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Viññāṇa (Consciousness)

A study of the 5th aggregate (based on the Suttas and the Commentaries)
by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Definitions

1.1 THE MIND'S CENTRAL ACTIVITY

1.1.1 Ask yourself, “**Am I conscious now?**” The short answer lies there, but to put this experience or understanding into meaningful words is another matter. Understandably, there is a huge and growing volume of thought, discussion and literature on consciousness.¹ Since the mid-20th century, there is a notably growing interest in Buddhism, especially Buddhist psychology,² that is, meditation theory and practice. Such interest and the deepening Buddhism-science dialogue has led to what specialists now call “the mind sciences” or “the neuroscience of consciousness.”³ As the American philosopher, **Daniel C Dennett**, says, “Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.”⁴ Let us now investigate the question of consciousness and try to answer it in greater detail.

1.1.2 In simple terms, **consciousness** can be said to be what we generally refer to as “the mind,” and its function is that of “sensing” or experiencing sensations, that is, *sense-experiences*, or the events occurring at the 6 sense-doors (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind). Unfortunately, terms like “mind” and “sensation” are very general and polysemous, and as such are not very helpful in serious discussion. To compound the problem, the suttas often use 3 terms—*citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*—interchangeably for what we regard as the mind.⁵ However, as we shall see, these 3 terms are not always used in a synonymous way [12].

1.1.3 Using the 3 terms is less problematic when we here regard the early Buddhist teachings as “canonical contexts” rather than as “canonical texts.” As a rule, the early teachings are easily understood from its context, and if there appears to be any ambiguity, it is almost always purposeful, reflecting the fact that the passage refers to more than one situation or to something not easily put into words.⁶ All this will become evident as this study progresses.

Suffice it to say, at this point, that *viññāṇa* is a broad term that overlaps in places with these western psychological categories, namely, the conscious, the preconscious, the unconscious and the subconscious⁷ [Fig 6.1]. These terms expedite a better understanding of the ancient Buddhist wisdom of the mind for the purposes of contemporary Buddhist meditation and therapy, if not for a better understanding of early Buddhist mind teachings.

¹ In October 2006, when I googled “consciousness, Buddhism,” I made 5,750,000 hits, and “vinnana” itself, 16,800 hits! On some contemporary academic views on consciousness, see Uriah Kriegel, “Philosophical theories of consciousness: Contemporary Western perspectives,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, 2007:35-66 (ch 3). Accessed October 2006 from <http://www.uriahkriegel.com/downloads/theories.pdf>.

² See Luis O Gómez, “Psychology,” 2003.

³ See Lutz, Dunne & Davidson, “Meditation and the neuroscience of consciousness,” 2007.

⁴ *Consciousness Explained*, Boston & London: Little, Brown & Co, 1991:21.

⁵ Even in the Abhidhamma, these three terms do not seem to be differentiated [12.4-5].

⁶ This is esp true when feelings (to be personally experienced) are expressed rather than ideas (concepts expressible through language).

⁷ For a graphic summary and cross-refs, see **Fig 6.1**. See also **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (1).

1.1.4 One great advantage in this broad Pali term, *viññāṇa*, is that it is less cumbersome. Let us begin by talking about it as a general category. Then, we go on to understand that the unspecified term has inter-related sub-categories, each of which could, of course, have its own terminology and applications. Some aspects of language and meaning have been discussed in the chapter on *saññā* (which is well worth reading first, if you have not done so).⁸

1.1.5 The main points about *viññāṇa* are as follows. It is an impermanent and momentary stream of consciousness that flows⁹ through our present life (allowing us to know things), and, upon dying, is transmitted to a new life, thus enabling the karmic process to continue over many lives. This continuity represents what the world regards as a “**personal identity**.”¹⁰ *Viññāṇa* works with the body, rendering it alive, so that we are distinguished from inanimate things. As such, it is a key factor in Buddhist psychology.

1.1.6 As *viññāṇa* is the central activity of the mind, it is often translated as “consciousness.” As Sue Hamilton notes, “Because one of the most fundamental characteristics of human beings is that they are conscious, this makes it a particularly important term in the analysis of the human being” (1996a:82). Again, the context of *viññāṇa* in the suttas (and the Abhidhamma) is not always clear to the modern reader. The problem is not helped by the fact that, even to this day, scholars and specialists of both East and West have no consensus as to the meaning or function of consciousness.¹¹

1.2 SELF-AWARENESS

In many occurrences of the term *viññāṇa* in the early suttas, we see it used generally to refer to *self-awareness* or *reflexive consciousness*. Let us examine three such passages, namely, **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), **the Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) and **the Vīṇā Sutta** (S 35.246):

(1) The Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61):

4 But, bhikshu, as regards that which is called “thought” (*citta*), and “mind” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) [12]—the untutored worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be freed from it.

5 What is the reason for this?

Because for a long time, this has been held, cherished, and grasped by him, thus:

“This is mine; this I am; this is my self.”¹²

⁸ SD 17.4.

⁹ Such a flow of consciousness is sometimes termed “stream of consciousness” (*viññāṇa,sota*). However, Buddhist scholastics of the Abhidhamma also often describe consciousness as “thought-moments” (*citta-k,khaṇa*) (MA 2:224; SA 1:22; NmA 1:148; SnA 2:458; Pm A 2:470; VbhA 157 f, 202 f; YamA 70; VA 2:438). In others, consciousness is conceived both as waves as well as moments (or “particles”). *Viññāṇa,sota* is a rare term in the Canon, found only in **Sam-pasādanīya S** (D 28,7/3:105) which prob refers to the better known comy term, *bhav’aṅga* (“life-continuum” or the subconscious) or *bhavaṅga,sota* (sub-conscious stream) [SD SD 17.8b (1.1.2)]. See BDict: bhavaṅga & Ency Bsm: bhavaṅga. See **Matter and moments**, SD 17.2b.

¹⁰ The Buddhist term here is *sakkāya*. See **Mahā Mālunīyā,putta Sutta** (M 64,3/1:432 f), SD 21.10. On the self-identity view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (3). See also **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (1.3).

¹¹ See eg Susan Blackmore 2003:7-20 (ch 1) & Max Velmans 2002.

¹² These are **the 3 graspings** (*gāha*): “this is mine” (*etam mama*) is the grasp of craving; “this I am” (*eso ‘ham asmi*), the grasp of conceit; and “this is my self” (*eso me attā*), the grasp of views. The noble disciple, on the other hand, reflects thus: “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”: **Upādā Paritassanā S 2** (S 22.8/3:18 f), SD 97.11; cf S 22.7 [below]. When this is applied to the 5 aggregates in turn, we have the 20 wrong views of the untutored worldling, who views *form*, etc, as the self, the self as possessing *form*, etc, *form* as in the self, the self as in *form*, etc: **Bhadd’eka,ratta S** (M 131/3:188), SD 8.9; **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 138/3:227), SD 33.14; **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/3:3), SD 5.4; **Upādā Paritassanā s 1** (S 22.7/3:16), SD 97.10; **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:96), SD 8.1. Both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma def self-

Therefore, the untutored worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be freed from it. (S 12.61/2:94 f), SD 20.2 [3, 12]

The Assutava Sutta 1 shows how an unawakened worldling remains in the grasp of craving, conceit and views by regarding the mind as the self, that is, as some sort of abiding entity. Although he is aware of his own mind or consciousness (that is, he has reflexive consciousness), he has not let go of grasping to it.

(2) Hāḷiddakāni Sutta 1 (S 22.3):

“The form element,¹³ houselord, is the home of consciousness (*viññāṇassa oko*).¹⁴ One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the form element is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”¹⁵

The feeling element, houselord, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the *feeling* element is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”

The perception element, houselord, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the *perception* element is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”

The formations element, houselord, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the *formations* element is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”¹⁶

identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) as comprising these 20 wrong views: **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44/1:300), SD 40a.9; **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109/3:17 f), SD 17.11; S 3:102; Dh 182). See **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61) @ SD 20.2 (3) & Gethin 1985:44 f.

¹³ “Form element,” *rūpa, dhātu*. “The use of *dhātu* as a syn for *khandha* (aggregate) is unusual; more often the two are treated as headings for different schemes of classification” (S:B 1046 n18). This usage however is found in a number of suttas: **Hāḷiddakāni S 1** (S 3:9, 10), **Hāḷiddakāni S 2** (S 3.13), **Anicca S** (S 3:13), **Upāya S** (S 3:53), **Bija S** (S 3:55), **Udāna S** (S 3:58 *bis*)—all in the Khandha Saṃyutta—and **Mahā Niddesa** (Nm 1:198).

¹⁴ SA explains this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as karmic consciousness (*kamma, viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259). “The passage confirms the privileged status of consciousness among the 5 aggregates. While all the aggregates are conditioned phenomena marked by the 3 characteristics, consciousness serves as a connecting thread of personal continuity through the sequence of rebirths. This ties up with the idea expressed at **Cetanā S 1-3** (S 12.38-40/2:65-68) that consciousness is the persisting element in experience that links up the old experience with the new one. The other four aggregates serve as the ‘stations for consciousness’ (*viññāṇa-t, ṭṭhiyo*) [see **Upāya S** (S 22.53/3:52-54) & **Bija S** (S 22.54-3:54 f)]. Even consciousness, however, is not a self-identical entity but a sequence of dependently arisen occasions of cognizing; see M 1:256-60 [M 38.1-8, **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S**]” (S:B 1047 n18). For the 5 aggregates as an “empty abode,” see **Udāyī S** (S 46.30/5:89 f), SD 28.10.

¹⁵ “Wanders about frequenting houses,” *oka, sārati*. According to DP, *oka* means “house, home; resort, refuge” (S 3:9, 5:24 = Dh 87; Dh 91; J 3:430), cf *ukka* (house) (V 1:211); *anoka*, “without a home, independent” (S 1:126; Sn 966), as n “homelessness, independence” (Dh 87); *anoka, sārī* (S 3:10; U 32; Sn 628). For other nn, see DP: *oka* & *ukka*. The first line reads *okaṃ pahāya aniketa, sārī* without mention of *oka, sārī*, “one who wanders about frequenting houses,” nor *anoka, sārī*, “one who wanders about not frequenting houses.” Mahā Kaccāna introduces these terms as implicit in the absolute construction *okaṃ pahāya* (S:B 1046 n18). On *oka*, *anoka*, *niketa*, and *aniketa*, see **Hāḷiddakāni S** (S 22.3,-4+8+15 *passim*) +nn, SD 10.12.

¹⁶ Comy: **Why is not said here, thus**, “the consciousness element, houselord, (is the home for consciousness)?” For the sake of avoiding confusion, for “home” is here spoken as a condition (*paccaya*). An earlier karmic consciousness is a condition for both a later karmic consciousness and a resultant consciousness, and a resultant consciousness for both a (later) resultant consciousness and a (later) karmic consciousness. Therefore, the confusion could arise, “Which [what kind of] consciousness is meant here?” To avoid this, consciousness is not included, and the teaching expressed without breach. Furthermore, the other four aggregates, as objects (*ārammaṇa, vasena*), are said to be “stations for the karmically generative consciousness” (*abhisankhāra, viññāṇa-t, ṭṭhiyo*). As such, consciousness is not mentioned here (*Kasmā pan’ettha “viññāṇa, dhātu kho, gahapatī ti na vuttanti? Sammoha, vighāt’attham. “Oko” ti hi atthato paccayo vuccati, purejātañ ca kamma, viññāṇam pacchājātassa kamma, viññāṇassa pi vipāka, viññāṇassa pi vipāka, viññāṇa ca vipāka, viññāṇassa pi kamma, viññāṇassa pi paccayo hoti. Tasmā “kataram nu kho idha viññāṇan?”*

Such, houselord, is the “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”

(S 22.3,4/3:9 f), SD 10.12 (5.2 & 11.2)

This well known passage plays on the word “house” (*oka*): while a lay person lives in a house, a true renunciant has given up both the physical house and the psychological “house,” that is, the support or basis for his notion of selfhood, namely, the 5 aggregates. Although the saint here has self-awareness, it is that which lets go of clinging to the aggregates. [5.2]

(3) *Vīṇā Sutta* (S 35.246)

(1) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to forms cognizable by *the eye*, such a one should restrain *the mind* [his thoughts] (*citta*) from them thus:

“This path is fearful, dangerous, thorny, thickly tangled, a wrong path, a bad path, beset by scarcity. This is a path taken by mean people, and it is not a path taken by worthy persons. You do not deserve this.”¹⁷

In this way, the mind should be restrained from these states regarding form cognizable by the eye.

(2) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to sounds cognizable by the ear ... such a one should restrain the mind from them thus...

(3) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to smells cognizable by the nose ... such a one should restrain the mind from them thus...such a one should restrain *the mind* from them thus...

(4) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to tastes cognizable by the tongue ... such a one should restrain the mind from them thus...

(5) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to touches cognizable by the body ... such a one should restrain the mind from them thus...

(6) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to mind-objects cognizable by *the mind*, such a one should restrain the mind from them thus:

“*This path is fearful, dangerous, thorny, thickly tangled, a wrong path, a bad path, beset by scarcity. This is a path taken by mean people, and it is not a path taken by worthy persons. You do not deserve this.*”

ti sammoho bhaveyya, tassa vighāt’attham taṃ agahetvā asambhinnā va desanā katā. Api ca ārammaṇa,vasena catasso abhisankhāra,viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo vuttā ti tā dassetum pi idha viññāṇam na gahitam) (SA 2:259).

¹⁷ Cf this passage from **Vitakka Saṇṭhāna S** (M 20): “If, bhikshus, while the monk is paying attention to a different meditation sign, and there still arises in him bad unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate or delusion, then he should examine the dangers (*ādīnava*) of those thoughts, thus: ‘These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blame-worthy, they bring suffering.’ [cf M 19.3-5] Then the bad unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated. Bhikshus, just as a young man or woman, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel pained, shamed, disgusted by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the bad unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: ‘These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blame-worthy, they bring suffering.’” (M 20,4/1:119 f), SD 1.6.

Then the bad unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

In this way, the mind should be restrained from these states regarding mind-objects cognizable by the mind. (S 35.246,3/4:195), SD 28.8

In this Viñā Sutta passage, we see *citta* (the mind) in place of its synonym, *viññāṇa*. Here, we apply self-awareness not to react to any of the sense-objects in an unwholesome way so as to reinforce the latent tendencies.

1.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SENSES

1.3.1 The early Buddhist texts consistently speak of the 6 sense-faculties (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), and where *consciousness* forms a vital component of every sense-experience. Consciousness, as such, is divided into 6 types, by way of its sense-base, thus:

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| eye consciousness | cognizes ¹⁸ | visual forms and colours |
| ear consciousness | cognizes | sounds and vibrations |
| nose consciousness | cognizes | smells |
| tongue consciousness | cognizes | tastes |
| body consciousness | cognizes | touches (tangible objects), movements and temperature |
| mind consciousness | cognizes | the physical sense-objects, as well as mental objects, such as ideas, concepts, images, emotions, etc |

Table 1. The 12 sense-bases

1.3.2 Simply put, consciousness cognizes sense-data. Sense-experience arises through the interaction between the sense-faculty (eg, the eye) and its related sense-object (viz, visual form) by way of sense-consciousness (viz, eye-consciousness). As such, there are altogether 18 such factors or conditions of sense-experience: they are called the 18 “elements” (dhātu). A description of the well known 3 conditions of sense-experience (tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso)¹⁹ is found in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), beginning as follows:

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, *eye-consciousness* arises. The meeting of the three is contact. (M 18,16/1:111), SD 6.14²⁰

1.3.3 **The Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta** (M 28) closes with a similar analysis of the 18 elements, beginning with the statement:

If, friends, internally, **the eye** is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention] (*tajjo samannāhāro hoti*),²¹ then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness. (M 28,27/1:190), SD 6.16

¹⁸ “Cognize” here means to “experience, know, think or notice” a mental state. Where a word encompasses a number of meanings or ideas, it is helpful to use it. Such a word or term is said to be “pregnant.”

¹⁹ Tr as “the meeting of the 3 is contact.”

²⁰ See SD 6.14 (4).

²¹ *Tajjo* (*tad + ya*), “that which,” appropriate; “engagement [of attention]” (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasikāra*, “attention” (M 1:445; Vbh 321). PED gives the following definitions of *samannāhāratī* (vb): 1. to concentrate the

1.3.4 In these contexts, technically speaking, consciousness acts as “appropriate attention” (*samannāhāra*), that is, the directing of our mind towards a sense-object. In short, consciousness is the key aspect of our mind as thought-process,²² and is the basic awareness of a sense-object that makes the sensing or experience possible.

1.3.5 The Majjhima Commentary explains *samannāhāra* here as *attention arising in dependence on the sense-faculty (eg the eye) and sense-object (eg forms)*. It is identified with the “five-door adverting consciousness” (*pañca, dvāra, vajjana, citta*), which breaks off the flow of the life-continuum (*bhav’aṅga*) to initiate the process of cognition (MA 2:229). Even when a sense-object (external stimulus) comes within the range of the sense-faculty, if attention is not directed towards the object (because we are occupied with something else), there is still no appearance of “the corresponding class of consciousness.” It means here that no sense-consciousness would arise.²³

1.4 PHASSA

1.4.1 N Ross Reat notices that in these two passages—from the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta and the Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta—an interconnection between the arisings of *viññāṇa* and of *phassa* (contact):

... two equations emerge:

(1) faculty + object + *viññāṇa* = *phassa/samannāhāra* [M 18.16], and

(2) faculty + object + *phassa/samannāhāra* = *viññāṇa* [M 28.27].

Sensory contact, accompanied by appropriate attention, is as necessary to consciousness as consciousness is for sensory contact and appropriate attention. (1987:19)²⁴

1.4.2 This observation, similar to the one made by Rune E A Johansson (1965:213) twenty years earlier, is both interesting and insightful. However, it should be noted that although both Johansson and Reat juxtapose *phassa* (contact) with *samannāhāra*, they are only near-synonyms. *Samannāhāra* is a very specific term and refers only to the directing of our attention towards a sense-object.

1.4.3 *Phassa* (or, *-samphassa*, in compounds), on the other hand, has a broader meaning and plays a central role in the human conscious process. We find two sets of *phassa* in the suttas: a sixfold set and a twofold set. The sixfold *phassa*, the better known of the two sets, is found, for example, in the **Sammā, diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), where Sāriputta defines *phassa* as follows:

46 And, avuso,²⁵ what is **contact**, what is the *arising* of contact, what is the *ending* of contact, what is *the way* leading to the ending of contact?

mind on, to consider, reflect (D 2:204; M 1:445; A 3:162 f, 402 f; S 1:114); 2. to pay respect to, to honour (M 2:169; V 1:180). The PED, however, gives the meanings of *samannāhāra* (n) as “concentration, bringing together (M 1:190 f; DA 1:123; Miln 189). As such, *tajjo samannāhāro hoti* means “there is an appropriate attention,” or, as Jayatilleke suggests, that there is “an appropriate conscious engagement” or “an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind” (1963: 433). See [1.3.2.2] ad loc. See also Sarachchandra 1994:14 f.

²² Technically, this is known as “cognitive consciousness”; cf “existential consciousness,” which goes through the rebirth process: see *Viññāṇa*, SD 17.8a (6), esp Fig 6.1.

²³ See Harvey 1996:95.

²⁴ See also Hamilton 1996a:89.

²⁵ “Avuso” (*āvuso*; BHS *āvusa*, *āyusaṃ*), “friend(s), gentleman/-men, sir(s),” used by non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike. A common form of address between strangers and peers; later (after the Buddha), use by seniors to address juniors; never used by the Buddha.

There are, avuso, these six classes of contact:²⁶

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| eye-contact | (<i>cakkhu,samphassa</i>), |
| ear-contact | (<i>sota,samphassa</i>), |
| nose-contact | (<i>ghāna,samphassa</i>), |
| tongue-contact | (<i>jivhā,samphassa</i>), |
| body-contact | (<i>kāya,samphassa</i>), |
| mind-contact | (<i>mano,samphassa</i>). |

With the arising of the six sense-bases, there is the arising of contact.

