3 In the later discourses, we almost always meet with the fourfold cognition list (diṭṭha suta muta viññāta) [2]. This set of 4 modes of cognition act as a bridge to the full Buddhist conception of the human faculties, that is, of the 5 physical senses (pañc'indriya),⁴⁶ and the more common 6 sense-bases (saḷ-āyatana).⁴⁷ This latter is often used in the teachings on not-self, such as in **the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28).⁴⁸

The Āditta Pariyāya Sutta is addressed to the fire-worshipping matted-hair ascetics, the Kassapa brothers, who are advanced in their religious learning and spiritual practice for the Buddha to approach them so early in his ministry. This Sutta contains the first mention of the 6 sense-bases in the Buddhist scripture. As such, my usage of “evolution” here applies as a whole to the growing awareness of the faculties in the cultural history of India, but in terms of the Buddha’s teachings, he of course is aware of it all along, but introduces the idea in a *progressive* manner, depending on the capability of his audience.

4.1.4 Notice that in the 1st discourse (**the Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta**, S 56.11)⁴⁹ and the 2nd discourse (**the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta**, S 22.59),⁵⁰ the sense-faculties are not mentioned at all even though there is the context for them. In the second discourse, the main teaching model is that of the 5 aggregates (pañca-k,khandha),⁵¹ a model that is well known by non-Buddhists then.⁵²

Then, in **the Māluṅkyaputta Sutta** (S 35.95), we see the Buddha applying both the 6-sense-base (*saḷ-āyatana*) model and the four-perception (*diṭṭha-suta-muta-viññāta*) model in his admonition to Maluṅkyaputta.⁵³ As the Buddha’s ministry progresses, we see more teachings using the model of the 6 sense-bases, alongside those dealing with the 5 aggregates, as in **the Vaṅḡisa Sutta** (S 754/8.12/1:196; Tha 1255).

4.2 EVOLUTIONARY EVIDENCE

4.2.1 Muta: “felt” or “thought”?

4.2.1.1 Occasionally, we see evidence of independent or contextual references to the senses or modes of cognition. We find this interesting ancient passage, composed by Vaṅḡisa, in **the Aratī Sutta** (S 8.2):

⁴⁶ *Panc'indriyāni: cakkhu'ndriyaṃ ... kāy'indriyaṃ* (D 3:239,10 ≈ M 1:295,5 f = S 5:217,24 f); *pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ avakkanti hoti: cakkhu'ndriyassa ... kāy'assa* (S 3:46,22).

⁴⁷ *Cha-y-imāni indriyāni ... cakkhu'ndriyaṃ ... kāy'indriyaṃ man'indriyaṃ* (S 5:205,8 f; *asekho bhikkhu cha indriyāni pajānāti: cakkhu'ndriyaṃ ... man'indriyaṃ* (S 5:230,23; *indriyānaṃ avekallatā dullabhā lokasmim* (A 3:441,7, *mana,-chaṭṭhānaṃ*, AA 3: 414,16).

⁴⁸ S 35.28/4:19 f (SD 1.3).

⁴⁹ S 56.11/5:420-424 (SD 1.1).

⁵⁰ S 22.59/3:66-68 (SD 1.2).

⁵¹ D 22/2:305; M 9/1:49; S 5.10/1:135; Vbh 1; sometimes the models appear together, eg the aggregates, the sense-bases and the elements (S 754/8.12/1:196; Tha 1255).

⁵² On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

⁵³ S 35.95/4:72-75 = SD 5.9.

*Upadhīsu janā gadhitāse,
diṭṭha,sute paṭighe ca mute ca
ettha vinodaya chandam anejo
yo ettha na limpāti tarā munim āhu.*

People are bound to their birth-bases,⁵⁴
to what is seen, heard, sensed and thought.
Who here, having rid of desire, unshaken,
who clings to nothing here—they call him a sage.
(S 714/8.2/1:186 = Tha 1216), SD 53.7

The Commentaries either show independence in their interpretation, or have difficulties in trying to understand the sense of the terms in this verse (S 714b). Buddhaghosa, in his **Saṃyutta Commentary** explains *paṭigha* (“the sensed”) as comprising smell and taste (*gandha,rasa*), and *muta* as “the felt”⁵⁵ (that is, by direct contact) denoting a tactile object (*phoṭṭhabb’ārammaṇa*, SA 1:269). [2.1.1.3]

4.2.2 Commentarial difficulties

4.2.2.1 Dhammapāla, in his **Thera,gāthā Commentary** on the same verse by Vaṅḡsa (Tha 1216), quotes the Sār’attha,pakāsinī (SA 1:170), but gives his own interpretation. He, in fact, reverses the explanations: *paṭighe’ti ghaṭṭanīye phoṭṭhabbe*. *Mute’ti vuttāvasese mute, gandharasesūti vuttam hoti* (ThaA 3:190,15-20). *Paṭigha* is glossed as “touches that impact” (*ghaṭṭanīye phoṭṭhabbe*), and *muta* as “smell and taste” (*gandha,rasa*).

4.2.2.2 The explanation in the Sārattha,pakāsinī is, as **C A F Rhys Davids** notes in her translation of the Saṃyutta (S:RD 1:237 n1) is an attempt to include the usual 5 senses in four words. That is, we see here, as **Bodhi**, points out, “*paṭigha* assuming the usual role of *muta* and the latter serving in place of *viññāta*” (S:B 458 n494).

Thus, in deference to the Commentaries (SA & ThaA), Bodhi adds, “I prefer to translate the present tetrad [at S 714 above] in a way that comprises only the five external sense bases and thus as signifying the five cords of sensual pleasure.” (id)

4.2.3 The rule of context

4.2.3.1 Now, remember the “**context rule**”: the first and final arbiter of a good translation is *its context* [2.1.1.7]. In S 714, Vaṅḡsa refers to the “birth-bases” (*upadhi*), one of the trickiest of Pali words, often confused with *upādi*, “substrate (of life).” A rule of thumb is that *upādi* is usually used in connection with the “final passing away” (*parinibbāna*), while *upadhi* refers to the “fuel” or “baggage” of rebirth, and, as such, also translated as “acquisition.” While *upadhi* has a “karmic tone” to it, *upādi* simply means “the 5 aggregates.” Otherwise, they practically have the same sense or overlap closely in sense, differing only in usage.

4.2.3.2 If *upadhi* [4.2.1.1] means “acquisition,” or the burden we pile up and roll up the hill of sam-sara (like Sisyphus pushing his rock uphill) or a dung-beetle his dung-ball. If *upadhi* is the burden we build up in life, *upādi* is the fuel or motivation that keep us to instinctively, uncontrollably, that keeps us going—like Sisyphus, we think it is something enjoyable to so!

Upadhi is easily and often confounded with *upadi*. But *upādi* is very close, a near-synonym, of “clinging” (*upādāna*) of the 5 aggregates—then, surely, all our 6 sense-bases contribute to it or them. *Upādi*, then, are our “birth-bases” that keeps us going life after life.

⁵⁴ See SD 28.11 (3.2).

⁵⁵ Bodhi’s tr: S:B 282.

Both *upadhi* and *upādi* are the mental aspect behind our samsaric existence. If *upadhi* is what we “have,” then *upādi* is what we “are.” *Upadhi* is the diachronic (“daily, this moment”) collecting, acquisition; *upādi* is the synchronic (“over time”) expending—the insatiable shopping around for more acquisitions—that keeps going life after life. Hence, if we translated *diṭṭha, suta paṭighe ca mute ca* as “to what is seen, heard, sensed and felt” (following the Commentary), we omit the most potent of the birth-bases: the mind!

4.3.2.3 Linguists and philosopher are aware of how fluid and plastic language can be. Even though Pali is not technically a “living language,” it is not exactly a “dead language,” either. It has a life of its own as a literary language (Kunstsprache) that evolved for the sole purpose of preserving the early Buddhist texts. It is the language of the most complete canon of the early teachings to have come down to us. Pali is much simpler than Sanskrit but just as rich in depth and play on words whose senses seem to grow in clarity and significance as we mature in our spiritual development. These texts are, after all, records of the Buddha’s awakening and accounts of his awakened disciples.

4.3.2.4 Philosopher **Donald Davidson**, in his essay, “A nice derangement of epitaphs” (1986),⁵⁶ gives us some insight into such a plasticity of language and the vitality of contextuality. He suggests that mala-propisms (for example) show how people process the meanings of words. He argues that language competence must not merely involve learning a set meaning for each word, and then rigidly applying those semantic rules to decode what is said (or written).

Rather, he says, we should continually make use of other contextual information to interpret the meaning of utterances. Then, we must adjust our understanding of each word’s meaning based on those insights. In short, we need to understand words, phrases and sentences in proper **context**, especially in translating Pali into English and reading those translations.

4.3.2.5 This is what I call **the “rule of context”** [4.2.3]. In the cognition triad—*diṭṭha, suta, muta*—we have noted, *muta* can only mean “thought,” referring to the “mind-door” of karma [3.1.2.1]. Here, *muta* does not have its usual sense as a component of the cognition tetrad—*diṭṭha, suta, muta, viññāta*—where it means “sensed” or “felt” [2]. In the context of **S 714**, *muta* can only mean “thought”—this gives us a complete list of the factors that contribute to the “birth-bases.”⁵⁷

5 The meanings and translation of *muta*

5.1 THE PROBLEM WITH *MUTA*

5.1.1 Let us look at *muta* again, and perhaps even identify its pattern of evolution in the suttas. But let us first recall what we know of *muta*. Usually, the Commentaries would explain *muta* as comprising smell, taste and touch [2.1.1.2; 5.5], and *viññāta* as mental objects [7]. The difficulty of translating the term *muta* is attested by its differing translations, the best known, of which are listed here:

⁵⁶ D Davidson, “A nice derangement of epitaphs” in R Grandy & R Warner, *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, Oxford University Press, 1986:157-174.