With the ending of the six sense-bases, there is the ending of contact.

The way leading to the ending of contact is just this noble eightfold path; that is, right view ...
right concentration. (M 9,46/1:52), SD 11.14

1.4.4 The less known, but no less important, is the twofold set of *phassa* defined in the **Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (D 15) as *paṭigha,samphassa* (sense-impression) and *adhivacana,samphassa* (conceptual impression).²⁷

When there is input through any of the physical senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body), *saññā* (perception) arises as a result of the stimulus, that is, our attention is directed at the experience: we then apperceive, that is, recognize or identify it. When there is no physical sense-stimulus, that is, the stimulus is purely *mental*, then we conceive an idea or a state, that is, we ideate,²⁸ or mentally “see” or project an image from an earlier experience, or conjure one up.

1.4.5 *Phassa*, the Buddhist Dictionary reminds us, “does *not* signify any physical impact,” but is one of the 7 “mental factors” (*cetasika*), or constant concomitant factors of consciousness, and belongs to the mental formations aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*). In *Abhidhamma* lists of both the mental factors and of the formations aggregates, *phassa* is generally mentioned first (eg Dhs 1), because of its fundamental position in the cognitive process.²⁹

1.4.6 *Phassa*, as we can see, plays a hugely vital role in the cognitive process, while *samannāhāra* is a special term for advertence or attention. As such, the correlation between the two formulas—as suggested by Reat above [1.4.1]—is better simply shown in this manner:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| (1) sense-faculty + object + <i>viññāṇa</i> | = | <i>phassa</i> | [M 18.16], and |
| (3) sense-faculty + object + <i>samannāhāra</i> | = | <i>viññāṇa</i> | [M 28.27]. |

If we look at the links of dependent arising, we can now understand why *viññāṇa* is a much earlier link than *phassa* [Table 6].

²⁶ Cf S 2:3; Vism 444-446.

²⁷ For details, see *Saññā*, SD 17.4(2.2).

²⁸ For a discussion, see Hamilton 1996a:59 f.

²⁹ In the dependent arising, *phassa* is conditioned by the six sense-bases and is a condition for feeling [3]. The **Brahmajāla S** (D 1) states that *phassa* influences feeling and wrong views (D 1.131-143/1:43 f), SD 25.2). Along with material food, mental volition and consciousness, it is one of the 4 foods (*āhāra*) (see **Sammā,diṭṭhi S**, M 9,11/ 1:48 @ SD 11.14). It is the first of the sense-impression pentad (*phassa,pañcamaka*), together with feeling, perception, volition and consciousness (see Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies*, 3rd ed 1976:47 ff). As *phassa* is “a key function in the mind’s contact with the world of objects and being a potential source of defilements,” it forms an important subject for reflection (Sn 736 f, 778, 851, 870-872, 923).

2 Canonical contexts of *viññāṇa*

2.1 As we all know, the teachings of the Buddha and the early saints are all oral transmissions. Teachings are directly presented to the listener or audience depending on the occasion and their spiritual disposition. Very often, the audience's understanding (or misunderstanding) becomes the point of departure for a teaching specially tailored for them so that they attain certain levels of sainthood.

Attempts to systematize these *ad hoc* and personalized teachings have been done even in the Buddha's time in such texts as **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) and **the Das'uttara Sutta** (D 34). The most complete systematization is of course found in the Abhidharma traditions of the post-Buddha sects.³⁰ Challenging though a study of *viññāṇa* may be, there are enough materials in the Pali Canon to give us a clear insight into its nature and the purpose of the teachings around it.

2.2 Sue Hamilton, in chapter 5 of her thoughtful monograph on the 6 aggregates entitled *Identity and Experience* (1996a), attempts to establish how we might understand the meaning and function of *viññāṇa* as an aggregate (*khandha*) by suggesting the following five headings (though some of the points under each may overlap):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|------|
| (1) <i>Viññāṇa</i> as impermanent; | [3] |
| (2) <i>Viññāṇa</i> as "consciousness of"; | [7] |
| (3) <i>Viññāṇa</i> as a factor in cognition; | [8] |
| (4) <i>Viññāṇa</i> as providing continuity; and | [9] |
| (5) <i>Viññāṇa</i> as evolving. | [11] |

Such headings as these given by Hamilton help us get a better perspective of the meaning and function of *viññāṇa* in the early texts. However, she cautions us that:

In imposing such headings on unsystematic material there is of course the danger that one is projecting onto it a greater degree of coherence than exists in the texts. Indeed, such is the lack of any systematic approach in the texts that to a certain extent this is unavoidable if one is to attempt to come to any meaningful understanding of the function of *viññāṇa*. (1996a:83)

I shall, in the following sections, use this structure of ideas as my point of departure, especially to link more teachings and sutta references together to throw more light into our study of *viññāṇa*.

3 *Viññāṇa* is impermanent

3.1 CONSCIOUSNESS IS THE MOMENT

In translating *viññāṇā* as "consciousness," we have not only used one of the most problematic terms in modern psychology and mind science, but more significantly, may allow the impression, since it is a substantive noun, that it is something of a permanent entity (which is clearly not the case in early Buddhism): it is activity or process. As such, "our concern here is to establish that any interpretation of *viññāṇa* as permanent is erroneous" (Hamilton 1996a:64).

³⁰ According to Frauwallner, "Abhidharma-Studien IV. Der Abhidharma der anderen Schulen." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost)asiens*, 15:103-121 (1971), 16:95-152 (1972); 1971b:106, the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is considerably later than both the Vinaya and the Sutta Piṭaka, ie, between 200 BCE and 200 CE. See also Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, 1996 §129.

Any suggestions of permanence would be against the key teachings of the Buddha. The doctrine of dependent arising and the 3 universal characteristics, for example, declare that all samsaric experiences are conditioned, dependently arising, and therefore impermanent. The impermanence of the mind and consciousness is clearly shown by the Buddha in the monkey simile in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), thus:

Bhikshus, that which is called “mind” (*citta*), or “mentation [thought]” (*mano*), or “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another.

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, wandering through the forest, seizes one branch, lets go of that and grabs another—even so, bhikshus, that which is called “mind,” or “mentation,” or “consciousness,” night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another. (S 12.61,8/2:95), SD 20.2³¹

3.2 CONSCIOUSNESS ARISES ON ACCOUNT OF FORMATIONS

3.2.1 Not only is *viññāṇa* impermanent, it does not arise on its own, but arises on account of ***saṅkhārā*** (formations) [SD 17.6]. *Saṅkhārā* are the fuel (*upādāna*) of consciousness (as an aggregate of clinging, *upādāna-k, khandha*), that is, as the volitional or conative side of an unawakened individual. Conversely, when formations cease, consciousness ceases, too. *Viññāṇa* and *saṅkhārā* arise interdependently, as follows:³²

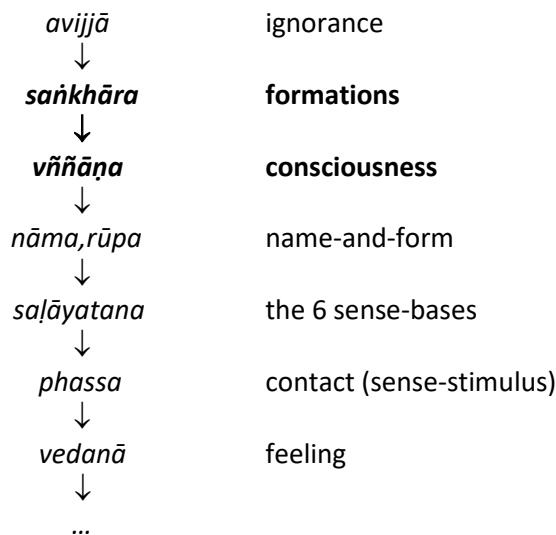


Table 3.1: The traditional dependent arising formula

3.2.2 This notion of **impermanence** was apparently later developed by the Abhidhamma tradition into the theory of momentariness (*khaṇa, vāda*).³³ One interesting aspect of this scholastic development is that consciousness is viewed as a “mental moment” or even “mental particle” (*citta-k, khaṇa*). The suttas, how-

³¹ Although this simile is often quoted to illustrate that the restless “monkey” mind, the Sutta and its commentary only points to the fact that the mind is always dependent on a sense-object. See S:B 771 n157.

³² See below §6. For a discussion on dependent arising (*paṭicca, samuppāda*), see SD 5.16.

³³ Discussed in detail by Collins, 1982:237-261. See SD 17.2b.

ever, generally view consciousness as a flow, “waves” or “stream,” of consciousness [1.1.5; 4]. Viewed either way—whether as waves or particles—consciousness is inexorably impermanent.³⁴

But, **Sue Hamilton** instructively reminds us, that

... in the Sutta Piṭaka, the purpose of this passage [S 12.61,8] is simply to illustrate that one’s mental processes are impermanent. And its concern is not to establish that the object(s) of one’s mental processes are constantly changing (though of course they are) but that this is how one’s mind operates subjectively: the context of the Sutta indicates that it is to one’s subjective experience that the Buddha is referring. (1996a:86)

4 The “stream” of consciousness

4.1 THE STRINGED JEWEL

4.1.1 Let us now examine a few parables and similes on the impermanence of consciousness. **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) contains this enigmatic passage on the nature of the body and consciousness:

³⁵Maharajah, just as if there were a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread³⁶—and a man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand, were to reflect on it thus:

‘This is a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread.’

Even so, maharajah—with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and utterly unshakable—he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He knows:

‘This body of mine is form, composed of the 4 great elements, born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to uncertainty, rubbing, pressing, breaking up and destruction. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.’

(D 2,84/1:76 f), SD 8.10

4.1.2 Neither the suttas nor the Commentaries offer any explanation on the gem parable here, except for saying that the gem “is like the physical body, and the thread running through it is like insight knowledge (*vipassanā,ñāṇa*)” (DA 1:211). The New Sub-commentary (NAṬ) corrects “insight knowledge” to “insight consciousness” (*vipassanā,viññāṇa*).³⁷

4.1.3 The Pali for the phrase, “through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread”—*tatra suttarṃ āvutarṃ nīlarṃ vā pītārṃ vā lohitarṃ vā odātārṃ vā paṇḍu,suttarṃ vā*—is rather curious, in that the first four colours are simply listed as adjectives, but the last is a noun clause (*paṇḍu,-*

³⁴ On the views of other schools, see **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (6.5).

³⁵ This passage also at **Subha S** (D 10,2.21-22/1:209) = **Mahā Sakuludāyī S** (M 77,29/2:17).

³⁶ “Through which runs...etc,” *tatra suttarṃ āvutarṃ nīlarṃ vā pītārṃ vā lohitarṃ vā odātārṃ vā paṇḍu,suttarṃ vā*. Rhys Davids tr *pītārṃ* here as “orange-coloured,” and *paṇḍu* as “yellow” (D:RD 1:87), while Bodhi has as “yellow” and “brown” respectively (1989:44). *Paṇḍu,sutta* is found in **Vidhura Paṇḍita J** (J 545/6:305), where EB Cowell & WHD Rouse tr it as “white thread” (J:C&R 6:147). Both *pīta* and *paṇḍu* sometimes refer to “yellow.” SED def *pāṇḍu* as “yellowish white, white, pale.”

³⁷ DANṬ:VRI 2:126.

sutta, “light yellow string”). It is possible that these 5 colours—blue, yellow, red, white, and light yellow — represent 5 of the sense-consciousnesses, that is, respectively, the eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness. The string is the mind-consciousness, and the gem is the physical body. In simple terms, all this refers to the mind and body of an individual. We will discuss this further below [4.4].

4.1.4 The last sentence of the gem simile in the Sāmañña,phala Sutta, “this consciousness of mine lies attached here, bound up here” (*viññāṇam ettha sitam ettha paṭibaddham*) [4.1] means that consciousness in a physical being is dependent on the physical body. As **Sue Hamilton** notes,

This analogy suggests that just as both gem and thread have to be present in order for there to be a necklace at all, so it is with the human being: body and *viññāṇa* are interrelated and interdependent. Indeed the passage implies that far from being an independent entity, *viññāṇa* is bound up with and *dependent on* the body... The analogy of the gem on a thread further suggests that occurrences of consciousness are held together, as it were, by their common physical locus, a particular body. The way in which *viññāṇa* represents continuity of experience is discussed [9].

(1996a:87)

4.1.5 This enigmatic but well known passage, as such, describes the nature of *individuality*: the human person comprises of body and *viññāṇa* (consciousness), both integrally bound up together, without either one, there is no “individual” at all.

4.2 TRULY KNOWING THE MIND

4.2.1 We can only really begin to understand the nature of consciousness at the dhyanic level of the third satipatthana, the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*).³⁸ More specifically, this direct experience of the nature of consciousness begins in the ninth stage of the twelve-stage breath meditation, as laid out in **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118), where the meditator breathes, “experiencing the mind” (*citta,paṭisaṃvedī*).³⁹

Only with the insight based on the absolute stillness of the fourth dhyana, can we have a fuller vision of the true nature of consciousness.⁴⁰ The fourth dhyana is likened to *a man fully covered from head to foot with a clean white cloth* who “sits, pervading the body with a pure, bright mind,”⁴¹ so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by a pure, bright mind.”⁴² In fact, if we have actually seen someone all draped in such a clean white robe, we would often notice an iridescence, a bright glow from the cloth.

4.2.2 Clearly, **the man** in the parable [4.2.1] represents the mind, while the luminescent white cloth represents the total purity of equanimity and mindfulness that is the hallmark of the 4th dhyana, that is, *when the mind is fully free of the body*. In other words, this is the nature of consciousness when it is purified

³⁸ **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,12/2:299), SD 13.2 = **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,34/1:59), SD 13.3.

³⁹ M 118,20/3:83 (SD 7.13) = (**Ānāpāna,sati**) **Kimbila S** (S 54.10,12/5:323), SD 12.22. See Brahmavamso 2006: 92-94, where he explains how the arising and nature of the *nimitta* in this connection; also 2006:116-124.

⁴⁰ On the nature of the 4th dhyana, see Brahmavamso 2006:163.

⁴¹ See **Accharā Vagga** (A 1.6.1-2): “Bhikshu, this mind is radiant (*pabhassara*), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The untutored ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no personal development.” (A 1:10). On reaching the 4th dhyana, the practitioner becomes directly aware of the truly and naturally pure nature of the mind. See also A:ÑB 1999 §4 & **The Radiant Mind**, SD 8.3.

⁴² D 2,82/1:75 f (SD 8.10).

(even temporarily) of all mental hindrances and defilements, that is, the radiant mind (*pabhassara, citta*), mentioned in the suttas.⁴³ We will discuss this in more detail in the section on Dh 1-2 [4.5].

4.3 THE FRUIT SALAD PARABLE

4.3.1 Consciousness, as such, is not a permanent entity; it is not even a smooth “stream of consciousness,” but is really *a series of discrete mental events*, that is, a string of mental particles. Consciousness is sometimes compared to a sandy beach that looks continuous and compact, but on closer examination, we discover that it is made up of discrete particles of sand. In fact, under magnification, we would even notice that there are spaces around each of the sand-particles.

In fact, there are empty spaces around every particle of sand, but without any essential sandiness flowing in these gaps. In the same way, what we take to be the flow of consciousness is clearly seen to be a series of discrete events, with nothing flowing in between. It is like the series of picture frames on a celluloid movie film. They are discrete frames—one not connected to the other—but when a strong light is properly shone through them (our attention) and projected onto the screen (our senses), we see a movie and our mind sees the “story” behind these “moving” picture. We project the story and reacts with various emotions to what we see before us.

4.3.2 The nature of consciousness can be illustrated by a fruit salad analogy, which shows how we are conscious through the 6 sense-objects. Suppose there is an apple on a plate. You see it disappear completely, and in its place a pineapple appears. Then the pineapple disappears and a banana appears in its place. The banana then disappears, and a pineapple appears again in its place. And so it goes on: then lemon, *pineapple*, papaya, *pineapple*, pineapple, *pineapple*, and so on. This illustration will graphically show what has just occurred:

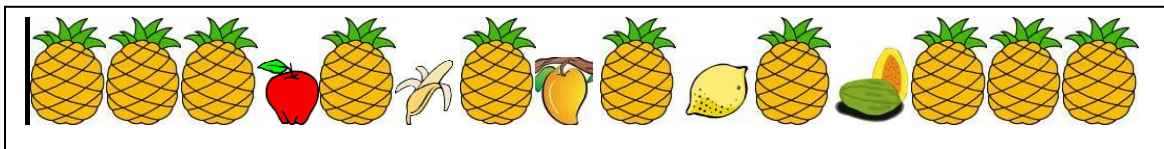


Fig 4. The stream of consciousness (Parable of the fruits or the fruit diagram)

The apple represents *eye-consciousness*; the banana, *ear-consciousness*; the mango, *nose-consciousness*; the lemon, *tongue-consciousness*; the papaya, *body-consciousness*; the pineapple, a mind-object (such as a thought); and the ever present pineapple in the intervals, the mind-consciousness (in *italics*).⁴⁴

4.3.3 Depending on what we are experiencing, the same fruit may try to appear successively for some time, but the flow is often interrupted by some other fruit. It is important to note here that as soon as one fruit (or fruit-event, if you like) disappears, another takes its place without any fruit-essence linking them up. From experience, we know that no two fruits are the same, even when they are the same kind of fruit.

Mind consciousness [the pineapple] appears after every other kind of consciousness, which gives the illusion of sameness to every conscious experience. To the average person, there is a quality in seeing that is also found in hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. We can call the quality “knowing.” In an important

⁴³ See **The Radiant Mind**, SD 8.3.

⁴⁴ Cf Brahnavamso 2006:118.

way, we are defined and limited by this knowledge. We often even try to defend “what we know”—these are our “views.”

However, with a focused mindfulness, we can discern that this knowing is not really part of seeing, hearing, and so on—they arise a moment after each type of sense-consciousness. Moreover, this knowing has vanished when, for example, eye-consciousness is occurring. And eye-consciousness has vanished when knowing (mind-consciousness) is occurring. Using the fruit salad parable: there cannot be an apple and a coconut on the same plate at the same time.⁴⁵ [4.5] It is the mind (*citta*) that rules all conscious activity. Sight might be assumed to be capable of seeing on its own, but, in fact, it is the mind sense, immediately following seeing, that makes knowing what is seen possible. Sight on its own does not register. As the Buddha said (S 48.42),⁴⁶ the mind can appropriate for itself any of the events in the 5 senses, as well as its own mind-experience. Since mind-consciousness follows every recognizable event of the 5 sense-consciousnesses, these 5 carry an illusion of sameness, which we mistake as our “will” or “free will.” We may mistakenly even identify with this evolving knowledge and regard it as some kind of abiding “self.” Thus, self-view arises and harden our mind.

4.4 THE PHYSICAL SENSES DEPEND ON THE MIND

From what we have discussed above, the mind (*citta*) evidently “rules all conscious activity.”⁴⁷ In conventional terms, we often say or think that sight is capable of seeing on its own, but, in reality, *it is the mind that sees*. In the fruit salad simile [4.3], the pineapple (mind-consciousness) that immediately follows each of the other fruits, allows us to *know* what we see: sight (or any other sense-consciousness), on its own, does not register.

According to the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the **Uṇṇābha Sutta** (S 48.42), the 5 physical sense-faculties, each have their own resort (*gocara*) and range (*visaya*)—or sense-data—and do not experience one another’s resort or range. They all however resort to the mind, only the mind experiences all the sense-data. [12.4]⁴⁸ In other words, as the Sutta says, the physical sense-faculties are like data-sensors, the data of which are processed or experienced in the mind. The mind itself resorts to mindfulness (or memory, in a wholesome sense) (*sati*);⁴⁹ mindfulness (memory) resorts to freedom (*vimutti*), and freedom resorts to nirvana.⁵⁰

The essence of the Uṇṇābha Sutta can be stated as follows: The mind readily captures any of the events in the 5 senses (sense-experience), as well as its own field of experience. Since mind consciousness follows every recognizable event of the 5 sense-consciousnesses, these 5 sense consciousnesses gives us an illusion of sameness, even permanence (misleading us to think in terms of a “self,” etc). There appears to be something similar in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Once we have come face to face with the mind (*citta*) in dhyana, we recognize that it is the accompanying citta that gives the illusion of continuity to the stream of consciousness.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Cf op cit 118; also 202

⁴⁶ **Uṇṇābha S** (S 48.42/5:217-220), SD 29.3.