⁵⁷ On *upadhi*, see SD 53.7 (2.3.1.2).

	<u>Translator</u>	<u>Text reference</u>	<u>Translation reference</u>	
"thought"	R C Childers	DPL	<i>sv muto</i>	
	W Fausböll	Sn 793, 798 etc	SBE 10:151, 153 etc	
	Geiger & Norman	<i>Pali Grammar</i>	1916, 2000:§18	
	K R Norman	Tha 1216	Tha:N 290 n1216	
"gedacht," <i>thought</i>	W Geiger	<i>Pali Literatur und Sprache</i>	1916:47,34	
"thought of"	T W Rhys Davids	D 33,4.11(43)/3:231	D:RD 3:223,10+12	
	B C Law	KvuA 38	KvuA:L 47	
"considered"	Pe Maung Tin	DhsA 338	DhsA:PR 439	
"imagined"	C A F Rhys Davids	Dhs 961/177	Dhs:RD 221 & n1	
"felt"	T W Rhys Davids	D 29,29/3:135	D:RD 3:127,6 + n	
	Bodhi	S 8.2*/1:186	S:B 714*/282	
"experienced/felt"	K R Norman	Sn 714	Sn:N 285 n714	
"touch(ed)"	C A F Rhys Davids	S 8.2/1:186	S:RD 1:237	
"sensed"	I B Horner	V 4:2,25 (Pāc 1.2.1)	V:H 2:166 n4, 167	
	M Walshe	D 3:232	D:W 493 f (43-46)	
	R C Chalmers	M 1,21/1:3	M:C 1:2,3	
	I B Horner	M 1,21/1:3	M:H 1:5	
	Ñāṇamoli/Bodhi	M 1,21/1:3	M:ÑB 86	
	Bodhi	M 1, Mūla,pariyāya tr	<i>The Root of Existence</i> (1980:31 f, 69)	
	F L Woodward	A 4.250/2:246	A:W 2:251	
	Bodhi	A 4.250/2:246	A:B 612	
	"sensing"	Ñāṇamoli et al	VbhA 2075/412	VbhA:Ñ 2:157
	"sensed otherwise"	U Thittila	Vbh 1036-1037/429	Vbh:T 548

5.2 MUTA AS "KNOWN"

5.2.1 German Pali scholar, **Wilhelm Geiger**, in his *Pāli Grammar* (§18.1), states that *muta*—like related words, *muti* ("thought," Sn 846), *mutimā*, Sn 321 = Skt *matimān*, Sn 714), should be regarded as dialectical side-forms of *mata*⁵⁸ ("thought, understood, considered," Vbh 2). **Muti** (derived, by the labialization of *-a-* → *-u-*, from *mati*, "mind, opinion, thought") in **Sn 846** has the sense of "feeling (by the senses other than seeing and hearing)."⁵⁹

This word *mata*, however, is a late form in Pali, and is related to the Sanskrit *manta*, "think, reflect." The form **mata**, a participle of *manteti*, "to think; to take counsel," comes from √MAN, "to think," and should not be confused with its homonym, *mata*, "dead," derived from √MR, "dead."

This wordy exercise, tedious as it is, help us see the link between the Pali of the Buddha's lessons to what he is addressing, that is, the Upanishadic views rooted in or promoting the abiding self (*ātman*) [1.2.3.1], which he rejects.

5.2.2 We have noted that the verbs *dassati* (or *passati*), *suṇāti* and *vijānāti* respectively of *diṭṭha*, *śuta* and *viññāta* are well known. But **munāti**, the verb for *muta* is not common. It is a synonym of *maññati*, "he thinks," which is very common. However, from the sutta usages of these two words, we will see an important difference: while *munāti* usually refers to "think" in a positive sense (of bringing wisdom)

⁵⁸ This is from √MAN, "to think," and should not be confused with a different form, *mata*, from √MR, "dead."

⁵⁹ See Sn:N 312 n714 & 353 n846.

(DhA 3:396),⁶⁰ *maññati* has a negative connotation of bringing about “thought proliferation” (*papañca*), which, in turn, creates a jungle of views.⁶¹

<p><i>na monena munī hoti mūḷha,rūpo aviddasu yo ca tulaṃ va paggayha varam ādāya paṇḍito</i> (Dh 268)</p>	<p>Not by silence is one a sage, who is confused and ignorant. One, as if holding up a balance, takes hold of the best---he is wise--</p>
<p><i>pāpāni parivajjeti sa munī tena so muni yo munāti ubho loke muni tena pavuccati</i> (Dh 269)</p>	<p>rejecting the all the bad, he is a sage. For that reason, he is a sage, who knows both in the world [who knows both worlds]⁶²— hence, he is called a sage.</p>

5.3 MUTA AS “THOUGHT”

5.3.1 Perhaps, the earliest usage of *muta* reflects its popular usage outside of Buddhism, as found in the Sanskrit traditions of the day. This usage is reflected in **the Aratī Sutta** (S 8.2), where, clearly, the context dictates that we must translate *muta* as “**thought**,” thus:

<p><i>Upadhīsu janā gadhitāse, diṭṭha,sute paṭighe ca mute ca</i></p>	<p>People are bound to their birth-basis, to what is seen, heard, sensed and <i>thought</i>.</p>
<p><i>ettha vinodaya chandam anejo yo ettha na limpāti taṃ munim āhu.</i></p>	<p>Who here, having rid of desire, unshaken, who clings to nothing here—they call him a sage. (S 714/8.2/1:186 = Tha 1216), SD 53.7</p>

We have already discussed this interesting usage of *muta* elsewhere [4.2.1.1].

5.3.2 Bodhi, however, renders line b as “To what is seen, heard, sensed, and felt” [2.1.1.3], explaining that he does so “in a way that comprises only the five external sense bases and thus as signifying the five cords of sensual pleasure” (S:B 458 n494). However, the context clearly refers to the arhat (the sage, *muni*), who is mentally unaffected by the impact of *all* the 6 senses. Hence, we need to include all the sense-faculties (as reflected in the translation above).

Here is a good case where Pali words are used in a non-technical sense in the early Buddhist texts. The sense of such words has to be teased out from the context and—in this case—how other words are used. Since *paṭigha* here clearly refers to “sense-impact” or simply “sensing,” we can only render *muta* as “thought,” which also completes and conveys the import of the whole verse.

5.4 MUTA AS “EXPERIENCED”

5.4.1 Now let us examine a related line from **the Nālaka Sutta** (Sn 3.11), from this verse:

⁶⁰ Comy ad Dh 296 explains: “Any person ... as if holding up a balance and measuring, ‘These are internal aggregates; these are external ones,’ and so on, he thinks of these two (in the same way); hence, he is called a sage (*muni*)” (*yo puggalo ... tulaṃ āropetvā minanto viya ime ajjhātikā khandhā ime bāhirā’ti,ādinā nayena ime ubho pi at the mināti muni tena pavuccatīti*) (DhA 3:396). Se Dh:N 126 nn 268+269.

⁶¹ The noun of *maññati* is *maññanā*, “conceiving (ideas, views)” [2.1.1.7]. On *papañca*, see SD 6.14 (2).

⁶² Although both trs are possible, the former fits the context better.

*Uccāvacā hi paṭipadā
samanena pakasitā
na param diguṇaṃ yanti,
na-y-idam̐ eka,guṇaṃ mutam̐*

For, high and low are the ways [paths]
proclaimed by the recluse:
they do not go to the far shore twice;
this is not *experienced* once. (Sn 714)

5.4.2 Commenting on the phrase *na-y-idam̐ eka,guṇaṃ mutam̐* (“This is not experienced once”) (Sn 714), the Sutta Nipāta Commentary explains *muta* as “worthy of being touched [experienced]” (*phusan-āraha*, SnA 498; quoted at KvUA 38). Here, clearly, the word *muta* is used in a general sense of experiencing or attaining a state. The rendition “thought” is definitely wrong here. A technically correct (but pedantic) translation would be “attained,” as the context demands.

5.5 MUTA AS “SENSED”

5.5.1 Muta defined. The most developed and best known usage of *muta* is that if “sensed,” which should be its translation in the well-known phrase, *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññāta*, “seen, heard, sensed and known.” We see this explanation given in the Vinaya’s internal Old Commentary, as follows: “*muta* refers to what is smelt by the nose, what is tasted by the tongue, what is touched [felt] by the body” (*mutam̐ nāma ghānena ghāyitam̐ jivhāya sāyitam̐ kāyena phuṭṭham̐*, V 4:2,25 f).

5.5.2 Saṃyutta Commentary definition

5.5.2.1 An intermediate stage in the definition of the phrase *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is perhaps that found in **the Saṃyutta commentary** (by Buddhaghosa) on the line *dittha,sute paṭighe ca mute ca* in verse **S 714 of the Aratī Sutta** (S 8.2),⁶³ which goes thus:

diṭṭha,sute’ti cakkhunā diṭṭhe rūpe

In the phrase *diṭṭha,suta*, **diṭṭha** means seeing forms with the eye;

sotena sute sadde

suta means hearing sounds with the ear;

paṭighe ca mute cāti ettha

in the phrase *paṭighe ca mute cāti*,

paṭigha,saddena gandha,rasa,gahitā

by the word *paṭigha* is meant grasping smell and taste;

mute,saddena phoṭṭhabb’ārammaṇam̐

by the word *muta* is meant the objects of touch.