⁴⁷ Brahnavamso 2006:202 f.

⁴⁸ *Mano, paṭisaraṇaṃ mano ca nesaṃ gocara, visayaṃ paccaṇubhoti*, “the mind is (their) resort [refuge], and the mind experiences their resort and range.” (M 43.21/1:295 = S 48.42/5:218). Comy explains *mano* here (following the Abhidhamma tradition) as the mind-door impulsion (*javana*), which experiences the object by way of lust, hate or delusion (SA 3:245). **Bodhi**, however thinks, “In my view, this introduces an unnecessary ethical slant on the passage, which I take to be primarily epistemic [having to do with knowing] in import. I interpret the sentence simply to mean that mind-consciousness has access to the data provided by the five types of sense consciousnesses, which it collates, categorizes, and interprets with its own stock-in-trade, namely, concepts.” (S:B 1936 n226)

⁴⁹ *Manassa kho ... sati paṭisaraṇaṃ*.

⁵⁰ S 48.42/5:217-219 @ SD 29.3.

⁵¹ Cf Brahnavamso 2006:203.

4.5 DHAMMAPADA 1-2

4.5.1 There is another important side of **the fruit salad parable**.⁵² In the fruit salad parable, the pineapple represents not only the consciousness as attention (*samannāhāra*), but also as intention (*cetanā*). We find this usage in the first two verses of **the Dhammapada**, where *mano* (the mind),⁵³ which here refers to the “mind” or “intention” behind our actions, is used:⁵⁴

The mind (*mano*) precedes all mental states;
The mind is supreme; mind-made are they:
If, with a defiled mind (*paduṭṭhena*), one speaks or acts,
Suffering follows one like a wheel that dogs a draught ox’s foot. (Dh 1)

The mind (*mano*) precedes all mental states;
The mind is supreme; mind-made are they:
If, with a pure (*pasannena*) mind, one speaks or acts,
Happiness follows one like a shadow that leaves not. (Dh 2)

4.5.2 The moral dimension of these two verses is very clear: *it is the thought that counts*. The moral quality of an action is decided by its intention. As **the Attha,sālinī**, the Commentary on the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī (the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka), says:

When the mind is unguarded, physical action is unguarded; speech also is unguarded; thought also is unguarded. When the mind is guarded, physical action is guarded; speech also is guarded; and thought also is guarded. (DhsA 68)

4.5.3 The **Dhammapad’aṭṭhakathā** (Commentary on the Dhammapada) explains “**mental states**” (*dhammā*) as the “formless aggregates” (*arūpino khandhā*), that is, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and formations (*saṅkhāra*) (DhA 1:22). The term “preceded by the mind” (*mano,pubb’aṅgamā*) also occurs in 2 short passages in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (A 1.6.6-7),⁵⁵ reflecting similar sentiments as Dh 1-2.

Here “**mind**” (*mano*) refers to the intention. While the mind does not actually precede the wholesome and unwholesome states in a temporal sense, it is said to arise first because it is a volition or intention that determines the ethical quality of the deeds that issue from the mind.

(Bodhi, A:ÑB 278 n15)

⁵² Not explained in Brahmavamso’s book.

⁵³ On def of *mano* [12.5] below.

⁵⁴ On how this work with karma, see SD 18.1(3).

⁵⁵ “Bhikkhus, whatever states that are unwholesome, partaking of the unwholesome, pertaining to the unwholesome—all these are preceded by the mind. The mind arises as the first of them, followed by the unwholesome states. (*Ye keci bhikkhave dhammā akusalā akusala,bhāgiyā akusala,pakkhikā sabbe te mano,pubbaṅgamā*). Bhikkhus, whatever states that are wholesome, partaking of the wholesome, pertaining to the wholesome—all these are preceded by the mind. The mind arises as the first of them, followed by the wholesome states. (*Mano tesarā dhammānaṃ paṭhamarā uppijati anvad-eva akusala dhammā ti. Ye keci bhikkhave dhammā kusalā kusala,bhāgiyā kusala,-pakkhikā sabbe te mano,pubbaṅgamā. Mano tesarā dhammānaṃ paṭhamarā uppijati anvad-eva kusala dhammā ti*). (A 1.6.6-7/1:11)

4.5.4 The Dhammapada Commentary says that *mano* is a term for “thought [conscious moment]” (*citta*) on all the four levels of being.⁵⁶ However, here it specifically refers to “a thought connected with mental displeasure associated with repulsion” (*domanassa,sahagata.paṭigha,sampayutta.citta*), that is, a mentally hostile reaction due to dislike (DhA 1:21 f).

Explaining “defiled” (*paduṭṭhena*), the Commentary says:

It is defiled by adventitious faults [“arriving” at the sense-doors] such as covetousness (*āgantu-kehi abhijjhādāhi dosehi*). The “natural mind” (*pakati,mano*) is the *bhavaṅga,citta*,⁵⁷ which is undefiled. Just as clear water is tainted by (such colours as) blue and so on, flowing into it and becomes known as “blue water,” and so on, but not so the earlier clear water (before it was tainted by the colour) nor new (fresh) water.

In the same way, thought too becomes tainted by adventitious ills, such as covetousness and so on, but not the earlier *bhavaṅga,citta* nor a new thought (*navam cittam*). Hence, has the Blessed One said,

“Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by impurities that arrive (through the sense-doors)” [A 1:10].
(DhA 1:23)

4.5.5 On a simple level, what is **the practice to guard one’s mind**? It is threefold. Firstly, the restraint of the senses, which means, see less, hear less, smell less, taste less, touch less, think less: these are the six wise monkeys. Often enough, if there is nothing worth doing, it is worth not doing anything: just let it be. Secondly, when sense-objects arrives at the sense-doors, regard them as impermanent; they become more meaningful and valuable lessons that way. Thirdly, when expressing yourself, do it with lovingkindness, otherwise, it is better not to express yourself. Gentle silence often heals.

4.6 SUMMARY

The nature of conscious experience can be summarized in this manner. When a sense-experience (such as our noticing a visual object: the apple in the fruit simile) arises [4.3], the related mind-consciousness arises almost immediately after that.⁵⁸ How we respond then (whether we are motivated by greed, hate, or delusion, or by non-greed, non-hate, or non-delusion: the pineapple in the fruit simile), decides the moral quality of the thought-moment (that is, the act). In this sense, the mind is not “naturally pure.”

We have to assert ourself to clear the mind of the unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion). Having done so, and overcoming all the mental hindrances (active manifestations of the unwholesome roots), we then see the pure radiant mind. Although the Commentaries equate the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) with the radiant mind (*pabhassara,citta*), it is difficult to see how this would apply to one whose dying thoughts are unwholesome. The radiant mind, as such, refers only to the dhyanic experience or to the awakened mind.

⁵⁶ DhA 1:21. The “4 levels of being” (*catu bhūmi*) are the sense realm (*kāmāvacarā bhūmi*), the form realm (*rūpāvacarā bhūmi*), the formless realm (*arūpāvacarā bhūmi*), and the supramundane realm, “the level of the unincluded (those free of the 3 worlds, ie the saints)” (*apariyāpannā bhūmi*) (Pm 1.397/1:83). BDict on *mano*: “‘Mind,’ is in the Abhidhamma used as a synonym of *viññāṇa* (consciousness) and *citta* (state of consciousness, mind). According to the [Vism Comy], it sometimes means sub-consciousness (see *bhav’āṅga,sota*).” Here, however, I have rendered *citta* as “thought.”

⁵⁷ Often tr as “life-continuum,” ie the underlying stream of consciousness that supervenes whenever active consciousness lapses, most notably in deep dreamless sleep. See A:ÑB 278 n13.

⁵⁸ According to Benjamin Libet (1985), the “readiness potential” (RP) is followed by a gap of about 350 milliseconds before one’s awareness of a volitional act: see **Free will and Buddhism**, SD 7.7 (12).

5 Viññāṇa is dependent upon the other aggregates

5.1 VIÑÑĀṆA AND LATENT TENDENCIES⁵⁹

5.1.1 The suttas of the **Khandha Saṃyutta** (S 22), where *viññāṇa* is mentioned alongside other aggregates, not only imply its impermanence, but also its close connection with latent tendencies or the unconscious roots of our personal habits. Take, for example, the delightful **Aññātara Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 22.35), where the Buddha gives a short teaching to a certain monk, thus:⁶⁰

Bhikshu, whatever latent tendency one has, *that* is what one is.

Whatever latent tendency one has not, one is *not* that. (S 22.35/3:35), SD 31.4

5.1.2 The **Cetanā Sutta 2** (S 12.39), on the other hand, explains the benefits of overcoming the latent tendencies so that there is no more mental basis for the support for consciousness, in these words:⁶¹

But, bhikshus, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for consciousness to remain.

When there is no mental basis, there is no support for consciousness.

When consciousness has no support⁶² and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth.**

When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.39.64/2:66), SD 7.6b

5.1.3 The aggregates are impermanent, but regarding them in terms of a self or abiding entity, make them seem less so, that is, we live with the delusion that *we have a reality of our own*. This is what reinforces our negative acts so that the latent tendencies become even stronger. An understanding of the aggregates, of knowing how they work, helps in the weakening of the latent tendencies. The best way to deal with the aggregates is to constantly regard them as being impermanent.

5.2 THE HOUSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

5.2.1 The synopsis (*uddesa*) of the **Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) states that each of the other 4 aggregates is the “house” of consciousness (*viññāṇassa oko*) [1.2(2)]. The teaching of this interesting Sutta is that *the true renunciant is one who has given up the aggregates of clinging*, thus:

The form element, houselord, is the house of consciousness.⁶³ One whose consciousness is bound by lust for *the form element* is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”

⁵⁹ See **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48), SD 17.1a (1.3).

⁶⁰ *Yaṃ kho bhikkhu anuseti tena saṅkharāṃ gacchati. Yaṃ nānuseti na tena saṅkharāṃ gacchati.*

⁶¹ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See **Cetanā S 2**, SD 7.6b (4) for detailed nn.

⁶² Bodhi interprets the phrase “**when consciousness has no support**” (*appatiṭṭhita viññāṇa*) here to refer to “a consciousness without the prospect of a future rebirth through the propulsive power of ignorance, craving, and the volitional formations” (S:B 760 n114). The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122) and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24). See Intro (4) for more details.

⁶³ SA explains this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as karmic consciousness (*kamma, viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259). See 1.2(2) n & S:B 1047 n18 quoted below. Here, the term is “house of consciousness” is *viññāṇassa oka*, viz the 5 aggregates. The one

The feeling element,

The perception element,

The formations element, houselord, is the house of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for *the formations element* is called “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”⁶⁴

Such, houselord, is the “one who wanders about frequenting houses.”

(S 22.3,4/3:9 f), SD 10.12 [1.2(2)]

5.2.2 Mind and mental factors

5.2.2.1 The Commentary glosses *viññāṇa* here as “karmic consciousness” (*kamma,viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259) [10]. This is what sustains us in this life and holds us down to future lives. In his Sutta translation, **Bodhi** reminds us of the interdependence of the aggregates and the impermanence of *viññāṇa*:

The passage confirms the privileged status of consciousness among the five aggregates. While all the aggregates are conditioned phenomena marked by the three characteristics, consciousness serves as a connecting thread of personal continuity through the sequence of rebirths. This ties up with the idea expressed at [Cetanā Suttas 1-3]⁶⁵ that consciousness is the persisting element in experience that links together the old experience with the new one. The other four aggregates serve as the “stations for consciousness” (*viññāṇa-t,ṭhitiyo*) [see **Upāya Sutta**⁶⁶ and **the Bija Sutta**⁶⁷]. Even consciousness, however, is not a self-identical entity but a sequence of dependently arisen occasions of cognizing; see M 1:256-60 [M 38.1-8, **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta**]. (S:B 1047 n18)

5.2.2.2 In other words, of the 4 mental components of the 5 aggregates, it is *viññāṇa* or *citta* or *mano* (here they are synonyms), that stands out as the fundamental factor: in this case, *citta* serves as the key term. The other 3—*vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra*—are called *cetasikā* (“pertaining to *citta*”) or “mental factors or concomitants.” Here lies the root of the Abhidhamma categories of *citta* and *cetasika*.⁶⁸

5.2.2.3 The commentator **Dhammapāla**, for example, separates *viññāṇa* (which he equates with *mano*) from the other 3 aggregates, which he subsumes under the category of *dharmā*,⁶⁹ that is, objects of *mano* or *viññāṇa*. He even contrasts the 3 with *nāma* (“name”), clearly implying that the other 3 mental aggregates are included in *nāma*.⁷⁰

5.2.2.4 All the 4 mental aggregates are closely interconnected in their operation; *viññāṇa* or *citta*, however, is the 1st amongst equals, forming the basic or predominant factor in the mental process. We should not mistake that *viññāṇa* is some sort of “house,” “home,” “vehicle,” or “container” for the other 3 aggregates; rather, if we are to speak of a “support” for consciousness, it would be one of the other 4 aggregates,

described here is also called *niketa,sārī*, “one who wanders about frequenting homes”: see **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3,15/3:9 f), SD 10.12 .

⁶⁴ See 1.2(2) n.

⁶⁵ S 12.38-40/2:65-68 @ SD 7.6abc.

⁶⁶ S 22.53/3:52-54 @ SD 29.4.

⁶⁷ S 22.54/3:54 f @ SD 39.2.

⁶⁸ For details, see **Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha**: on *citta*, see Abhs:BRS ch 1 (1999:23-75); on *cetasika*, see Abhs:BRS ch 2 (1999:76-113).

⁶⁹ *Mano ti viññāṇa-k,khandho, dharmā ti vedanā,saññā,saṅkhāra-k,khandhā* (NettA 255 = NettA:VRI 306).

⁷⁰ *Vijānātī ti viññāṇam... Nāma ti nāmaṃ, vedanādi-k,khandha-t,tayam* (UA 41).

as stated in **the Hāḷiddakāṇi Sutta 1** (S 22.3).⁷¹ Dhammapāla reminds us that we simply cannot perceive *citta* (or *viññāṇa*) aside from the other 3 mental aggregates, just as the waters from several rivers, or various kinds of oil, cannot be discerned once they have been mixed together (Pm 432).

5.2.3 The body and selfhood

5.2.3.1 The physical component, ***rūpa***, is also sometimes called *kāya* or *sarīra* in the Commentaries. ***Kāya*** has two important senses: as “locus” or “basis” (*ṭhāna*) and as “body” (in the sense of a collection or corporation). As the former sense, *kāya* is the locus of *citta* (Pm 124), and *citta* is the locus of the other mental factors like *vedanā*, as much as *kāya* is.⁷² *Kāya*, in other words, is the physical body in which *citta* and the other mental processes occur. This is at least the case for human beings.

Kāya sometimes refers to the whole “body” of psycho-physical factors known as the 5 aggregates.⁷³ Dhammapala points out that it is this psycho-physical body that is often referred to as the ***atta, bhāva*** (literally, “selfhood”) or the empirical being (ThaA 2:47). “In other words,” concludes Pieris, “the *kāya* which is the locus of *citta* may not denote merely the 5th *khandha* as it often does, but the whole pentad of aggregates, including the *citta*!”⁷⁴

This observation is very significant in Buddhist psychology because, unlike in classical western psychology, which tends to locate the mind in the brain or its activities, early Buddhism does *not* locate the mind anywhere specifically. In an important sense, our minds pervade our whole being, and possibly even beyond.⁷⁵

5.2.3.2 The Pali Canon and its Commentaries often take ***atta, bhāva*** as being somewhat synonymous with *sakkāya* (self-identity).⁷⁶ Understandably, Buddhaghosa points out that the *atta, bhāva* is only a concept (*paññatti*), that is, a way of naming or referring to the body.⁷⁷ Dhammapāla goes further to state that the 5 aggregates (that is, the body-mind complex) are called *atta, bhāva* precisely because they have the inherent danger of being misunderstood as being the self or soul (*attā*).⁷⁸ Early Buddhism rejects any notion of an abiding self or essence.⁷⁹

⁷¹ It is curious that a contemporary Sinhalese scholar monk has described *viññāṇa* as “the receptacle, so to speak, for all the fifty-two mental concomitants or factors, since without consciousness no mental factors are available” (Piyadassi, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, London 1964:48). See also Pieris 1979:13 = 1980:219.

⁷² *Kāyo cittaṃ ca vedanāya ṭhānaṃ* (ItA 2:22).

⁷³ ThaA 3:151; ThīA 86, 239. Sometimes, the mental factors are aggregates referred to as *nāma, kāya* in contrast to *rūpa, kāya*, the physical body (ThīA 160).

⁷⁴ Pieris 1979:14 = 1980:220. Dhammapāla compares the *atta, bhāva* to a hut (*kuṭikā*), put together with sticks, etc; so too the *atta, bhāva* is composed of the 5 aggregates. It is also the dwelling (*nivāsa*) or locus of the monkey called *citta*. Here the monkey symbolizes restlessness and impulsiveness of *citta*, and not a self or soul (ThaA 1:29; ItA 1:53, 179); cf *kuṭi, purisa* (Miln 147).

⁷⁵ Further see **Consciousness and meditation**, SD 17.8c (7) The mind and the brain.

⁷⁶ V 2:238,17 = A 4:200,2 = 204, = 207,2; D 3:111,10; M 2:32,8, 181,11; S 5:442,1; A 1:134,20, 279,2; MA 2:88,19; KhA 1:132,10; DhA 1:78,9, 291,23, 316,6, 2:64, 68,13, 3:115,8. See CPD for more refs. See also Vism:Ñ 256 n11.

⁷⁷ Vism 9.54/310.

⁷⁸ *Apariññatā, vatthukāṇam attā ti bhavati ettha abhidhānaṃ cittaṃ cāti, atta, bhāvo sarīraṃ khandha, pañcakam-eva vā*, “Here, the body or the aggregate pentad is taken to be *atta, bhāva* when, on the ground of not comprehending, the expression (*abhidhāna*) and thought (*citta*) of *attā* occurs” (VismT 298). On Pieris’ n regarding Ñāṇamoli’s mistranslation of this passage, see Pieris 1979:15 n56 = 1980:222 n56.

⁷⁹ See **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16 & SID: anattā.

5.2.4 The 4 basic properties of consciousness

5.2.4.1 Modern psychology sometimes speaks of consciousness as having **4 basic properties**—intentionality, unity, selectivity and transience—that consciousness occurs at different levels, and that it includes a range of different contents. These modern terms and ideas remarkably parallel, even describe, the nature of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as envisioned by the Buddha 2,500 years ago in terms of **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*): form [5.2.4.5], feeling [5.2.4.3], perception [5.2.4.4], formations [5.2.4.2] and consciousness [5.2.4.6].

However, this is only a comparative study, and we should not try too hard to see whether the terms and ideas of the 2 systems actually coincide—they are 2 different systems with radically different goals. However, such a study may help us better understand, in modern terms, the nature of consciousness as taught in the suttas.⁸⁰

5.2.4.2 The 1st basic psychological property of consciousness is **intentionality**, which psychologists define as “the quality of being directed toward an object.” Consciousness is always about something —this is the same saying that we are always “conscious *of*” something: it always takes an object, at least, in our “normal” unawakened state [7.1.1].

Modern psychology agrees with Buddhist psychology that our **attention** or deliberate awareness is basically *limited*. Although we seem to be flooded with a crowd of rich details in our mind’s eye, the kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, feelings and thoughts—of what is “seen, heard, sensed, cognized” [13.1.3] —the object of our consciousness at any one moment is just a small part of all of our mental process.⁸¹

At this point, it should be noted that secular psychology seems to take intentionality as merely a cognitive focus our consciousness. Early Buddhism, however, takes it as **intention** (*cetanā*), that is, as conation, with a moral quality to it, depending whether we direct such attention with *greed, hatred or delusion* or not. This area will be discussed under “**formations**” (*sankhārā*), that is, how karma arises and works [SD 17.6].

5.2.4.3 The 2nd basic psychological property of consciousness is **unity**, or resistance to division or fragmentation. This property becomes clear when we try to attend to more than one thing at a time. We may wishfully think that we can “multi-task”: study and watch TV simultaneously, for example, but psychological research suggests not.

One psychological study had research participants divide their attention by reacting to two games superimposed on a television screen.⁸² They had to push one button when one person slapped another’s hands in the first game and push another button when a ball was passed in the second game. The participants were easily able to follow one game at a time, but their performance nosedived when they tried to follow both games simultaneously.

Their error rate when attending to the two tasks was 8 times greater than when attending to either task alone.⁸³ Our watching a TV show while attempting to study, in other words, could seriously interfere with the attention to our study, as we often know.

In Buddhist psychology, this is technically a process known as **manasikāra**, “mental attention,” which is said to be “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*) when we are unmindful and see any object (sight,

⁸⁰ This whole section is based on Schacter, Gilbert and Wegner, *Introducing Psychology*, NY: Worthy Publishers, 2011: ch 8 Consciousness.

⁸¹ Schacter et al, *Introducing Psychology* illustrates this with “View of Dresden” by Bellotto (1720-1780), which, when from afar looks very detailed, but when the details are examined closely, we only see that the “people” are made of brushstrokes of an arm here, a torso there! (2011:237). Our perception [SD 17.4] “fills in” the details even in areas that are peripheral: D Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, NY: Basic Books, 1991.

⁸² See Schacter et al 2011: 238n (Fig 8.5).

⁸³ U Neisser & R Becklen, “Selective looking: Attending to visually significant events.” *Cognitive Psychology* 7, 1975:480-494.

sound, smell, taste, touch, thought) as being *permanent, pleasurable or self*. “**Wise attention**” (*yoniso manasikāra*), on the other hand, is when we see any such object as being *impermanent*. If we understand some level of the perception of suffering and of non-self, we also able to regard it as being suffering and non-self.

On a broader level, in Buddhist psychology, there is **feeling** (*vedanā*), the 2nd of the 5 aggregates. Technically, this stage of our perceptual process occurs after perception (selectivity) [5.2.4.4], that is, having associated the present object (our immediate experience)—like meeting someone—by recalling some past experience. If we recall an unpleasant experience with him, we would regard him with some *dislike*; or if we have a pleasant memory of him, then, we treat him *well*. If we have no recall of him (say, when have are meeting him the first time), we may either ignore or regard him with suspicion, and so on.

5.2.4.4 The 3rd psychological property of consciousness is **selectivity**, the capacity to include some objects and not others. Our conscious system is most inclined to select information of special interest to us. For example, in what has come to be known as the **cocktail party phenomenon**, *people tune in one message even while they filter out others nearby*. Perhaps we have noticed how abruptly our attention is diverted from whatever conversation we are having when someone else within earshot at the party mentions our name.

Selectivity, however, is not only a property of waking consciousness; the mind works this way in other states. We are more sensitive to our own name than others’ names, for example, even during sleep.⁸⁴ This is why when we are trying to wake someone up, it is best to use that person’s name (and making sure that it is the right one!)

According to Buddhist psychology, when we lack mindfulness, we tend to be drawn to a sense-object or a thought perceived as being *pleasant*; we tend to reject the *unpleasant*; we tend to ignore the *neutral*. From this tendency arises, respectively, lust, repulsion and ignorance. This negative karmic cycle arises from our habit of selectively associating what we experience *now* with some past experience, as described under “feeling” above, with **perception** (*sañña*), the 3rd of the 5 aggregates. Although we analytically speak of perception as arising *before* feeling, they actually work closely together [5.2.4.3].

5.2.4.5 The 4th and final basic psychological property of consciousness is **transience**, or the tendency to change. Consciousness wiggles and struggles like a toddler strapped in the seat in a car or an airplane. The mind wanders and flows incessantly, from one “right now” to the next “right now,” and then on to the next.⁸⁵

William James⁸⁶ famously described consciousness as **a stream**: “Consciousness ... does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it ... It is nothing jointed; it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described.”⁸⁷

The basic properties of consciousness are reminiscent of **the “bouncing ball”** that jumps from word to word when the lyrics of a sing-along tune are shown on a karaoke screen. The ball always bounces on something (intentionality), there is only one ball (unity), the ball selects one target and not others (selectivity), and the ball keeps bouncing all the time (transience).

This 4th and last property of consciousness, **transience**, is a good description of the nature of **form** (*rūpa*), that is, the very 1st of the 5 aggregates. According to early Buddhism, form, our “conscious body”

⁸⁴ L Oswald, A M Taylor & M Triesman, “Discriminative responses to stimulation during human sleep.” *Brain* 83, 1960:440-453.

⁸⁵ D M Wegner, “Why the mind wanders,” in J D Cohen & J W Schooler (eds), *Scientific approaches to consciousness*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997:295-315.

⁸⁶ On William James, see SD 17.8c (2).

⁸⁷ W James, *The principles of psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ Press. vol 1, 1890:239.

(*sa,viññāka kāya*),⁸⁸ may be seen as an interbeing of the 4 basic “**elements**” (*dhātu*)—earth (solidity), water (liquidity, cohesiveness), fire (heat, decay) and wind (motion)—or of the 5 physical sense-faculties (the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body), all of which are *transient*, momentary states or experiences that work with consciousness.⁸⁹

5.2.4.6 Consciousness, according to modern psychology, can also be understood as having **levels**, ranging from minimal consciousness to full consciousness to self-consciousness. This is not a matter of degree of overall brain activity but instead involves different *qualities* of awareness of the self and the world. In early Buddhist terms, this is called **mindfulness** (*satī*), especially following the teaching of *satipaṭṭhana* (the focuses of mindfulness), that is, as being body-based (*kāyānupassanā*), feeling-based (*vedanā’nupassanā*), mind-based (*cittānupassana*) and reality-based (*dhammānupassanā*).

In its **minimal form**, consciousness is just a connection between us and the world: this is basically a body-based consciousness. When, on a cold day, we sense the sun coming in through the window, for example, we may turn toward the light and warmth. This **minimal consciousness** occurs when the mind inputs sensations and may output behaviour.⁹⁰

This level of consciousness is a kind of sensory awareness and reactivity, something that could even happen when someone pokes us during sleep and we turn over. Something seems to register in our mind, at least in the sense that we experience it, but we may not think at all about having had the experience.

5.2.4.7 In simple Buddhist terms, we may speak of this **minimal level** of consciousness as the most common of our **waking** (and sleeping or unconscious) experiences. It is a reactive level of consciousness: there is a sense stimulus, we reflexively react to it; there is a thought, we reflexively respond to it. This is, in fact, the basic **perceptual process** that we have been speaking about above, especially as “selective association” [5.2.4.4].

In Buddhist terms, this is, of course, only the most basic level of **body-based awareness**. We see the brightness of sunlight, hear birds’ sound in outside, feel the sun’s radiant warmth, and even enjoy some profound sense of joy and peace.

This need not be any kind of “meditative” experience, but that of simply being sensitive to some sense-experience “just as it is,” and being conscious of how we *feel* or respond to it, especially of joy or peace. Or, this may be some negative emotions, when it is physical pain or mental pain: all the same, we *notice* the experience for what it is: *impermanent, suffering, having no essence of its own*.⁹¹ This last statement simply refers to seeing the **conditioned arising**⁹² of any such state “without owning” it.⁹³

5.2.4.8 Now, consider the glorious feeling of waking up on a cool morning as sun-rays streaming through the windows. It’s not just that we are having this experience; we are also *aware* that we are having this experience. The critical ingredient that accompanies **full consciousness** is that we *know and are able to report our mental state*.

When we have a hurt leg and mindlessly rub it, for instance, we may be minimally conscious of the pain. It is only when we realize that it hurts, though, that we become fully conscious of the pain. Full consciousness involves not only thinking about *things* but also *knowing* that we are thinking about things.⁹⁴ This is a kind of reflexive consciousness.

⁸⁸ SD 17.8a (12.3); SD 56.1; (4.3.2.2) n.

⁸⁹ On form (*rūpa*) as the 1st aggregate, see **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

⁹⁰ D M Armstrong, *The nature of mind*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ Press, 1980.

⁹¹ Technically, these are the 3 characteristics of *anicca, dukkha, anattā*, respectively: SD 1.2 (2).

⁹² See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 ; SD 53.15 (2.2).

⁹³ On “not owning the pain,” see **Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 61,17), SD 3.10; SD 26.9 (4.1.2).

⁹⁴ J Jaynes, *The origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind*. London: Allen Lane, 1976.

Full consciousness fluctuates, depending on whether we put our mind to it or not, and how we put our mind to it. In other words, we may just let “the flow” of feelings (*vedanā*) drag us into “the currents” of emotions (*sāṅkhārā*), or we may mindfully “go with the flow” and bliss out with the oneness of being with the “all” of things, meaning *all* our senses are focused on the here and now, enjoying it: this is an experience of “full consciousness.”

On the other hand, while we are doing something repetitive or dull, like studying (when we don’t enjoy it) or reading something, and suddenly realizing that we have “zoned out”; we are not processing what we do. When psychological researchers asked people to report each time they zone out during reading, they report doing this every few minutes.⁹⁵ When we are zoned out, we are only minimally conscious of wherever our mind has wandered; then, we return with a jolt into the full consciousness that our mind has drifted away.

5.2.4.9 William James (1890) and other theorists have suggested that **self-consciousness** is yet another distinct level of consciousness in which the person’s attention is drawn to **the self** as an object. We are **aware of ourself**. On a simple daily level, we report experiencing such self-consciousness when we feel embarrassed, when we find ourself the focus of attention in a group, when someone focuses a camera on us, or when we catch sight of ourself in a mirror.

Most animals don’t appear to have such self-consciousness. The typical dog, cat or bird would often simply ignore its image in a mirror or act as though there is some other animal behind it. However, chimpanzees that have spent time with mirrors sometimes behave in ways that suggest they recognize themselves in a mirror.⁹⁶ Besides chimps, few other animals—possibly dolphins⁹⁷ and elephants⁹⁸—can recognize their own mirror images.

Dogs, cats, birds, monkeys, and gorillas have been tested and don’t seem to know they are looking at themselves. Even human infants don’t have self-recognition right away until they’ve reached about 18 months of age.⁹⁹ The experience of self-consciousness, as measured by self-recognition in mirrors, is limited to a few animals and to humans only after a certain stage of development.¹⁰⁰

5.2.4.10 Buddhist meditation practice, as laid out in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10),¹⁰¹ for example, in fact, begin with minimally being conscious of the body. The most popular of these body-based meditation is the mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpāna,sati*), where we begin with *simply* being aware of the in-coming and out-going breaths.

We keep doing this, bringing back the distracted mind to being aware of the natural breathing process. This minimal attention to the breath-flow then calms itself down integrating itself into full attention. This is when breath frees itself the wind-element and attains the *interbeing* of breath and mind: the wind become *mind*. Through mental concentration, the breath evolves from being *a physical state* into becoming a mental state with its attending bliss and focus. This is a form of full consciousness in Buddhist meditation.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ J W Schooler, E D Reichle & D V Halpern. *Zoning-out during reading: Evidence for dissociations between experience and metaconsciousness*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Psychonomic Soc, Orlando, FL, 2001.

⁹⁶ G G Gallup, “On the rise and fall of self-conception in primates.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 818, 1997:73-84.

⁹⁷ D Reiss & L Marino, “Mirror self-recognition in the bottlenose dolphin: A case of cognitive convergence.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98, 2001:5937-5942.

⁹⁸ J M Plotnik, F B M de Waal, & D Reiss, “Self-recognition in an Asian elephant.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 103 2006:17053-17057.

⁹⁹ M Lewis & J Brooks-Gunn, *Social cognition and the acquisition of self*. New York: Plenum Press, 1979.

¹⁰⁰ Schacter et al, op- cit 2011:239 f.

¹⁰¹ M 10,4-31/1:56-58 (SD 13.3).

¹⁰² For details, see **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13.

Full consciousness, in the Buddhist sense, involves a certain consciousness of *oneself*; we notice the “self” (the mind) in a particular state (“Here I am, reading this”). Here lies the rub, in Buddhist lingo, only when we have let go or given up the sense of “I” and the “object” (an “I-Thou” dichotomy) that we reach a profound level of *self*-consciousness, a profound level of **samadhi** or mental concentration (*samādhī*). The reality here is that the gap between the conceptual subject-object has broken down. Then, we may feel: “Gosh, I’m really enjoying this!” This happens when “the self” is no more felt or framed in terms of the “other”: we *are*, as it were, to the exclusion of almost everything else. *We are the flow*.

6 Uses of consciousness

6.1 THE 2 KINDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

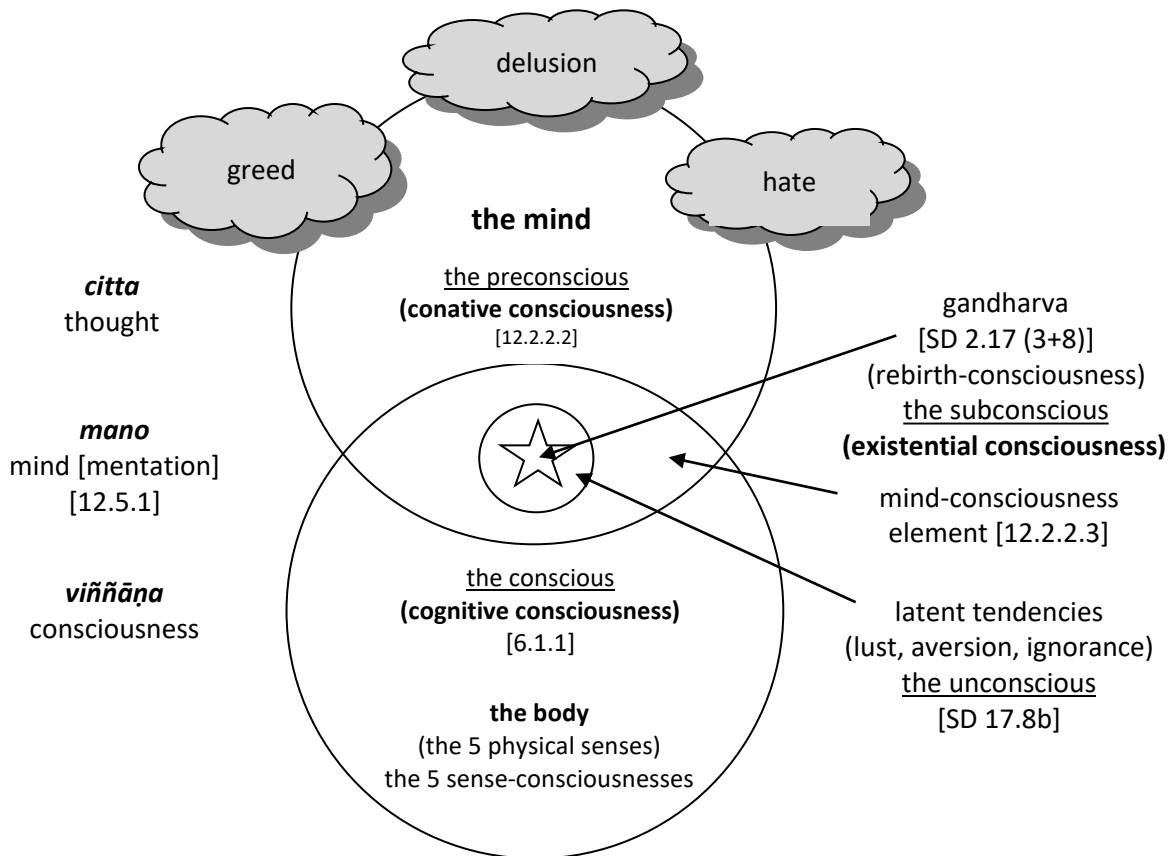


Fig 6.1 The “Eclipse” Mind Diagram

Cf SD 17.8b (Fig 2.2); 12.1.2 & Table 12.5; SD 56.17 (5.3)

6.1.0 Cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness

6.1.0.1 As we have seen, there is no unified definition of consciousness in the suttas. In fact, the term *viññāṇa* is used in early Buddhism in at least two important senses, that is, **the 2 basic conscious processes**, in terms of the functions of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāḍā*), discovered by the Buddha, that is, as

“cognitive consciousness” and as “existential consciousness.”¹⁰³ These are, of course, neologisms, but they are useful in describing an ancient wisdom in modern scientific terms not too difficult to the laity.

6.1.0.2 The first—**cognitive consciousness**—centering around *viññāṇa* and *nāma,rūpa*, shows how our senses work and how our lives are sustained down to the moment. This is the mental process underlying the workings of our 6 sense-faculties. In modern terms, this comprises processes that are mostly either *conscious* or *pre-conscious* [Fig 6.1].¹⁰⁴

6.1.1 Cognitive consciousness,¹⁰⁵ simply put, is the “this-life” (synchronic) moment-to-moment consciousness with which we perceive, define and respond to the world, that is, how we live our lives [Fig 6.1]. Both the **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56)¹⁰⁶ and the **Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57)¹⁰⁷ deal solely with such a synchronic (this-life) view of the 5 aggregates. Cognitive consciousness is defined in a synchronic context in the **Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57), where notice how the process centres on *viññāṇa* and *nāma,rūpa*, thus:

26 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

There are these 6 classes of consciousness:¹⁰⁸

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| eye-consciousness; | (visual awareness, | consciousness of seeing) |
| ear-consciousness; | (auditory awareness, | consciousness of hearing) |
| nose-consciousness; | (olfactory awareness, | consciousness of smelling) |
| tongue-consciousness; | (gustatory awareness, | consciousness of tasting) |
| body-consciousness; | (tactile awareness, | consciousness of touch) |
| mind-consciousness. | (cognitive awareness, | consciousness of thinking) |

This is called “consciousness.”

With the arising of name-and-form, there is the arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of name-and-form, there is the cessation of consciousness.

This noble eightfold path itself is the way to the ending of consciousness, that is to say: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

27 The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on consciousness—this is the gratification regarding consciousness.

That consciousness is impermanent, suffering, subject to change—this is the danger regarding consciousness.

The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for consciousness—this is the escape regarding consciousness.

28 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,
 having directly known the gratification regarding consciousness,
 having directly known the danger regarding consciousness,
 having directly known the escape regarding consciousness,

¹⁰³ Amongst the scholars who have used these or related terms are O H de A Wijesekera 1964, Rune E A Johansson 1965: 198 f, & W W Waldron 2003: 41-45. See also Harvey 1995:158 f & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3).

¹⁰⁴ For a broader def, see SD 59.7 (2.3.1.7). See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1) & **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1 (3.8).

¹⁰⁵ W S Waldron suggests “cognitive awareness, since it is an awareness that arises in conjunction with specific cognitive objects” (2003:29).

¹⁰⁶ S 22.56/3:58-61 (SD 3.7).

¹⁰⁷ S 22.57/3:61-66 (SD 29.2).

¹⁰⁸ “**Classes of consciousness**,” *viññāṇa,kāya*. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) here refers to “cognitive consciousness” [6], and is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object. See SD 3.7 (6.5).

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation—they are well practised.

Those who are well practised gain a firm footing in this Dharma and Discipline.

29 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known the gratification regarding consciousness, the danger regarding consciousness, the escape regarding consciousness*, practise for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation, are well freed.

Those who are well freed are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round to describe them. (S 22.57/3:64 f), SD 29.2

6.1.2 Existential consciousness

6.1.2.1 The 2nd function of dependent arising—existential consciousness—centres on *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging or fuel): it shows the true nature underlying what we call an “individual,” that is re-born, going through various lives, and it shows this by stating that *consciousness* arises conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā*) and formations (*saṅkhārā*). Traditionally, then, this is the rebirth-consciousness.¹⁰⁹ In modern terms, this is **the subconscious** [Fig 6.1].¹¹⁰

Essentially, both existential consciousness and the subconscious are the same thing within a person. Further, existential consciousness is what keeps us alive and going, while *cognitive consciousness* acts as it psychophysical embodiments and functions. Existential consciousness, our biological genes, do not function by themselves, but work through our body and mind.