(SA 1:270,9)

5.5.2.2 The Thera,gātha commentary (by Dhammapāla) on **Tha 1216**, quoting SA 1:270 [5.5.2.1], says thus:

Duṭṭha,sute’ti diṭṭhesu c’eva sutesu ca rūpa,saddesūti attha

Diṭṭha,sute means “in the seen and in the heard,” meaning, in forms and in sounds (respectively).

paṭighe’ti ghaṭṭaniye phoṭṭhabbe

Paṭighe means contact by way of impact (touched).

mute’ti vuttāvasese mute

Mute by way of verbal usage is said to be what is sensed by way of smells and tastes.

gandha,rasesūti vuttam̐ hoti

Sāratthapakāsiniyam̐ [SA 1:270]:

In the *Sār’attha,pakāsini*,⁶⁴ it is said:

paṭigha,saddena gandha,rasa,gahitā

“By the word *paṭigha* is meant grasping smell and taste; by the word *muta* is meant grasping touch.”

mute,saddena phoṭṭhabbam̐ gahitan’ti vuttam̐

(ThaA 3:190,16-20)

⁶³ **Aratī S** (S 8.2/714d/1:186,32), SD 92.6.

⁶⁴ The Saṃyutta Commentary by Buddhaghosa.

Dhammapāla’s interesting note attests to the fact that even in commentarial times, the teachers were not fully agreed in some of the finer points of the terms, which can be summarized thus:

	Buddhaghosa (SA 1:270,9)	Dhammapāla (ThaA 3:190,16-20)
<i>diṭṭha</i>	the seen	the seen
<i>suta</i>	the heard	the heard
<i>paṭigha</i>	the touched	the smelled + the tasted
<i>muta</i>	the smelled + the tasted	the touched

Here is a good example of Pali “technicality” which may trouble or at least concern the academic scholar, but simply delight the sutta seeker. It is likely that in S 174 of **the Aratī Sutta** (S 8.2), *paṭigha* refers to what is smelled, tasted and touched—that is, the sense of *muta* in the tetrad [5.5]. And *muta*, in this context, follows the Upanishadic senses of *mata*, “mentally conceived,” or *vijñātaḥ* (etc), “rationally conceived.” [1.1.1; 5.2]

Although the words (*vyañjana*) in the set differ, their overall meaning (*attha*) agree. In fact, *paṭigha* and *muta* here have the same sense of “impact” or physical contact of “molecules” (the earth element) on the nose-faculty. Hence, in practical terms, both *paṭigha* and *muta*—especially in other suttas—refer to the same set of senses, that is, smell, taste and touch.

5.5.3 Smell, taste and touch

5.5.3.1 Both **smell and taste** are part of our body chemosensory system. All physical things (such as rocks, perfumes, books and bread) emit molecules. We are mainly familiar with smelling through our nostrils, but eating food releases molecules into the back of the throat causes us to smell, too.

Inside our nostrils, these molecules land on **the olfactory epithelium**—a tissue covered in mucus that lines the nasal cavity. The epithelium contains millions of olfactory receptors, or neurons that are capable of binding with specific odor molecules. These are the “locks and keys” of the olfactory system, which help identify certain smells.⁶⁵

5.5.3.2 Once the olfactory receptors bind with a specific smell (odorant), they send their electrical impulses to a microregion known as **the glomerulus** (of which there are some 2,000 in the olfactory bulb in the forebrain or limbic region), which then passes it along to other parts of the brain. The “odorant patterns” that are released from the glomerulus are interpreted by the brain as smell.

In the 1920s, scientists calculated that the human nose was capable of only smelling 10,000 different scents. However, recently, scientists have shown this notion to be wrong: the nose is, in fact, capable of identifying up to **1 trillion scents** (although we wonder if there is really a need to discriminate so many scents!).⁶⁶ This is because smell molecules have a myriad of different shapes that can fit into several receptors at once, making it possible for the nose to identify more smells than the number of receptors available.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ This function was discovered by Richard Axel and Linda Buck, who won the 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their discovery.

⁶⁶ This fact, however, helps us appreciate the fact that the Buddha has a “perfect sense of taste” (the 21st mark of the great man), and in his birth as a deva he had peerless “divine smell (and sense of smell)”: see **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30,2.7), SD 36.9.

⁶⁷ <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/03/human-nose-can-detect-trillion-smells>.