6.1.2.2 When we pass away, it is the subconscious that is mostly involved. The adverb “mostly” is used because the unconscious (in the form of latent tendencies, *anusaya*) are always present in the mental process and rebirth process of an unawakened being.¹¹¹ This distinction is not a modern one, but goes back to at least the mediaeval Abhidhamma times.

In Anuruddha’s **Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha** (12th century), for example, we find consciousness defined and discussed in detail as being either “process consciousness” (*vīthi,citta*), that is, involving a thought process, or “process-free consciousness” (*vīthi,mutta*), a purely mental, but thought-free, process.¹¹² Although such terms are not found in the suttas or early Abhidhamma, they are found in their commentaries.¹¹³

6.1.2.3 Existential consciousness, in simple terms, refers to the rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*), that is, consciousness as the “many-lives” (diachronic) linking factor between lives [Fig 6.1]. It comprises the dependent arising cycle centering around *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging). In **the (Paṭicca,-samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2), however, we see existential consciousness defined *as a link* in dependent arising.¹¹⁴

The Cetanā Sutta 2 (S 12.39), for example, describes the end of birth in terms of an abridged dependent ending formula, thus:

¹⁰⁹ *Paṭisandhi,citta*; also *gandhabba* [12.1.3.3]. See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (3+8).

¹¹⁰ See also **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

¹¹¹ On latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

¹¹² See **Nimitta & anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14 esp (4) on rebirth.

¹¹³ The term *vīthi,citta* eg is found in: MA 1:76x3; KhpA 102; ItA 1:97x4; NmA 2:391, 392x2, 393; NcA 142x3, 143x2; VbhA 156, 157, 406; KvA 270, 279; DhSA 269, 280, 401x2, 402x2; PaṭA 107x2; Mohv:VRI 23, 59, 77. *Vīthi,mutta*, however, is a slightly later term found only in the Abhidhamma compendia and later works. See (9.3) below.

¹¹⁴ S 12.2/2:2-4 (SD 5.15).

But, bhikshus, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for the support for consciousness.

When there is no mental basis, consciousness is not established.

When consciousness is not established and does not grow, there is **no descent of name-and-form**.

With the ending of name-and-form, the six sense-bases end;

With the ending of the six sense-bases, contact ends;

With the ending of contact, feeling ends;

With the ending of feeling, craving ends;

With the ending of craving, clinging ends;

With the ending of clinging, existence ends;

With the ending of existence, birth ends;

With the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.39/2:66), SD 7.6b

6.1.3 A similar description is given in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15), where it is said that if no consciousness were “to descend into a mother’s womb,” or “were to depart” after that, *nāma, rūpa* would not form; or, if consciousness “were to be cut off” in a young person, *nāma, rūpa* would not develop and mature.¹¹⁵ In simple terms, this means that our sensing the world or our sense-experiences or sense-stimuli are what make us, create what we are.

This mutual conditioning of *viññāṇa* and *nāma, rūpa* shows that no part of an individual should be regarded as having independent existence or selfhood. This fact is clearly shown in the stock formula found in **the Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta** and elsewhere:

Whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all consciousnesses as they really are with right wisdom, thus: “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.”

It is when one knows thus, when one sees thus, that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs, there is no latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit.

(M 109,13/3:18; S 22.82/3:103; S 3:56 f, 68, 86 ff, 103; V 1:12 f), SD 17.11

6.1.4 Both cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness are mentioned in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15),¹¹⁶ showing that they are interconnected, thus:

22.1 EXISTENTIAL CONSCIOUSNESS. It is said: ‘**With name-and-form as condition, there is consciousness.**’

Ānanda, how name-and-form conditions consciousness should be known in this manner:

If there were no consciousness to find a footing in name-and-form, would there be further arising of birth, decay, death and suffering?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, the source, the origin, the condition for **consciousness**, that is to say, name-and-form.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ D 15,21-22/2:62 f (SD 5.17).

¹¹⁶ D 15,21-22/2:63 (SD 5.17). For a tr of detailed explanation at DA 2:501-503 with excerpts from Sub-comy, see Bodhi (tr), *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 2nd ed 1995:84-89.

¹¹⁷ On *nāma, rūpa*, see *Saṅkhā*, SD 17.4(2).

22.2 COGNITIVE CONSCIOUSNESS. It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born, decay and die, pass away and re-arise; thus far that there is a pathway for designation; thus far there is a pathway for language; thus far there is a pathway for description; thus far there is a sphere for wisdom; thus far that the round [of cyclic lives] turns [64] for describing this [state of being], that is, when there is name-and-form together with consciousness.¹¹⁸ (D 15.22/2:63), SD 5.17

We shall continue this discussion on how cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness interact in the next study.¹¹⁹

6.2 THE LOOPED SEQUENCE

6.2.1 Sutta references to the looped sequence

There is a special secondary, or “looped,” sequence of dependent arising found probably only in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15) and **the Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65).¹²⁰ This variant sequence begins with *viññāṇa*, but states that *viññāṇa* and *nāma, rūpa*, given as the second link in the formula, are mutually conditioning¹²¹ [Table 6].

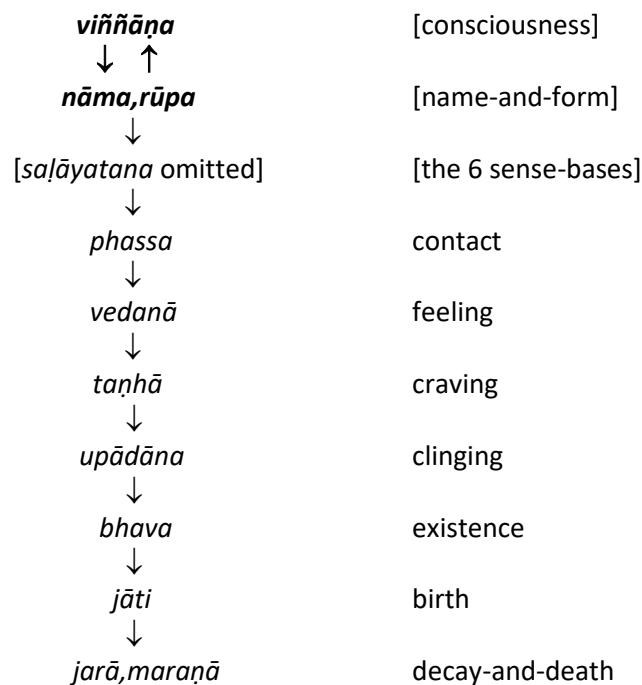


Table 6. The looped dependent arising

¹¹⁸ The PTS ed is followed here. Be adds *añña-m-añña, paccayatā pavattati*, “(which) occur as conditions for one another.” “But this phrase seems to have been mistakenly read from the commentarial gloss into the text itself.” (Bodhi 1984:60 n1). On the interrelationship between name-and-form and consciousness [21, 22], see **Naḷa, kalapiya S** (S 12.67) which compares this intimate interconnection (*nāma, rūpa* and *viññāṇa*) to “two bundles of reeds that are standing and supporting each other...if one of the two were to fall, the other would fall, too.” (S 12.67/ 2:114).

¹¹⁹ **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b(3).

¹²⁰ D 15,3/2:56 (SD 5.17) & S 12.65.9.3/2:105, 12.65.17ab/2:105), SD 14.2 respectively.

¹²¹ *Iti kho Ānanda nāma, rūpa, paccayā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇa, paccayā nāma, rūpaṃ* (D 15,3/2:56), SD 5.17. For details, see **Nagara S** (S 12.65,9.3/2:105 & 12.65,17.1+2/2:105), SD 14.2 (2).

6.2.2 The looped sequence

The **Mahā'padāna Sutta** (D 14) describes a 10-limbed dependent arising formula with the loop sequence, and states that as the key mental process in the awakening of the past buddha Vipassī. In the **Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65), too, the Buddha says before his awakening, he reflected on the 10-limbed cycle that starts with (12) decay-and-death (*jarā, maraṇa*) and ends with (4) name-and-form, as described in the Mahā'padāna Sutta.¹²² It is probable that this 10-limbed dependent arising [Table 6] is an ancient formula, if not the urtext or origin of the well known 12-limb dependent arising and its various versions.

6.2.3 A secondary sequence

In the usual sequence, after giving contact as the condition for feeling, feeling then follows as the condition for craving.¹²³ Here, however, the Buddha introduces a variation (D 15,9-18). From *feeling*, it returns to *craving* and then, from craving a new series—a **secondary sequence**—of nine factors are listed, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor. Here is the passage from **the Mahā Nidāna** (D 15):

¹²⁴Thus, Ānanda,

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| dependent upon <u>feeling</u> | (<i>vedanā</i>), | there is craving; |
| dependent upon <u>craving</u> | (<i>taṇhā</i>), | there is seeking; |
| dependent upon <u>seeking</u> | (<i>pariyesanā</i>), | there is gain; |
| dependent upon <u>gain</u> | (<i>lābha</i>), | there is decision-making; ¹²⁵ |
| dependent upon <u>decision-making</u> | (<i>vinicchaya</i>), | there is desire and lust; ¹²⁶ |
| dependent upon <u>desire and lust</u> | (<i>chanda, rāga</i>), | there is attachment; |
| dependent upon <u>attachment</u> | (<i>ajjhosāna</i>), | there is possessiveness; |
| dependent upon <u>possessiveness</u> | (<i>pariggaha</i>), | there is avarice; |
| dependent upon <u>avarice</u> | (<i>macchariya</i>), | there is safe-guarding; |
| dependent upon <u>safe-guarding</u> | (<i>ārakkha</i>), | there arise various bad unwholesome states—taking up of the rod, taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], back-biting, harsh speech, false speech. ¹²⁷ |

(D 15,9/2:58 f) = SD 5.17

This more down-to-earth sequence shows how, as a result, “there are born various bad unwholesome states” (D 15,9).¹²⁸ The purpose of this sequence is clear: it is to show that dependent arising can be used to

¹²² S 12.65,3-7 + SD 14.2 (3). On the looped sequence of dependent arising, see SD 17.8a (6.2).

¹²³ D 15,21-22/2:62 f (SD 5.17).

¹²⁴ This section—listing **the 9 states rooted in craving**, omitting the first link, feeling—forms a short sutta of its own, called **Taṇhā (Mūlaka) S** (A 9.23/4:400 f), and recurs at D 34.2.2(4)/3:289 (“**the 9 things to be abandoned**”) & Vbh 390. In the well known dependent arising formula, we have “contact→feeling→craving.” Here, however, the formula starts with feeling as the condition for craving, *successively followed by 9 other factors*, the last being a list of social problems. Comy labels the 2 sides of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and “ob-
sessional craving” (*samudācāra, taṇhā*) (DA 2:500). See Intro (3.2). On dependent arising being applied to the rise of social disorders, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (19.5).

¹²⁵ “Decision-making,” *vinicchaya*, lit “decision, deliberation, examination, investigation.”

¹²⁶ “Desire and lust,” *chanda, rāga*, here treated as dvandva (so Ñāṇamoli/Bodhi), “desire and passion” (Rhys Davids); sometimes treated as karmadharaya: “lustful desire” (Walshe).

¹²⁷ *Ārakkhā'dhikaraṇaṃ daṇḍ'ādāna, saṭṭh'ādāna, kalaha, viggaha, vivāda, tuvaṃtuva, pesuñña. musāvādā aneke pāpakā akusalā dhammā sambhavanti.*

¹²⁸ D 15,9/2:58 f (SD 5.17).

explain the origins of social disorder just as effectively as it can be used to understand the origins of individual suffering.¹²⁹ Thus, craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, but also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.¹³⁰

7 Viññāṇa as “consciousness of ...”

7.1 CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PROCESS

7.1.1 Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is not a state, but an activity connected with one or other of the 6 senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind). It is an activity of the sense-faculties, arising when a faculty is directed to a sense-object, and we mentally attend to this process. In other words, it cannot exist in itself: we must be conscious *of* something. As such, it is always impermanent, a momentary event that is changing, becoming other every moment (like a computer processing data).

Consciousness is impermanent because it is a *process*; as such, it is more meaningful here to speak of being “conscious *of*” something, that is, a subjective consciousness. This phrase helps to highlight the difference between the concept of an abiding entity (sometimes suggested by the term “consciousness”) and the process of *being* conscious (that is, being “conscious of”).¹³¹ [8.2.2]

7.1.2 But *what* is it that we are conscious of? We are conscious of contacts (stimuli) of the 6 sense-bases. The **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56) defines *viññāṇa* as follows:

19 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

There are these 6 classes of consciousness:¹³²

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Eye-consciousness | (visual awareness, | consciousness of seeing). |
| Ear-consciousness | (auditory awareness, | consciousness of hearing). |
| Nose-consciousness | (olfactory awareness, | consciousness of smelling). |
| Tongue-consciousness | (gustatory awareness, | consciousness of tasting). |
| Body-consciousness | (tactile awareness, | consciousness of touch). |
| Mind-consciousness | (cognitive awareness, | consciousness of thinking). |

This, bhikshus, is called “consciousness.” (S 22.56,19/3:61), SD 3.7

7.1.3 The **Mahā Tanhā,saṅkhāya Sutta** (M 38) defines *viññāṇa* arising dependent on the sense-faculty and its related sense-object, and is named after the sense-faculty, thus:

Bhikshus, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises.

¹²⁹ Well known examples of the causal origins of social problems are found in **Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-98), **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26/3:57-79, esp 26.14-22/3:67-75) and **Vāsetṭha S** (Sn 594-656): see discussion in Payutto 1994:73-75. Other suttas that investigate the causal conditions behind social disorder are **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21), **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13) and **Kalaha,vivāda S** (Sn 4.11). Despite their differences in formulation, they all come to the same conclusion. See **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15), SD 5.7 (3).

¹³⁰ Comy labels the two side of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa,mūla,tanhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra,tanhā*) (DA 2:500).

¹³¹ See Hamilton 1996a:87 f & 115 n29.

¹³² “**Classes of consciousness**,” *viññāṇa,kāya*. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) here refers to “cognitive consciousness” [6], and is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object. See SD 3.7 (6.5).

When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the nose and smells, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and tastes, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the body and touches, it is reckoned as body-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

THE FIRE SIMILE

Just as **fire** is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it burns.¹³³

| | |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| when fire burns dependent on wood, | it is reckoned as “wood fire”; |
| when fire burns dependent on wood chips, | it is reckoned as “wood-chip fire”; |
| when fire burns dependent on grass, | it is reckoned as “grass fire”; |
| when fire burns dependent on cow-dung, | it is reckoned as “cow-dung fire”; |
| when fire burns dependent on chaff, | it is reckoned as “chaff fire”; |
| when fire burns dependent on refuse, | it is reckoned as “refuse fire”; |

even so, too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises. (M 38,8/1:259 f), SD 7.10

7.1.4 The fire might be said to imply that, just as there is no latent, non-burning, form of fire, so there is no latent form of consciousness, apart from its 6 “kinds” arising dependent on a sense-organ and sense-object.¹³⁴ It is not that the fire, or *viññāṇa*, is of different types: just as a fire is named after the fuel feeding it, consciousness is named after the faculty in which it arises.

And just as under the appropriate conditions, fire burns, even so, under the appropriate conditions, consciousness arises, thus:

Though those conditions are infinitely variable, in the case of the former [the fire] the relevant characteristic of fire is burning, and in the case of the latter the relevant characteristic of the *viññāṇakkhandha* is providing consciousness of them. (Hamilton 1996a:90)

7.2 THE SENSES AS FACULTIES

7.2.1 The additional translations (within parentheses) for the 6 consciousnesses above have been added, based on **Hamilton’s** note that their usual translation as “eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness,” etc, “has little or no precise meaning for us in English,” and she adds that:

¹³³ The following are the fuel mentioned above for the fire in Pali: *kaṭṭha* (wood, stick, twig), *sakalika* (splinter, chip), *tiṇa* (grass), *go,maya* (cow-dung), *thusa* (chaff), *saṅkāra* (rubbish, refuse). The Pali word for “fuel,” *upādāna*, also means “clinging”, since clinging adds fuel to our craving (*taṇhā*). Our desire works closely with our self-view and self-identity: in fact, we are what we desire. “Bhikshus, one having sensual desires is reborn as an individual (*atta,bhāva*) into this or that existence depending on one’s merit or on one’s demerit.” (**Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S**, A 6.63.4c/3:411). This passage centring around the fire simile is a sort of abridgement of **Aditta,pariyāya S** (S 35.28), SD 1.3.

¹³⁴ See **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38), SD 7.10 (4).

If we translate the words *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāṇa*, *jivhā*, *kāya* and *mano* not as the organs of sense themselves but as representing the functions of those organs of sense, that is, sight or seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on, and if we specifically word the translation of each term as a genitive *tap-purisa* compounds,¹³⁵ then we have the following: *cakkhuvīññāṇa*, for example, would mean awareness of sight or seeing, *sotavīññāṇa* would be awareness of sound or hearing; *ghanavīññāṇa* awareness of taste, and so on. The same meaning is perhaps achieved more elegantly by translating as “visual awareness,” “auditory awareness,” and so on, but by using the overtly genitive wording in the first instance we gain a clearer understanding of the *viññāṇakkhandha* as providing “consciousness (or awareness) of.”

(1996a:88; see also 89-91; emphasis added)

7.2.2 Hamilton’s observation of the 6 internal senses as “**faculties**” (rather than “organs”) finds support in the early Pali texts. The suttas use a different terminology for the first three physical organs (*akkhi*, *kaṇṇa*, *nāsā*), thus:

| | Organ | Faculty |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------|
| <u>eye</u> | <i>akkhi</i> | <i>cakkhu</i> |
| <u>ear</u> | <i>kaṇṇa</i> | <i>sota</i> |
| <u>nose</u> | <i>nāsā</i> | <i>ghana</i> |
| tongue | <i>jīvā</i> | <i>jivhā</i> |
| body | <i>kāya</i> | <i>kāya</i> |
| mind | <i>mano</i> | <i>mano</i> |

Table 7.2 Physical organs and faculties

The fact that the set of faculties is more common in the suttas shows that the emphasis is on the subjective, that is, our ability to see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think. Experience as represented by the six types of consciousness, however, is the outcome of two determinants: the “objective” in-coming sensory impressions—the “sensing” of things—and the “subjective” way in which these sensory impressions are received and cognized—the “making sense” of things.¹³⁶

7.2.3 How this “subjective” experience occurs through the senses so that we are *conscious of* a sense-experience has been explained at the opening of this essay. **The Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18) explains that when sense-consciousness or sense-awareness arises dependent on its sense-faculty and sense-object, and the meeting of the three is *contact* (that is, sense-stimulus).¹³⁷ [1]

¹³⁵ A *tappurisa* (P; Skt *tatpurusa*; angl “tatpurusha”)—a dependent determinative compound—is a class of cpds having as first component a noun or noun stem that modifies the second component relating to it as possessor (as in *lionskin*), thing possessed (as in *waterski*), object of action (as in *keymaker*), location or habitat (as in *tree-deva*), agent (as in *mind-made*), instrument (as in *water-logged*), and so on. Most common are dativ tatpurushas, eg, *tap,purisa*, “that person”; or in English, “almsbowl.” A genitive tatpurusha relates to possessor, eg, *cakkhu,viññāṇa* = *cakkhussa viññāṇam* (the consciousness belonging to the eye). See A K Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 1963:77 f.

¹³⁶ See **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a(9.2).

¹³⁷ M 18,16/1:111 @ SD 6.14 (4).

7.2.4 After defining *viññāṇa*, the **Upādāna Parivaṭṭā Sutta** (S 22.56) (see above) goes on to instruct how insight into the nature of consciousness leads to freedom:

19 With the arising of name-and-form, there is the arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of name-and-form, there is the cessation of consciousness.