5.5.3.3 The olfactory bulb, which contains glomeruli, is located in the forebrain's limbic system, which is often associated with memory and emotions. The olfactory bulb is also linked to the amygdala, which processes emotion, as well as to the hippocampus, known for its role in learning. Notice how a smell—the inside of an old book, chlorine smell, or fresh-cut grass—triggers memories and powerful emotions, and we find ourselves going back to a familiar time—an experience known as “involuntary memory.”⁶⁸

5.5.3.4 Taste is the sensation that arises when a substance in the mouth reacts chemically with taste receptor cells located on taste buds in the oral cavity (the mouth), mostly on the tongue. Taste, along with smell and trigeminal nerve stimulation (registering texture, pain, and temperature), determines flavours of food or other substances. Humans have taste receptors on taste buds (gustatory calyculi) and other areas including the upper surface of the tongue and the epiglottis. The gustatory cortex in the brain is responsible for the perception of taste.

The tongue is covered with thousands of small bumps called papillae, which are visible to the naked eye. In each papilla are hundreds of taste buds, except for the filiform papillae. There are between 2000 and 5000 taste buds that are located on the back and the front of the tongue. Others are located on the roof, sides and back of the mouth, and in the throat. Each taste bud contains 50 to 100 taste receptor cells.

5.5.3.5 Modern science identifies 5 specific tastes received by taste receptors, that is: **saltiness, sweetness, bitterness, sourness and savouriness** (Japanese *umami*).⁶⁹ In some circles, however, the 5th taste, savouriness, is omitted, so that we have only the 4 tastes: salty, sweet, bitter and sour.⁷⁰ **The Sūda Sutta** (S 47.8) lists the following 8 kinds of tastes that the ancient Indians were aware of:

		<u>tastes like</u>
(1) <i>ambila</i>	sour , astringent	buttermilk (<i>takkambali</i> , DhsA 320)
(2) <i>tittaka</i>	bitter	neem leaves (<i>nimbi, paṇṇa</i> , DhsA 320)
(3) <i>kaṭuka</i>	spicy hot	ginger, black pepper (<i>siṅgivera, marica</i> , DhsA 320)
(4) <i>madhura</i> ⁷¹	sweet	honey (ThaA 3:22)
(5) <i>khārika</i>	sharp, acrid	egg-plant sprout (<i>vātingaṇa, kaḷīra</i> , DhsA 320)
(6) <i>akhārika</i>	mild, not sharp	[Commentary probably has “acrid” (<i>lambila</i>) here] ⁷²
(7) <i>loṇika</i>	salty	sea-salt (<i>sammudika, loṇa</i> , DhsA 320)
(8) <i>aloṇaka</i>	bland, unsalted	[Commentary probably has “astringent” (<i>kasāva</i>) here] ⁷³

(S 47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15

⁶⁸ The French writer, Marcel Proust (1871-1922), coined the term “involuntary memory,” in his novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time or Remembrance of Things Past*) (1913-1927). This is also known as the “Proust phenomenon,” which he described as a childhood memory primed by the taste of dunking a piece of madeleine (a biscuit) in lime-tea (*Schwann's Way*, 1928). For a scientific overview of the sense of smell, see <https://www.medicaldaily.com/how-does-nose-smell-inner-workings-our-sense-smell-324566>.

⁶⁹ *Umami* (Jap, “delicious”) has been described as being characteristic of broth and cooked meat, and is tasted through taste receptors that typically respond to glutamates. See Ikeda, Kikunae (2002), “New Seasonings” [1909], *Chemical Senses* 27,9 2002: 847-849. doi: 10.1093/chemse/27.9.847. PMID 12438213.

⁷⁰ For general reading, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taste>.

⁷¹ Given as *madhuka* at **Khajjanīya S** (S 22.79/3:87).

⁷² In place of this and the last, *aloṇaka*, Comy has “acrid” (*lambila*), such as jujube (*Zizyphus jujuba*), emblic myrobalan (*Phyllanthus emblica*), wood-apple (*Feronia elephantum*), *sālava* [?] (*badarāmalaka, kapiṭṭha, sālavādi*), and “astringent” (*kasāva*), such as yellow myrobalan (*hariṭaka*) (DhsA 320). For botanical names, see DPL (Childers).

⁷³ See n for *akhārika* above.

The traditional Indian awareness of tastes seems to be classes in approximate pairs of sour-bitter, spicy hot-sweet, sharp-mild, and salty-bland. *Umami* is apparently a cultural phenomenon not found in ancient India, just as “spicy hot” (*kaṭuka*) is not included amongst the 4 kinds of tastes in the western scientific classification.

5.5.3.6 Touch (*phassa*) is the body sense, especially the skin, that allows us to perceive pressure and related sensations, including temperatures and pain. The sense of touch is located in the skin, which is composed of 3 layers: the epidermis, dermis and hypodermis. Different types of sensory receptors, varying in size, shape, number, and distribution within the skin, are responsible for relaying information about pressure, temperature, and pain.

The largest touch sensor, the Pacinian corpuscle, is located in the hypodermis, the innermost thick fatty layer of skin, which responds to vibration. Free nerve endings—neurons that originate in the spinal cord, enter and remain in the skin—transmit information about temperature and pain from their location at the bottom of the epidermis.

Hair receptors in the dermis, which are wrapped around each follicle, respond to the pressure produced when the hairs are bent. All the sensory receptors respond not to continued pressure but rather to changes in pressure, adapting quickly to each new change, so that, for example, the skin is unaware of the continual pressure produced by clothes.

Once stimulated by sensation, the receptors trigger nerve impulses which travel to the somatosensory cortex in the parietal lobe of the brain, where they are transformed into sensations. Sensitivity to touch varies greatly among different parts of the body. Areas that are highly sensitive, such as the fingers and lips, correspond to a proportionately large area of the sensory cortex.

Somatic senses are sometimes referred to as somesthetic senses, with the understanding that somesthesia includes the sense of touch, proprioception (sense of position and movement), and (depending on usage) haptic perception.

Haptic perception, a major form of touch, involves active exploration, usually by the hands, or the experience that arises when one's hands envelop an object and explore its surface freely, providing information about its general shape or form and allowing object-recognition to occur, even when the object is larger than any area of the skin.⁷⁴

6 The tetrad

6.1 REMEMBERING THE TETRAD

6.1.1 The most useful way of remembering of the cognition tetrad—*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*—is to be familiar with the cognition tetrad passage found in **the Māluṅkyaputta Sutta** (S 35.95), thus:

Here, Māluṅkyāputta, regarding things⁷⁵ seen, heard, *sensed* and known by you:
 in the seen there will only be the seen;
 in the heard there will only be the heard;
 in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
 in the known there will only be the known. (S 35.95/4:73), SD 5.9

⁷⁴ *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2nd ed, 2001 sv Touch.

⁷⁵ “Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and known,” *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu*, lit “in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be sensed, to be known.” See foll n.

6.1.2 Here, all the Commentaries agree in glossing *muta* as comprising the faculties of smell, taste and touch, that is, all the senses *except* seeing, hearing and mentation (in the 6 sense-bases). In this connection, I think that **U Thittila**, in his translation of the Vibhaṅga (1969), has given us the best English rendition of *muta*, as “sensed otherwise” (Vbh 1036-1037/429 = Vbh:T 548).

Thittila’s translation may be a bit awkward and may not sound like good English in certain passages. In that case, we can use an amplified translation: “(otherwise) sensed.” Like Thittila, we may dispense with the parenthesis, and simply use “otherwise” where the reading is very awkward (as in the following line above). The principle is that by appending the word “otherwise,” we have a better idea what the expression means. When we understand the meaning of the key word and the rest of the passage, then we are ready to fulfil the purpose of the teaching that the passage preserves.

6.1.3 Words are how we use them, and we need to define how we use them, especially in connection with the Buddha’s teachings and practice. Knowing how to use words means knowing their proper context. As we have noted, although *muta* should be translated as “thought” [5.3] or as “sensed” [5.5], these are not fixed. Words rarely have fixed senses: we give meaning to the word by making sense of the context of the word. This is called “the rule of context” [4.2.3]. When we know the context of the passage, we know its meaning and purpose—then, it is helpful in our understanding and practice of the Buddha Dharma.

7 Translation of *viññāta*

7.1 FUNCTION OF VIÑÑĀTA. The word *viññāta* in the phrase *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is difficult to render into English. If we take *muta* as a collective term of “the 3 physical object-bases, that is, those of the nose-object, tongue-object, and body-object” [5.5.1], then, clearly, the whole phrase is a shorthand for the 6 sense-bases, that is, the seen, heard, smelt-tasted-touched, and thought. This may well apply to the early Buddhist context. *Viññāta*, then, refers to mental processes, mentation, including cognizing and thinking.

7.2 VIÑÑĀTA AS “THE KNOWN.” However, in the broader Upaniṣad context—unfamiliar with the Buddha usage—it is more appropriate to render *viññāta* (Skt *vijñāta*) as “**the known**,” that is, as *the faculty or activity of the mind*. It is the mind that knows through the physical sense-faculties, which includes the mind itself. *Viññāta* here then refers to our “making sense” (however that may work out to be) of the other experiences. “Knowledge,” then, is simply a construal or construction of what the mind *thinks* of what it sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks. This sense conveniently applies to the Buddhist context, too, when we speak of the unawakened mind.⁷⁶

7.3 COGNITION

7.3.1 A technical term

7.3.1.1 *Viññāta* should not be translated as “the cognized” or “cognition” for the simple reason: *viññāta* includes a broader spectrum of mental activities. In modern psychology, **cognition** is (1) a general term for all forms of mental processes involved in acquiring and processing information, including conscious ones such as perception, thought, and memory, as well as non-conscious processes, such as

⁷⁶ See SD 3.13: 5.2.1.4 f.