This noble eightfold path itself is the way to the ending of consciousness, that is to say:

right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

20 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,

having directly known consciousness,

having directly known the arising of consciousness,

having directly known the ending of consciousness,

having directly known the way to the ending of consciousness,

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation—they are well practised.

Those who are well practised gain a firm footing in this Dharma and Discipline.

21 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known consciousness, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending*, practise for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation, are well freed.

Those who are well freed are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round to describe them. (S 22.56,19-21/3:61), SD 3.7

7.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AND ĀYU, SĀṆKHĀRA.

7.3.1 There is a sutta passage where it is problematic to translate *viññāṇa* as “consciousness of.” **The Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) comprises of a dialogue on various topics between Mahā Koṭṭhita (the questioner) and Sāriputta (the respondent). Sāriputta has, earlier on, explained to Mahā Koṭṭhita that the 5 sense-faculties (*pañc’indriya*), that is, the physical senses, are dependent on life (or vitality) (*āyu*), which is dependent on heat (*usmā*), which is in turn dependent on life (*āyu*).¹³⁸ Then, this dialogue ensues:

“Avuso, when this body loses how many states is it then discarded, cast aside, lying like a lifeless log?”¹³⁹

“Avuso, when this body loses three states—vitality, heat, and *consciousness*—it is then discarded, cast aside, lying like a lifeless log.” (M 43,24/1:296), SD 30.2

7.3.2 *Viññāṇa* here seems to be identical with “life principle” (*āyu, saṅkhāra*), which according to the Majjhima Commentary refers to “life” (*āyu*) itself (MA 2:350). **Hamilton** makes the following observations:

The suggestion is that life, heat and *viññāṇa* collectively represent some form of basic life principle, and there is little room here for *viññāṇa* to mean “consciousness of.” But there are only two contexts in which *viññāṇa* is used in this way [here at M 43.24, and in **Pāyāsi Sutta**, D 23,17/ 2:335]. In other contexts where the term *āyusaṅkhāra* is used it either appears in the singular,¹⁴⁰ or is not explicitly associated with *viññāṇa*.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ M 43,22/1:295.

¹³⁹ Death does not occur merely with the departure of consciousness from the body. Life (or vitality) (*āyu*) and heat (*usmā*) must also be exhausted at the same time.

¹⁴⁰ D 2:106; A 4:311; U 64. (Hamilton’s fn)

¹⁴¹ S 2:266 (plural).

It is possible that the notion of *viññāṇa* as a life principle contributed to the development in later Buddhist traditions of more elaborate theories of consciousness. In the Sutta Piṭaka, however, it does not significantly compromise the many other contexts in which *viññāṇa* seems to mean “consciousness of.”¹⁴² (1996a:90 f)

7.3.3 Hamilton goes on to point out that she has stressed that “being conscious” is a fundamental characteristic of a human being and this might be why it is associated with the life-principle in the Mahā Vedalla Sutta, thus:

But in Buddhism there is a further reason for suggesting that it is consciousness of that is of greater importance. This is the Buddha’s teaching that karma is volition. The purpose of this teaching is precisely that one should be conscious of the process of cyclic rebirth that is fuelled by one’s volitions: the qualitative causal dimension implicit in the Buddha’s definition of karma requires consciousness *of* what one is willing. This association between consciousness of and spiritual progress might also explain why there is no discussion of peripheral awareness or involuntary reactions: they are not spiritually relevant. (1996a:90 f; underscore added)

7.4 ON BEING CONSCIOUS

We have by now established the fact that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is impermanent, and its usages in the suttas suggest that it functions as *a process of being aware*, for which, as Hamilton proposes, “consciousness of” is a good translation. Another important point to note is that while other philosophies and religions (such as the Upaniṣads and many other brahminical systems) regard consciousness as the very stuff of existence, as a metaphysical entity, both Reat (1990:296) and Hamilton (1996a) stress that “[t]he Buddha’s teaching is more concerned with how the human being operates than with what he or she consists of, and *viññāṇa* refers to the process which provides consciousness of.” (1996a:91; emphasis added)

8 *Viññāṇa* as a factor in cognition

8.1 THE KEY FACTOR OF COGNITION

8.1.1 The 5 aggregates are not separate entities, but function interdependently as an integral whole.¹⁴³ Although, we are now discussing “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), it is not a separate reality and does not operate in itself. *Viññāṇa* is, however, the key factor in the cognitive process,¹⁴⁴ as is evident from this famous passage from **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18):

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is contact.

With contact as condition, there is feeling.

What one feels, one perceives.

What one perceives, one thinks about.

What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates.

(M 18,16/1:111)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² See also Hamilton’s fn here.

¹⁴³ See SD 17.1b (1).

¹⁴⁴ “Cognitive process” refers to the mental process centering around consciousness (*viññāṇa*); “perceptual process” refers to the same process but centering around perception (*saññā*).

¹⁴⁵ See *Saññā*, SD 17.4 (8.2).

8.1.2 “The meeting of the three is contact” here refers to *viññāṇa* operating, in the presence of the sense-faculty and sense-object, as simple awareness (without any discriminatory function). Then we see this contact (*phassa*) giving rise to feeling (*vedanā*), and this in turn to perception (*saññā*).¹⁴⁶

8.1.3 This is a description of the “normal” unawakened way we look at things. Here, *viññāṇa* is the key process and, as the prerequisite of the cognitive process, appears in the first line of each of the passages related to the other sense-faculties and the sense-objects (ear and sounds, nose and smells, etc). *Viññāṇa* is, in other words, present at every stage of the cognitive process.

8.1.4 *Phassa* (contact or sense-stimulus)—the sensory event—gives rise to *vedanā*, not simply because of contact between the sense and its object. Only when *viññāṇa* is present does *phassa* give rise to feeling, which is then identified by *saññā*. This is then regarded as painful, pleasant or unnoticed as neither is felt, which, when sustained, leads to *vitakka* (discursive thought), and then to *papañca* (mental proliferation). *Viññāṇa* enables us to be aware of all these cognitive stages.

8.2 VIÑÑĀṆA AND SAÑÑĀ

8.2.1 In the suttas, we sometimes see a very close relationship between *viññāṇa* and *saññā*. In the *Khajja-nīya Sutta* (S 22.79), for example, we have these definitions:

7 And what, bhikkhus, is called **perception** (*saññā*)?

It perceives, bhikkhus, therefore it is called perception
(*Saññānāṭī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā saññā ti vuccati*).¹⁴⁷

And what does it perceive?

It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white.

It perceives, bhikkhus, therefore it is called perception. ...

9 And what, bhikkhus, is called **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

It cognizes, bhikkhus, therefore it is called consciousness
(*Vijānāṭī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇan ti vuccanti*).

And what does it cognize?

It cognizes sour, it cognizes bitter, it cognizes spicy hot, it cognizes sweet, it cognizes sharp, it cognizes mild [not sharp], it cognizes salty, it cognizes bland [not salty].¹⁴⁸

It cognizes, bhikkhus, therefore it is called consciousness.

(S 22.79/3:87), SD 17.9

8.2.2 We can see here that the explanation of *viññāṇa* is very similar to that of *saññā*, the difference being only in the type of sense-objects they cognize. The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that this difference in sense-object highlights a difference in their cognitive functions.

¹⁴⁶ All this is briefly mentioned at §1.3; see also *Saññā*, SD 17.4(7.1.1).

¹⁴⁷ On *saññā*, see SD 17.5. See S:B 1072 n114.

¹⁴⁸ The 8 kinds of tastes are, respectively, *ambila*, *tittika*, *kaṭuka*, *madhuka*, *khārika*, *akhārika*, *loṇaka*, *aloṇaka*. Defined as follows: sour “like mango, hog-plum, citron” (*amba, ambāṭaka, māṭuluṅ’ādi, ambilam*); bitter like “nimb (leaf), bittergourd, and various such plants” (*nimba, paṭol’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*); spicy hot like “various kinds of peppers” (*pippali, maric’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*; *marīci* is untr here); sweet like “ghee and cane-sugar, and so on” (*sappi, phāṇit’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*); sharp like “various creepers, and the shoots of such plants as the eggplant and the coconut” (*vāṭiṅgaṇa, nālikera catur-assa, valli, vett’aṅkur’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*, uncertain tr); mild like “some kinds of fruits or miscellaneous leaves such as those of the *kāra* tree” (*yaṃ vā taṃ vā phala, jātaṃ kāra, paṇṇ’ādi, missaka, paṇṇam*); salty like “various salted foods such as salted porridge, salted fish” (*loṇa.yāgu, loṇa.maccha, loṇa.bhatt’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*); bland like “various unsalted foods such as unsalted porridge, unsalted fish” (*aloṇa.yāgu, aloṇa.maccha, aloṇa.bhatt’ādi, nāna-p, pakāram*) (SA 2:293). See also *Sūda S* (S 47.8/5:149-152) qu at Vism 4.122/150 f.

Perception is synthesized by way of the eye-door because it is evident in apprehending or recognizing the appearance [distinctive mode] (*ākāra*) and shape (*saṇṭhāna*) of the object. Its function is to make a sign as a condition for apperceiving again that “this is the same,” that is, recognizing what has been cognized.¹⁴⁹

Consciousness, on the other hand, is analysed by way of the tongue-door because it can apprehend or cognize an object’s distinct qualities (*paccatta,bheda*) even when there is neither appearance nor shape (SA 2:293). In short, consciousness cognizes, perception recognizes.

Here we see both *saññā* and *viññāṇa* defined in discriminative terms. **Sue Hamilton** helpfully points out that although the definition of *viññāṇa* here encroaches on that of *saññā*, we should understand that *saññā* does the actual discrimination of the five sensory objects, identifying, say, a taste, more precisely (that is, what *sort* of taste),¹⁵⁰ while *viññāṇa* “is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, including the process of discriminating” (1996a:92, 55). The two, in other words, perform different functions. *Viññāṇa* is a bare or fundamental process of being “conscious of” (or being aware of) sense-objects, while *saññā* apprehends the distinctive qualities of sense-objects. Consciousness cognizes, perception recognizes. [8.3.7]

8.2.3 W S Waldron gives this helpful note to show the differences between *saññā* (Skt *saṃjñā*) and *viññāṇa* (Skt *vijñāna*):

Usually translated as “perception,” the Sanskrit term *saṃjñā* is composed of the prefix *saṃ*, “together,” plus the root verb *jñā*, “to know, perceive, understand,” that is, a “knowing-together.” *Samjñā* (P *saññā*) thus means “conception, idea, impression, perception” (BHSD 551 f). Interestingly, it is etymologically parallel with “conscious”: *com*, “together, with,” plus *scire*, “to know.” *Samjñā* is formally the opposite of *vijñāna* (P *viññāṇa*), which is composed of *vi-* “dis-,” plus the same root, *jñā*. While *vijñāna* stress disjunctive discernment, *saṃjñā* emphasizes a conjunctive construction of an image or idea that brings disparate sensations together into a whole, often connected with a name or concept. This is why *saṃjñā* is a *saṃskāra* (P *saṅkhāra*) of mind, a construction or complex (S 4:29): *saññā va vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāre ti*.

Saññā is often described as the apperception of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental phenomena (*dharmā*) (D 2:309). The example of *saññā* most typically given is color perception (M 1:293): “And what does [one] apperceive (*sañjānāti*)?” [One] apperceives what is green, yellow, red, white” (Johansson, 1979:92). (Waldron 2003:198 n69)

8.2.4 Viññāṇa (Skt *vijñāna*, consciousness) cognizes or discerns (*vijānāti*), that is, “splits” (*vi-*), or analyses, the sense-object that impinges on the sense-doors, deciding whether it is a visual object, a sound, a smell, a taste or a touch. We *know* or “sense” things (on a very general, simple but important level) through *viññāṇa*: that is, we have to *know* or “sense” that we see, or hear, smell, taste, or touch something. Otherwise, there is no knowledge of sensing.

As such, *viññāṇa* is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object, that is,

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| eye-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of physical form |
| ear-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of sound |

¹⁴⁹ See Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha §2.2(3): Abhs:BRS 80.

¹⁵⁰ The following 13 tastes are mentioned in the texts: astringent (*kaṣāva*) and sweet (*madhura*), salty (*lavana*, *loṇika*) and bland (*aloṇika*), sour (*lambila*, *ambila*), acrid or spicy hot (*kaṭuka*), sharp or alkaline (*khārika*) and mild (*akhārika*), tasty or pleasant (*sādu*), and tasteless or unpleasant (*asādu*), bitter (*tittaka*, *tittika*, also in *ālābu*, M 1:80, 315), cold (*sīta*) and hot (*uṇha*): 12 of them (excl *aloṇika*) are mentioned at Nm 240; Nc 236. The rest occur separately or in pairs at S 3:87, 5:140 f, J 3:145, DhA 1:344, Dhs 629, DhsA 320, Miln 56, 63.

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| nose-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of smell |
| tongue-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of taste |
| body-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of touch |
| mind-consciousness | the mental awareness of the presence of a mind-object (which can include any of the previous five) |

8.2.5 *Saññā* (Skt *saṃjñā*, perception) recognizes (*sañjānāti*) or forms an idea with which it identifies or recalls the object. The word *sañjānāti* is resolved as *saṃ + jānāti*, whose cognates in English are as follows:

com- + gnoscere (to know) → *cognize* (verb)
com- + scire (to know) → *conscious* (adjective).

The Latin prefix *com* or *con* has the sense of putting together, a synthesis of parts and the past (that is, from our memory and ideas formed of those memories).

Saññā, as such, is outward-oriented, and interprets (“puts together,” *saṃ-*) *what* is known by the sense-organ. In the full perceptual process directed to a visual object, for example, an eye-based consciousness is followed by a mind-based one (*mano, viññāṇa*), with a sequence of cognitions interpreting the same object as it is discerned at progressively higher levels.

Understandably, the most dominant of the 6 kinds of consciousness is mind-consciousness (*mano, viññāṇa*), since the mind leads all mental experiences (*mano pubb’aṅgamā dhammā*, Dh 1-2) [4.5]. However, at this point, on the level of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the process is still rudimentary and very much dragged on by latent tendencies or past habitual karma. In this sense, we act (think, speak, physically exert) simply out of old habits: in this sense, we really have *no* free will! Only through mindful practice and wisdom we realize this and could correct the process.

8.2.6 In Buddhist psychology, we can therefore say that **consciousness** or the conscious process in itself is affectively neutral (neither painful nor pleasant, *adukkha-m-asukha*): it simply cognizes or knows things. It is merely an existential process, meaning that we simply respond to external stimuli which keeps us alive. This is a very basic process that defines a living being, a conscious human or non-human.

Perception, on the other hand, is more involved, that is, it links a present conscious moment to a past experience, seeing them “as the same,” giving it a sense of permanence, as it were. It recognizes a sense-experience; hence, perception gives that conscious moment a hedonic value, as being pleasant (*sukha*) or painful (*dukkha*).¹⁵¹

When such a re-cognition is taken further and we re-act to a hedonic value, that is to say, we are drawn to it, desiring more of it, wanting it to be permanent, reinforcing the latent tendency of *lust* (*rāga*); or, we are repelled by it, drawing ourselves away from it, wanting to see it annihilated, rooting ourselves in *revulsion* (*paṭigha*); or, we simply ignore a conscious experience on account of not recognising it, and so reinforcing the motivational root of *ignorance* (*avijjā*).¹⁵²

Propelled by the notions of eternalism, we construct a desirable mirage of what we perceive as pleasant; we construct a repulsive phantom of what we perceive as unpleasant; we create an empty delusion of what we perceive as neither painful nor pleasant. We have created our world, and coloured it with moral tones. This is called **formations**; another word for it is karma.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ On perception, see *Saññā*, SD 17.4; on feelings, see *Vedanā*, SD 17.3.

¹⁵² See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3.

¹⁵³ See *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6.

8.2.7 Sometimes, aspects of *viññāṇa* and *saññā* overlap—they refer to the same thing—as in the names of the mental realms or meditation bases (*āyatana*), *saññā* refers to consciousness in its entirety, namely, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana*), and the non-conscious beings (*asaññā,satta*). In both cases, *saññā* does not refer to perception alone, but also to all the other aspects of consciousness.¹⁵⁴

Contrasted against *saṅkhāra* (mental formations) as the “doer,” *viññāṇa* is the “knower,” present at every stage of the cognitive process. In reality, there is neither doer nor knower, but a process of instantaneous discrete mental moments that race through our being, even as we read this right now. Everything is impermanent. All this not mine, this I am not, this is not my self. There is no reader, only the reading.¹⁵⁵

8.3 PAÑÑĀ

8.3.1 In terms of the growth, refinement and penetration of awareness, *viññāṇa* leads to *paññā* (Skt *prajñā*, wisdom). The suttas often use *paññā* in a qualitative sense that is more advanced than any form of ordinary knowledge (as it can have a sense broad enough to encompass such knowledge, too). A well known application of *paññā* in the suttas is found in the *third of the 3 trainings* (*sikkhā*), but the *first* in the threefold division of the noble eightfold path into moral virtue (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*),¹⁵⁶ thus:

| <u>Factor</u> | <u>aṅga</u> | <u>Training (sikkhā)</u> | <u>khandha</u> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| (7) Right view | <i>sammā diṭṭhi</i> | } <u>Wisdom group</u> (freedom-based) | <i>paññā khandha</i> |
| (8) Right intention | <i>sammā saṅkappa</i> | | |
| (1) Right action | <i>sammā kammanta</i> | } <u>Moral virtue group</u> (the body and speech) | <i>sīla khandha</i> |
| (2) Right speech | <i>sammā vācā</i> | | |
| (3) Right livelihood | <i>sammā ājīva</i> | | |
| (4) Right effort | <i>sammā vāyāma</i> | } <u>Concentration group</u> (the mind) | <i>samādhi khandha</i> |
| (5) Right mindfulness | <i>sammā sati</i> | | |
| (6) Right concentration | <i>sammā samādhi</i> | | |

(D 2:312; M 1:61, 3:251; Vbh 235)

Table 8.3 The noble eightfold path schema

8.3.2 According to the **Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta** (M 117), right view comes first because it knows right view and wrong view as they really are. In the same way, with right view, we know the other factors as they really are.¹⁵⁷ In other words, without right view, none of the factors would be “right” (*sammā*), that is, complete and true to reality and spiritually liberating.

In actual practice, moral virtue (*sīla*) comes first because our body and speech should be restrained first so that social living and progress in harmony is possible. This bodily and verbal restraint forms a good foundation for mental concentration (*samādhi*), which in due course leads to wisdom (*paññā*) and freedom

¹⁵⁴ For other senses of *saññā*, see **Saññā**, SD 17.4 (7.1).

¹⁵⁵ Further, see **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16.

¹⁵⁶ D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:229. For detailed studies on the noble eightfold path, see **Sammā,diṭṭhi S** (M 9), SD 11.14; **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117), SD 6.10; **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (M 16), SD 9 (10d); see also **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.11/1:301), SD 21.7.

¹⁵⁷ M 117/3:71-78 @ SD 6.10 (2).

(*vimutti*). And a wholesome consciousness runs through the whole process: it supports the spiritual evolution, and is in turn transformed by it.

8.3.3 In the noble eightfold path schema, a distinction is made between *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (spiritual wisdom). Both need to be practised, that is, realized or internalized. With mindfulness as the tool, *samādhi* arises, further strengthening mindfulness, as a result of which *paññā* arises. In the end, *aññā* (the arhat's penetrative insight) is achieved, not by the meditation itself, but through *paññā*.

8.3.4 The evolution of consciousness [11] through the dynamics of the 3 trainings can be seen in another way: that of the threefold wisdom (*paññā*), that is,

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| (1) wisdom through thinking, | <i>cintā, mayā paññā</i> |
| (2) wisdom through listening, and | <i>suta, mayā paññā</i> |
| (3) wisdom through cultivation. | <i>bhāvanā, mayā paññā</i> ¹⁵⁸ |

What we learn or know usually begins with listening to teachings (including reading about them). However, much of what we know actually comes from external sources, that is, through conversing and communicating with others and the mass media, that is, through second-hand (even third-hand) transmission, that is, “received” information. This is traditionally called “heard” (*suta*) wisdom.

This knowledge is built up and refined with how we think (*cintā*) or reflect on it: as we think, so we are. The former (what is heard) may be said to be *intellectual wisdom*, while the latter (what is thought), *philosophical wisdom*. Neither is spiritually liberating as they are not a direct experience of reality: they are like *reading* and *thinking* about food, but not really eating at all, so that we are still hungry! Only the third, the wisdom self-realized through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), or *spiritual wisdom*, the direct experience of true reality through deep mental focus, leads to full freedom.

8.3.5 In the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), Mahā Koṭṭhita asks Sāriputta a series of questions of special interest to us here as it concerns *vedanā*, *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *paññā*. Let us examine the relevant passages:

5 “Wisdom (*paññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), avuso—are these states associated¹⁵⁹ or dissociated? And is it possible to separate these states in order to describe their difference?”

“Wisdom and consciousness, avuso—these states are associated, not dissociated. And it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.

For what one understands (*pajānāti*), that one cognizes (*vijānāti*), and what one cognizes, that one understands.

Therefore these states are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.”¹⁶⁰

6 “What is the difference, avuso, between wisdom and consciousness, these states that are associated, not dissociated?”

¹⁵⁸ D 3:219; Vbh 324. This model is sometimes presented with *suta, mayā paññā* first as the first two usually develop somewhat simultaneously in a person.

¹⁵⁹ “Associated” (*samsettha*). Comy explains as “associated by way of arising together, ceasing together, sharing the same basis (sense-faculty), sharing the same sense-object” (*ek’uppāda, eka, nirodha, eka, vatthuka, ek’ārammaṇatāya samsetthā*) (MA 2:342).

¹⁶⁰ Comy says that this statement refers to the wisdom and consciousness on the occasions of both insight and the supramundane path. The two are associated in that they arise and cease simultaneously, and share a single sense-base and object. However, the two are not totally associated in that while wisdom always needs consciousness, consciousness can occur by itself (without wisdom). (MA 2:342)

“The difference, avuso, between wisdom and consciousness, these states that are associated, not dissociated, is this: wisdom is to be cultivated (*bhavetabbam*), consciousness is to be fully understood (*pariññeyyam*).¹⁶¹

9 “Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), avuso—are these states associated or dissociated? And is it possible to separate these states in order to describe their difference?”

“Feeling, perception and consciousness, avuso—these states are associated, not dissociated. And it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.

For what one feels (*vedeti*), that one perceives (*sañjānāti*); and what one perceives, that one cognizes (*vi jānāti*).

Therefore these states are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.”¹⁶² (M 43/1:292 f), SD 35.1

8.3.6 *Viññāṇa* is singled out here because without it—without consciousness or awareness—no feeling, no perception, no wisdom, is possible. “Its inseparability from *paññā* implies that wisdom has to be conscious: you have to know what you know.” (Hamilton 1996a:95). **Hamilton** concludes with the following observation:

We have the three mental *khandhas* of *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* working together, each contributing to the process: *vedanā* as affective cognition, *saññā* as discriminatory or identificatory cognition, and *viññāṇa* as consciousness of each and every part of the process as a whole. The absence of the *saṅkhārakkhandha* here will not surprise us since we have seen that it is the source of volitions, which are to be neutralized completely if wisdom is to be attained. *Viññāṇa*, the *khandha* which provides awareness, represents the very basis of knowledge, and while the highest levels that constitute liberating insight may be qualitatively and inconceivably different knowledge from mundane cognition, one is nevertheless conscious of it in some way: this much is evident from the Buddha’s accounts of his own experience of Enlightenment.¹⁶³

(1996a:95)

8.3.7 Here Hamilton follows Buddhaghosa’s commentarial scholarship found in the Visuddhi, magga (Vism 14.3-5/437), the Saṃyutta Commentary (SA 2:293 f) and the Attha, sālinī,¹⁶⁴ where *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *paññā*—operating as *sañjānāti*, *vi jānāti*, *pajānāti* respectively—are cognitive functions of increasing depth, discriminative acumen, and full comprehension, but **Bodhi** cautions that

¹⁶¹ Wisdom, as a factor of the noble eightfold path—the path factor of right view—is to be developed. Consciousness, as one of the 5 aggregates pertaining to the noble truth of suffering, is to be fully understood, that is, as impermanent, suffering, and not self. **Hamilton’s** rendition of “*viññāṇa* is for everything that is to be known (*parineyyam*),” despite her careful explanations, is forced, has no canonical basis, and is ungrammatical (1996a: 94 f). Most clearly, it also does not fit the context: *paññā bhavetabbam viññāṇam pariññeyyam*, where the prefix *-ñeyya* is fut pass part in *-aneyya* (Geiger & Norman, *A Pāli Grammar*, 2000 §201). The point here is that just as “*paññā* should be cultivated, *viññāṇa* should be fully understood”: it is a sentence with two correlative now phrases. This is how *pariññeyyam* is used in **Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana S** (S 22.56) where we have *taṃ...dukkhaṃ ariya, saccaṃ pariññeyyam*, “this noble truth is that suffering (or, this suffering that constitutes a noble truth) should be fully known” (S 22.56.9/5:422), SD 1.1.

¹⁶² Comy says that wisdom has been excluded here because the intention is to show only the states that are associated on every occasion of consciousness. (MA 2:343)

¹⁶³ For a discussion of the conceptual and linguistic problems associated with describing transconceptual insight, see P Williams, “Non-conceptuality, critical reasoning and religious experience: Some Tibetan Buddhist discussions,” in M McGhee (ed), *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, Cambridge, 1992:194 f.

¹⁶⁴ *Saññā* is def in some detail at DhsA 110 f; *viññāṇa* (under *citta*) at DhsA 63 f.

this, however, is difficult to reconcile with the account of these factors found in the Nikāyas. Usually in the suttas *viññāṇa* is presented simply as the basic awareness of an object through which one of the sense-bases, ie, as bare “conscious of” rather than as a discriminative capacity. A parallel treatment of *viññāṇa* at M 1:292,26-29 defines it through its ability to cognize the three types of feelings (pleasant, painful, neutral); this just shifts the problem to that of distinguishing between *viññāṇa* and *vedanā*. (S:B 1072 n114)

8.3.8 This is where we can see a radical difference between Western psychology, especially of the Freudian tradition,¹⁶⁵ where the cognitive, the affective and the conative are three different processes. In Buddhist psychology, the mind (here *citta*) functions in all these 3 ways, but they are not distinct; they are overlapping processes.

When we refer to the mind as a cognitive process, we call it consciousness (*viññāṇa*); when we refer to the mind’s affective process, we call it feeling (*vedanā*); and when we refer to the mind’s conative or intentional processes, we call them formations (*saṅkhāra*) or volition (*cetanā*). The mind or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) pervades all these processes; otherwise we would not be *conscious* of any of them at all.¹⁶⁶

8.3.9 However, as Sue Hamilton has already stated [8.2], we should understand that *saññā* does the actual discrimination of the 5 sensory objects, identifying, say, a taste, more precisely (that is, what sort of taste), while *viññāṇa* “is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, including the process of discriminating.” (1996a:92).¹⁶⁷ And we must remember that *viññāṇa* also functions as *attention* [1.3], by which it allows sense-stimuli to occur.

9 *Viññāṇa* as giving continuity

9.1 A SENSE OF CONTINUITY

It has been shown earlier, by way of the fruit salad parable [4.3], that consciousness is not a permanent entity, but merely a series of discrete mental events, rising successively and instantaneously as it were. Consciousness’ impermanence is further illustrated in the monkey parable of the Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61) [3.1], where the tree-swinging monkey grasps one branch after another as it moves through the forest. Just as the monkey shows a continuous movement, we experience our consciousness as having continuity (*saṅgati*); in other words, working conditionally as a network of causes and effects.

Although we may not recall how we feel, such as when we were babies, we are convinced that we are conscious beings; that as living beings, we are all conscious. Upon waking after a period of sleep, our consciousness seems to continue as it does before we have fallen asleep. Even when we are not normally conscious, such as when under anaesthesia during an operation, or when we are afflicted with a fainting spell, or when in a coma, we still regard consciousness as functioning within us.

¹⁶⁵ The Freudian terms “id,” “ego,” and “super-ego” are not his inventions but are latinisations originating from his translator James Strachey. Freud himself used “das Es,” “das Ich,” and “das Über-Ich”—respectively, “the It,” “the I,” and the “Over-I” (or “Upper-I”). As such, for the German reader, Freud’s original terms are more or less self-explanatory. The term “das Es” (tr “it”) was borrowed from **Georg W Groddeck**, a German physician, whose unconventional ideas attracted Freud. Groddeck’s “It” refers to the concept of Dao or organic universal spirit. See G W Groddeck, *The Book of the It*, NY: Nervous and Mental Diseases Publishing Company, 1928. The term “unconscious” appeared in **Eduard von Hartmann’s** *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) some 30 years before Freud (1856-1939) wrote about the Unconscious. Hartmann was influenced by the Buddhism popular in the intellectual circle of his time. See Irvin A Hansen, “Buddhist influences on the idea of the unconscious,” 2007.

¹⁶⁶ See Thich Minh Thanh 2001:5 f, 128 f.

¹⁶⁷ See Hamilton (1996a:53-55, 92-95). Bodhi however agrees with these explanations of hers (S:B 1072 n114).

There are those who claim that, while asleep, they are aware of their dreams (as in lucid dreaming), or that, while in a coma, they are still aware of external events (such as out-of-body experiences). Even the mentally ill are believed to have some awareness of their environment. Sometimes, those pronounced clinically dead or whose body fail to show any sign of life, unexpectedly “return to life.”

Apparently, there is some sort of undercurrent of “fuel” (like electricity running through wires and various electrical gadgets) linking the moments of our lives. The Buddha however rejects the notion of any abiding entity (such as a “soul”) as they simply cannot exist because whatever exists can only exist in change and impermanence.

9.2 VIÑÑĀṆA AND SLEEP

9.2.1 Very little is said in the suttas about sleep and dreams [9.3]. Even the best known passage—the locus classicus for the satipatthana practice—in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), tersely instructs, “Furthermore, bhikkhus, a monk [meditator], while asleep, while awake, clearly knows what he is doing” (*puna ca param bhikkhave bhikkhu ... sutte jāgarite ... sampajāna,kārī*).¹⁶⁸

However, some useful insights can be found from the oral transmission of meditation instructors. Here are two examples.

9.2.2 Mindfulness over time

9.2.2.1 Those who are experienced with samadhi, or familiar with its nature, will notice that mindfulness is not always focused in the present moment. The Pali term for mindfulness, *sati*, translates both as “mindfulness” and as “memory” (or “remembering”). When our mindfulness is well grounded in samadhi, or better in dhyana, it is able to focus on an object many moments old, look deep into it as if it is arising right now, and see it for what it really is.

Hence, **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) instructs us to direct our mindfulness to focus on sleeping (*sutte*).¹⁶⁹ Now, even arhats are not aware when they’re asleep. Hence, some have reasoned (wrongly) that we should take *sutte* as meaning “when falling asleep.” However, *suttee*, a present participle with the temporal sense of “when” clearly means “when asleep” or “while sleeping.”¹⁷⁰ The Pali phrase for “falling asleep” is *niddam okkamati*.

9.2.2.2 In **the mindfulness (clearly knowing) when asleep** (*suttee ... sampajāna,kārī*) refers to the practice of observing “sleeping,” focused on an old experience, like replaying a recording of that past event. Our mindfulness takes this old experience as its object. This understanding is vitally useful when we go on to examine the focus of mindfulness on mind-consciousness (*citta*).¹⁷¹

Basically, it is like when, with a focused mind, we recall or trace back a fascinating journey we have taken, or when we had misplaced something. We “picture” the event moment by moment, as it were. At first, we get only some flickering or glimmer of the events; or we locate and find the lost object. Then, as our mindfulness grows, we begin to fit the pieces together to form a bigger and clear picture.

Of course, to be able to do this, we must first cultivate a strong and stable mindfulness, one that arises from a habitually calm and clear mind of joy and peace.

¹⁶⁸ D 22,4/2:292 (SD 13.2) = M 10,8/1:57 (SD 13.3).

¹⁶⁹ M 10,8(7)/1:57 (SD 13.3). For details: SD 13.1 (3.6.2).

¹⁷⁰ Wijesekera, *Syntax of the Cases in the Pali Nikayas*, 1993:227 (§174a).

¹⁷¹ See Brahmavamso 2002:26, 32-34, 2006:112, 116 f.

9.2.3 Perception practice

On a simpler level of mind-training, especially for those who for some reason are unable to do sitting meditation—or if we *do* practise sitting meditation but have not advanced very far—it is most advantageous to do a short “perception practice” (*saññā*) immediately before falling asleep and as soon as we wake up. We could, for example, mindfully focus our attention on the breathing process and fall asleep on that. If this is properly done, we could easily fall asleep within a few minutes.¹⁷² Upon awakening, we should immediately smile happily (in our hearts, at least) and cultivate lovingkindness.

These two meditations could be alternated or any one used as it is applicable and efficacious. Or, we could also use the “Bud-dho” breath meditation (for either case), at the end of each inhalation, mindfully note “Bud,” at the end of each exhalation, note “dho.”

9.2.4 A key purpose of meditating is to transform our negative habits and mental states into present-moment awareness and wholesome response. It takes a good habit to displace, or at least weaken, a bad habit. The principle behind this practice is that of telling the mind (telling ourselves), “This is the wholesome habit I want you, mind, to cultivate!”¹⁷³

As such, the “sleep perceptions” should be a proper routine like our toilet habits. Even when, especially when, we were to suddenly waken mid-sleep, we should at once apply this sleep perception exercise instead of sinking into some unhappy thought cycle or dark sense of loss.

There is a way of ascertaining that our perception practice is working well. Our dream quality improves, for example, but more significantly we may actually “hear” the positive feedback we have been doing before and after sleep, or we generally feel a pervading sense of inner ease. Please note, however, these are still very mundane states, but which should facilitate us in cultivating the deeper aspects of proper Buddhist meditation.¹⁷⁴

9.2.5 The benefits of lovingkindness

Both the **Atṭha Mettānisamsa Sutta** (A 8.1) and the **(Ekā,daśa) Mettānisamsa Sutta** (A 11.16) states that the cultivation of lovingkindness helps us to sleep happily and wake happily.¹⁷⁵ Lovingkindness can be cultivated in all our 4 postures—standing, walking, sitting, and reclining.¹⁷⁶ In other words, even a simple cultivation of lovingkindness is often helpful in getting us to fall asleep easily, sleep peacefully, and awake happily.

As we comfortably lie down to end the day, we should clear up our mind of the past and renounce the world for the night. We should tell ourselves all those happy thoughts we love or need: “May I be well! May I be happy! May I be at peace with myself.” and similarly to those who are near or dear to us. We then fall asleep happily, and wake up happily: this will change our lives for good.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² For those of us who find breath meditation actually refreshes or energizes us, we should then do a simple cultivation of lovingkindness.

¹⁷³ For such a spiritual soliloquy or apostrophic practice, see eg the examples of **Tāla,puṭa** (**Tāla,puṭa Tha**, Tha 1091-1145), SD 20.9, and of **Cakkhu,pāla**, where he addresses himself as “Pālita” (DhA 1.1/1:3-21). Comy on Sn 45 f recounts a **pratyeka-buddha** addressing his mind (SnA 1:93).

¹⁷⁴ On meditation, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1.

¹⁷⁵ A 8.1 (SD 30.6); A 11.16 (SD 2.15); also PmA 2:129; Miln 198; Araka J, J 169/2:61.

¹⁷⁶ (**Karaṇīya**) **Metta S** (Sn 151 = Khp 9,9), SD 38.3.

¹⁷⁷ See also SD 38.5 (2.2.3).

9.3 DREAMS

9.3.1 As mentioned in the previous section, very little is said in the suttas about sleep and dreams.¹⁷⁸ However, starting in the mid-20th century, as western interest in Buddhism grew and gravitated towards Buddhist psychology and meditation, literature on the Buddhist notion of sleep is slowly growing.¹⁷⁹

The earliest statement in modern Buddhist scholarship is that of the Burmese scholar, **Shwe Zan Aung**, in “An introductory essay to the Compendium of Buddhist Philosophy,”¹⁸⁰ where his comments on dreamless sleep are found on pages 9-12. Speaking from the Abhidhamma tradition, he says that the thought-free (*vīthi,mutta*, literally, “process-free) mind [6.1], such as during dreamless sleep, is called *bhavaṅga* (life-continuum).¹⁸¹

All thinking consists of mental processes (*vīthi,citta*). The mind-door (*mano,dvāra*) separates the *bhavaṅga* and consciousness (*citta*), and Shwe Zan Aung uses the term subliminal for the *bhavaṅga*, and supraliminal for normal consciousness. It is the *bhavaṅga* (subliminal consciousness, for which I use “the subconscious”) that, as the *paṭisandhi,citta* (rebirth consciousness) or *cuti,citta* (the death consciousness), links this life to the next: hence, it is called life-continuum.¹⁸² Shwe Zan Aung explains:

And when that current is opposed by any obstacle of thought from the world within, or perturbed by tributary streams of the senses from the world without, the thoughts (*vīthi-citta*’s) arise. But it must not be supposed that the stream of being is a subplane from which thoughts arise to the surface. There is juxtaposition of momentary states of consciousness, subliminal and supraliminal, throughout a life-time and from existence to existence. But there is no superposition of such states. (Abhs:SR 9-12)

9.3.2 In a recent study, **Steven Collins** has commented on deep sleep, saying that the *bhavaṅga* is a convenient concept for explaining it, in which neither conscious process nor dreams occur. He quotes Nāgasena’s explanation of dreams from **the Milinda,pañhā**:

one who dreams does so neither when (fully) asleep nor when awake, but in the interval state while falling deeply asleep before *bhavaṅga* is reached... When someone is deeply asleep, his mind is in the *bhavaṅga* state; a mind in the *bhavaṅga* state does not function...whereas one sees dreams with a functioning mind. [Miln 299 f]

9.3.3 The stage of sleep in which dreams occur is called “monkey-sleep...the middle stage of sleep,” whereas “the final stage is in *bhavaṅga*” (id). Collins goes on to summarize **the Vibhaṅga Commentary’s** inter-

¹⁷⁸ The Pali Canon and Commentaries, however, make significant references to dreams and dream-stories, the best known of which are Mahā Māyā’s dream (J 1:50 f; MA 4:175) and the Bodhisattva’s pre-awakening dreams (A 3:240; Mvst 2:136), both of which are followed by dream interpretations. The Jātaka mentions Pasenadi Kosala’s 16 dreams (J 77/1:334-343).

¹⁷⁹ For developments in this area in modern Chinese Mahayana, see Heng Sure, “A Buddhist Approach to Dreams Jung and Junti—Dreams West and East.” Accessed 20 Oct 2006, <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma7/dreams-.html>. For contemporary Tibetan teachings on dream yoga, see Namkhai Norbu, *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light*, ed Michael Katz, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, rev ed 2004; also <http://www.plotinus.com/zhine-tibetan-dream-yoga.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ **Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha**, tr Shwe Zan Aung (as *Compendium of Philosophy*) [Abhs:SR]; rev & ed CAF Rhys Davids, London: Pali Text Society, 1910:1-76.

¹⁸¹ Shwe Zan Aung uses the term “being”; on *bhavaṅga*, see Abhs:SR 265-268.