grammatical construction, parsing of sensory data into percepts, and the neural control of physiological processes. (2) It is, in itself, an item of knowledge and belief, that is a particular thought.⁷⁷

7.3.1.2 It is, of course, possible for us—just as we apply (by natural adaptation)⁷⁸ terms such as consciousness, the preconscious, the unconscious and the subconscious [2.1.3.2]—to define the way we use “cognition, cognitive, etc.” It’s not that *cognitive* or *cognition* are not suitable terms here, but we have a more beautiful one-syllable Anglo-Saxon word which well applies here, that is, *know*, *known* and their related forms. “**The known**” is a perfectly good translation for *viññāta*, even etymologically: *vi* (a prefix evoking analysis, taking apart) + *√JÑĀ*, “to know + *-tā* (a noun ending).

7.3.2 More than just *viññāna*

7.3.3.1 Arguably, the words *cognize*, *cognition* etc, are bulls in a china shop when we consider that *viññāta* covers a wide range of vital and beautiful Buddhist experiences: to dream, to be fundamentally conscious (like when we first waken from sleep), to see, to hear, to smell, to taste, to touch, to feel, to think and conceive ideas and views, to perceive others and their views, to intend and create karmically charged acts, to be aware, to enjoy that awareness, that bliss, that joy, and above all, to celebrate wisdom that frees us from all things. Does *cognition* do all this?

7.3.3.2 *Viññāta*—as “**the known**”—encompasses the experiences of all the physical senses (and its own mental objects), all their vital and beautiful experiences [7.3.3.1]. Hence, it is not an aspect of *viññāna*, “consciousness,” but rather *viññāna* is an aspect of *viññāta*. It is true that from “knowing” (*vijānāti*) arises “consciousness” (*viññāna*). But we need to look at this full etymology of *viññāna*, especially the one found in **the Khajjanīya Sutta** (S 22.79), thus:

It cognizes (*vijānāti*), bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness.⁷⁹

And what does it cognize?

It cognizes sour, ... bitter, ... spicy hot, ... sweet, ... sharp, ... mild [not sharp], ... salty, ... bland [unsalted].⁸⁰

It cognizes, bhikshus, therefore, it is called consciousness.⁸¹ (S 22.79,9/3:87), SD 17.9

The definition of consciousness here does not merely say that we are only conscious of tastes, but they are used to highlight the fundamentality of **consciousness**: it cognizes, it “tastes” sense-objects in “first blush” encounters, even as passing nodding acquaintances. It is perception that rekindles those acquaintances. It recognizes old flames, and rekindles them into warm or blazes, or it simply turns a cold shoulder, or is nonchalant to uninteresting cognitions (thoughts) and memories.

7.3.3.3 Note that perception (*saññā*) is defined (in the same Sutta) in terms of colours, thus: “It perceives blue, ... yellow, ... red, ... white.⁸² It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called **perception**.”⁸³ We

⁷⁷ *Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* (ed D Matsumoto), 2009 sv cognition.

⁷⁸ On the Buddha’s “natural adaptation” of such words, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

⁷⁹ *Vijānāṭṭi kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇan’ti vuccanti*. For details on consciousness, see **Viññāna**, SD 17.8a.

⁸⁰ The 8 kinds of taste are, respectively, *ambila*, *tittika*, *kaṭuka*, *madhuka*, *khārika*, *akhārika*, *loṇaka*, *aloṇaka* [5.5.3.5]. See also **Sūda S** (S 47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15, qu at Vism 4.122/150 f. For the difference btw perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāna*), see **Viññāna**, SD 17.8a (8.2).

⁸¹ See SD 17.8a (8.2) *Saññā* and *viññāna*.

⁸² For the difference btw perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāna*), see **Viññāna**, SD 17.8a (8.2).

⁸³ **Khajjanīya S** (S 22.79,7), SD 17.9.

don't perceive or recognize merely colours, but the definition uses the imagery of colours to highlight its more "colourful" mental reactivity to past memories and present conditions. Hence, "perception" goes beyond "consciousness"; but both these processes are "known" to *viññāta*, included in its compass. Hence, it would be inappropriate to render it as "the cognized."

It should be noted that the verb *viññāti* only "cognizes." It "knows"—to that extent it is *viññāta*—but *viññāṇa* stops there. *Saññā* then works on it, it recognizes: "I know this person, this experience, etc," and so on. *Viññāṇa* cognizes; *saññā* recognizes—a perfect pair. Broadly, we can say that *viññāṇa* knows "objectively," *saññā* knows "subjectively," *viññāta* knows both "analytically" and "synthetically"—it "sees" parts of an experience or puts one together.

Then, we project our desires for what has been recognized as being pleasurable or likeable, our hate rejects their opposites or distractors, and our ignorance is fed when we fail to recognize the pleasurable or its opposite—karma is formed, formations constructed; and so on. This—and more—are all under the purview of "the known" (*viññāta*).

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