¹⁸² Shwe Zan Aung uses “the stream of being” for *bhavaṅga,sota*.

esting discussion on dreams. **Peter Harvey**, too, briefly discusses dreams, especially in his section on the *bhavaṅga* in his book, *The Selfless Mind*.¹⁸³ [9.3.6]

9.3.4 Here¹⁸⁴ I present some details of the commentarial explanation of dreams. Buddhaghosa explains that dreams occur when we “wake up at the mind-door impulsion (*mano,dvārika javana*), not with the 5-door: he sees a dream only with that, not with the 5-door” (VbhA 2050/407). He gives these **4 reasons for the occurrences of dreams**:

- (1) The disturbance of the elements (*dhātu-k,khobha*), that is, through an imbalance of the humours (internal elements of earth, water, fire and air).¹⁸⁵ Examples include dreams of falling down a mountain, moving through space, being chased by wild beasts or robbers.
- (2) Past experiences (*anubhūta,pubba*) (that is, a mental replay of some past events or perceptions).
- (3) Divine intervention (*devatōpasamhāra*), that is, devas (probably past relatives) wishing him well or wishing him ill, present good omens or ill omens to him by way of dreams.
- (4) A portent (*pubba,nimitta*), that is, signs of good or ill seeking to arise due to one’s merit or demerit, such as the dream of the Bodhisattva’s mother of her conception,¹⁸⁶ or the Bodhisattva’s five great dreams,¹⁸⁷ and king Pasenadi Kosala’s sixteen dreams.¹⁸⁸ (VbhA 2051/407)

Buddhaghosa interestingly states that dreams occur to all ordinary worldlings and learners (all saints, except the arhat). Only the adepts or arhats (*asekha*) (including the Buddha) do not see dreams because they have abandoned the 4 perversions.¹⁸⁹

9.3.5 Buddhaghosa begins by saying that dreams can only occur on three possible occasions, that is, during sleep, in a waking state, or when we are neither asleep nor awake (eg unconscious). The first case—that of dreaming during sleep—is not possible because it conflicts with the Abhidhamma, which teaches that sleep (that is, deep dreamless sleep)¹⁹⁰ occurs with the life continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga citta*), when there is no sign of form, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought as object, nor does it become associated with greed, hate or delusion—all of which occur as part of a dream.

On the other hand, if dreams were to occur during the waking state, this conflicts with the Vinaya. For the waking state is normal (*saṁvohārika*) consciousness, and when a monastic offence is committed, it is regarded as an offence. But when such an offence is committed during a dream, it is not an offence. Furthermore, according to Buddhaghosa, we see no dream when we are neither asleep nor awake, too.

9.3.6 Buddhaghosa, quoting Nāgasena, says that dreaming only occurs during “monkey sleep” (*makkaṭa,-niddā*) (Miln 300) or “monkey torpor” (*kapi,middha*) (VbhA 408)¹⁹¹ [9.3.3]. Monkey sleep is a light sleep, because it is again and again interspersed with wholesome, unwholesome and indeterminate consciousness,

¹⁸³ 1995: §§6.7, 29, 31, 10.13-14, 40.

¹⁸⁴ VbhA 406-408; cf AA 3:317.

¹⁸⁵ On the humours, see *Rūpa*, SD 17.1 (5-6).

¹⁸⁶ MA 4:175; J 1:50 f.

¹⁸⁷ A 5.196/3:240; also Mvst 2:136; AA 3:240-242 & VA 520.

¹⁸⁸ J 77/1:334-343.

¹⁸⁹ That is, the perversions of perception (*saññā vipallāsa*), of thought (*citta vipallāsa*), of view (*diṭṭhi vipallāsa*): see *Saññā*, SD 17.4 (9.3).

¹⁹⁰ Buddhaghosa elsewhere says that the *bhavaṅga* consciousness occurs as long as no other mind-moments arise to interrupt it, and it goes on endlessly as in periods of deep, dreamless sleep (Vism 14.114/458; VismT ad loc; Vism:Ñ 515 n45).

¹⁹¹ Also qu at AA 3:317, where *kapi,middha* is used.

and during which time he again and again drops into the life continuum. This is when dreams occur, and as such, they are wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate.

Buddhaghosa gives the following examples. If we dream of paying homage at a shrine, or of listening to the Dharma, and so on, it is wholesome. If we dream of such things as the killing of living beings, it is unwholesome. When we are free from either extreme, at the moment of mental advertence and registration,¹⁹² it is indeterminate.

9.3.7 At this point, the **Aṅguttara Commentary** adds that a dream is unable to bring about rebirth linking (*paṭisandhi*) through volition because it has a weak basis. It may bring about some karmic result when supported by other wholesome or unwholesome karma. Anyway, because it arises outside the sensory field, dream volition is negligible.

Buddhaghosa, in the Aṅguttara Commentary, makes another interesting remark, that dreams occur *only* around dawn, “when what has been eaten, drunk or chewed is fully digested, when the nutritive essence is absorbed into the body, when the sun is rising” (AA 3:317). This remark is interesting, since in modern research, dreaming is said to occur just before we waken.¹⁹³

9.3.8 Evaluation

How does the commentarial explanation¹⁹⁴ of dreams stand today? Let us first look at the modern scientific definition of dreams. A **dream**, according to modern science, is mental activity associated with the rapid-eye-movement (REM) period of sleep. It is commonly made up of a number of visual images, scenes or thoughts expressed in terms of *seeing* rather than in those of the other senses or in words.

Electroencephalograph (EEG) studies, measuring the electrical activity of the brain during REM sleep, have shown that young adults dream for 1½ to 2 hours of every eight-hour period of sleep. Infants spend about half of their sleep in the REM phase, and as such are believed to dream more often than adults, but the dream duration decreases steadily with age.

During dreams, blood pressure and heart rate increase, and breathing speeds up, but the body is otherwise still. Studies have shown that those deprived of dream-sleep are likely to become irritable and lose coordination skills.¹⁹⁵

10 Viññāṇa and karma

10.1 Earlier on [5.2], we noted that according to the **Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3), the other four aggregates—form, feeling, perception, and formations—are the “house” of consciousness (*viññāṇa*): *viññāṇa* is present in all of them, just as it is common to all states or classes of consciousness (DhsA 63). The Sutta commentary glosses *viññāṇa* here as *kamma, viññāṇa* (karmic consciousness) (SA 2:259), clearly evident

¹⁹² These two Abhidhamma terms refer to the cognitive process, such as seeing: when an object impinges on a sense-door or the mind-door, there occurs a mind-moment called *bhavaṅga, calana* (vibration of the life-continuum), by which the *bhavaṅga* “vibrates” for a single moment. This is followed by another moment called *bhavaṅg’upaccheda* (arrest of the life-continuum), by which the flow of the *bhavaṅga* is cut off. Then, immediately, a *citta* (mind-moment), adverts to the object either at one of the 5 physical sense-doors or the mind-door: this is called “**advertence**” (*āvajjana*). Then a series of mind-moments arise resulting in the act of seeing, etc. This is followed by the all-important *javana* (impulsion) stage—usually seven moments—which give the sensing its moral flavour. This is usually followed by the mind taking this object as its own: this is “**registration**” (*tad-ārammaṇa*). Then the mind sinks back into the *bhavaṅga*. See Abhs:BRS 3.8/122-124, 4.6/153-156; SD 8.3(11-12); SD 7.6 (2.2).

¹⁹³ The advice on “sleeping happily” and “waking happily” should be examined here, esp their practical benefit in helping our minds to be more wholesome: see SD 40a.8 (6.5).

¹⁹⁴ I.e. those of Nāgasena and of Buddhaghosa.

¹⁹⁵ For a biblio on dream psychology, see http://psych.ucsc.edu/dreams/Library/fmid_refs.html.

from its role in linking our personal continuity through the rounds of lives. *Viññāṇa* then is what sustains us in this life and holds us down to future lives.

10.2 In fact, we have discussed *saṅkhāra* as “karmic fuel” that sustains our present lives and propels future ones.¹⁹⁶ The fact that *viññāṇa* is the only process that clearly continues across many lives, shows its close connection with karma, hence with formations (*saṅkhāra*). That all we can bring along, indeed are bound to, is our karma, and we are often reminded to constantly reflect as follows:

I am the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds,
the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds,
my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I do,¹⁹⁷ good or bad, I will be its heir.

(M 3:203 = A 5.57/3:72 f = 186 = 5:88, 288), SD 5.13

10.3 Discourses, such as **the (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33), caution us how our karma stalks us as we journey through life: we are karma-burdened time-travellers, reaping karmic fruits and sowing karmic seeds along the way:

Bhikshus, just as viable [good] seeds, not rotten, undamaged by wind or sun, viable,¹⁹⁸ properly planted in well-prepared soil in a good field, and if there were proper and timely rain,¹⁹⁹ then, bhikshus, these seeds would sprout and grow in abundance.

Even so, bhikshus, whatever action that is done in **greed**, born in greed, caused by greed, arising in greed, it ripens wherever the individual is born. And wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma’s result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

Whatever action that is done in **hate** ... wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma’s result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

Whatever action that is done in **delusion**, born in delusion, caused by delusion, arising in delusion, it ripens wherever the individual is born. And wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma’s result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

(A 3.33.1/1:135), SD 4.14

10.4 When a passage such as this [10.3] is compared with one concerning *viññāṇa*—such as **the Parivīmaṃsana Sutta** (S 12.51)—we can actually see that they refer to the same context, that they are in fact referring to the same thing:

Bhikshus, if a person, drowned in ignorance,²⁰⁰ creates meritorious volitional formation,²⁰¹ his consciousness fares in merit. If he creates demeritorious volitional formation, his consciousness fares in demerit. If he creates imperturbable volitional formation, his consciousness fares in the imperturbable.²⁰²

(S 12.51.12/2:82), SD 11.5

¹⁹⁶ See esp SD 17.6 §§5(4), 5(6), 8.4.

¹⁹⁷ *Yam kammaṃ karissāmi*, lit “whatever karma I will do.”

¹⁹⁸ “Viable,” *sāradāni*, (of seeds) “fresh” (D 3:354=A3:404); fr *sārada*, “autumn.” Also fr *sāra*, “essence.”

¹⁹⁹ “Proper and timely rain,” *devo ca sammā dhāraṃ*, lit “right and seasonable rain.”

²⁰⁰ “A person drowned in ignorance,” *āvijjā’gato*, lit “one gone to ignorance,” one engaged in ignorance.

²⁰¹ “Creates meritorious volitional activities,” *puññaṃ ... saṅkhāraṃ abhisankharoti*.

²⁰² Comy: “Meritorious volitional formation” (*puññaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) is one of the 13 kinds of volition (ie the volitions of the 8 wholesome sense-sphere cittas (*kāmāvacara, citta*) and the 5 wholesome cittas of the form sphere (*rūpāvacara, citta*)). “His consciousness fares in merit” (*puññaṃ upagaṃ hoti viññāṇaṃ*) means that the karmic consciousness becomes associated with a meritorious karma, the resultant consciousness with the fruits of merit. “Demeritorious volitional formation” (*apuññaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) is the twelve kinds of volition (ie in the 12 unwholesome cittas). “Imperturbable volitional formation” (*āneñjaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) refers to the 4 kinds of volition (ie in the 4 wholesome cittas of the

Here, “merit” (*puññā*) refers to a good rebirth in the sense-world or the form world, “demerit” (*apuñña*) a painful rebirth in the sense-world, and the “imperturbable” (*āneñja*) to the formless world.²⁰³



Fig 11.1 Dependent arising showing evolution: (l) the 5 realms; (r) the 6 realms.

<http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/books/wheel/circle3.htm>

11 Viññāṇa as evolving

11.1 THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS²⁰⁴

11.1.1 The word *saṁvattanikaṃ viññāṇaṃ* (“evolving consciousness”) occurs only eight times in the Pali Canon, and all eight are found in **the Āneñja, sappāya Sutta** (M 106).²⁰⁵ The Sutta commentary explains that here, **saṁvattanika** (or *saṁvattanika*) refers to one whose rebirth process is incapable of realizing arhathood (MA 4:61).²⁰⁶ PED defines the two words and related ones as follows (abridged):²⁰⁷

saṁvattanika [from *saṁvaṭṭa(na)*] turning to, being reborn (D 1:17).

saṁvattanika [from *saṁvattati*] conducive to, involving (A 2:54, 65; It 82; Kv 618; J 1:275; Nett 134 = S 5:371. As *saṁvattaniya* at PvA 205.

saṁvattati 1. to be evolved, to be in a process of *evolution* (opp *vivaṭṭati*, in *devolution*);

formless realms (*arūpāvacara, citta*) (SA 2:78). For analysis of these 3 types of volitional activities, see Vbh 135. **Āneñja, sappāya S** (M 106) explains in detail how consciousness “fares in the imperturbable” (*āneñjūpaga*) (M 106/2:261-266). On the tr of *saṅkhāra*, see S:B General Intro & 727 n7.

²⁰³ See **Pañca-t, taya S** (M 102, 3.2/2:229) n, SD 40a.12.

²⁰⁴ See S Collins 1982:213-218 (§7.2) & S Hamilton 1996a:97-101.

²⁰⁵ M 106.3-10/2:262-264.

²⁰⁶ Buddhaghosa is here referring specifically to one who has attained the 4th dhyana but fails to win arhathood. We can however tease out the sense to apply more generally.

²⁰⁷ See Collins 1982:297 n8 for other refs.

2. to fall to pieces, to come to an end (like the world's destruction), to pass away, perish, dissolve.

saṁvattati to lead (to), to be useful (for)—often in the phrase *nibbidāya virāgāya... nibbānāya saṁvattati* (eg D 1:189, 2:251, 3:130; S 5:80, 255; A 3:83, 326).

Both the key words appear in three Dīgha suttas in the same sentence in the same context, thus:

Saṁvaṭṭamāne loke yebhuyyena sattā ābhassara, **saṁvattanikā** honti.

When the world is contracting [collapsing], beings mostly arise in the Ābhassara [streaming radiance] Brahmā world. (D 1,2.2 = 24,2 = 27,10)

11.1.2 Here, *saṁvattanika* also has the sense of “conducive to,” that is to say, when the physical universe collapses, the consciousness of most beings generally become conducive for rebirth in the Ābhassara world, which lies just beyond the destroyed universe.

11.1.3 Another important sense of *saṁvattanika* (as a qualifier of *viññāṇa*) is that it “evolving,” here meaning changing in an either wholesome way or unwholesome way. Traditionally, we find this theme depicted in the painting of the Wheel of Life (dependent arising in graphic form): the wheel's hub contains **3 animals**: (A) a black pig (ignorance), (B) a green snake (hatred), and (C) a red rooster (greed), each biting the other's tail reflecting their neurotic inter-reaction or co-dependency, and that they lie right at the core of our lives, influencing almost all that we do.

11.1.4 The evolutionary aspect of consciousness is depicted in the two sectors of the wheel's outer hub (sectors I-II in the schema on the right of Figure 11.1), representing **the cycle of rebirth** (*saṁsāra*). Sector I (usually white) depicts beings floating upwards towards higher births (here we see lay followers meditating, followed by a monk doing walking meditation, sitting in meditation, and in dhyana). Sector II (usually coloured black) shows beings devolving or falling downwards in the lower realms.

11.1.5 The 3rd circle represents **the 6 realms** (that is, the traditional five realms and the asura or titan realm). Only 5 realms (*pañca, gati*) are mentioned in the Pali Canon (Fig 11.1 left circle).²⁰⁸ According to the Pali Commentaries, the titans (*asura*) or “fallen gods” are classed with the hell-beings.²⁰⁹

11.2 THE STATIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

11.2.1 Consciousness can exist as *a personal mental process*, or as *a realm of being*, that is, an actual world inhabited by those whose consciousness conduces (*saṁvattanika*) to that realm. **The Sutta Nipāta** contains this stanza, whose commentary throws some light on the nature of existential consciousness:

*Viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo sabbā
(Posāla ti Bhagavā)
abhijānaṁ Tathāgato
tiṭṭhantaṁ enaṁ jānāti
vimuttaṁ tapparāyaṇaṁ*

All the stations of consciousness
(Posāla, said the Blessed One)
he has directly known, the Tathagata
knows the one who remains (with karma),
or, the freed, or the one intent on that path. (Sn 1114)

²⁰⁸ D 33.2.1(4)/3:234; M 12.35-36/1:73; S 56.102-131/5:474; A 9.68/4:459; also Vism 443 passim.

²⁰⁹ DA 3:1061; UA 140, 418; ItA 1:73, 101, 2:118. Paṭisambhidā, magga Comy, however, defines “the plane of misery” (*apāya*) as comprising the hells, animals, departed ghosts and asuras (PmA 2:411), all of which however comprise “the lower realm” (*vinipāta*) (ThĀ 282). See SD 5.16(15) for further details.

The type of “consciousness” meant here can be known from another commentarial phrase, “stations of constructive consciousness” (*abhisankhāra, viññāṇa-ṭ, ṭhiti*, SA 2:259). The Sutta Nipāta Commentary explains that there are two sets of “stations” (*ṭhiti*), namely, 4 stations “by virtue of constructions” (*abhisankhāra, vasena*) and seven stations “by virtue of rebirth” (*paṭisandhi, vasena*).²¹⁰

11.2.2 The 4 stations here refer to the other 4 aggregates (form, feeling, perception and formations), that is, the constituents of a physical being. It is by becoming attached to these four that consciousness “while standing, would stand” (*tiṭṭhamānaṃ tiṭṭheyya*) engaged with form, with feeling, with perception, or with formations.²¹¹ Earlier on, we saw **the Hāliddakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) explain how consciousness makes the other four aggregates its “house” [1.2(2)], where its commentary glosses “consciousness” as *abhisankhāra* (construction) or *kamma, viññāṇa* (karmic consciousness)—that is, karma of body, speech and mind (SA 2:259). We see here a close link between consciousness and karma.

11.2.3 The 7 stations of consciousness (*satta viññāṇa-ṭ, ṭhiti*) are often mentioned together with the 2 bases (*āyatana*), totalling what are known as the “9 abodes of beings” (*nava satt’āvāsa*). This model classifies beings according to the nature of their consciousness, as follows:²¹²

- beings different in body, different in perception (such as humans, the sense-world gods);
- (1) beings different in body, same in perception (that is, the four lower realms);
- (2) beings same in body, different in perception (such as the Ābhassara devas);
- (3) beings same in body, same in perception (such as the Vehapphala devas);
- (4) the base of the infinite space;
- (5) the base of the infinite consciousness; and
- (6) the base of nothingness.

The 2 bases (*āyatana*), which are not exactly “stations” for consciousness, are as follows:

- (7) the base of non-percipient beings; and
- (8) the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

11.2.4 These last two are called “bases” (and not “stations”) because consciousness there is *totally suspended* (8) in a sort of total hibernation or suspended animation, or that it is *so subtle* (9) that it cannot be said whether it exists or does not.

It is interesting that **the Pure Abodes** (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa-loka*), are not listed as “stations for consciousness.” One reason for this is that these states do not generate new karma, that is, the consciousnesses of their inhabitants (the non-returners) are no more “stationed” there, once they awaken as arhats. These Abodes are inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Untroubled”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaṇiṭṭhā (“Peerless”).²¹³

²¹⁰ SnA 602; cf Nc 570.

²¹¹ **Upāya S** (S 3:53), SD 29.4 & SA 2:271; **Saṅgīti S** (D 3:228) & DA 3:1021.

²¹² See **Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (D 15.33-34/2:69 f), SD 5.17 where see Table 2. At Sn 1114, the Buddha is said to know “all the stations of consciousness.”

²¹³ D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46. See SD 47.15 (2.3). See also Bodhi 1984:48.

11.3 THE UNESTABLISHED CONSCIOUSNESS

11.3.1 The consciousness of an arhat who has passed away is said to be *appatitṭha*, which is best translated as “unestablished,” in the sense that it does not arise any more because there is no more “footing” or basis (*patitṭha*) for it. The most famous illustration for this is that of the extinguished fire in **the Aggi Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 72), where the brahmin Aggi Vacchagotta asks the Buddha where does the freed mind (*vimutta, citta*), that is, the arhat’s consciousness, arise. The Buddha answers that it is beyond all logical premises for any answer:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| “arise” | does not apply, |
| “does not arise” | does not apply, |
| “both arises and does not arise” | does not apply, and |
| “neither arises nor not arises,” | too, does not apply. |

Vaccha becomes confused at the reply. The Buddha then gives his famous fire simile:

Now, what do you think, Vaccha: suppose there were a fire burning before you, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if there were a fire burning before me, I would know it.”

“Suppose, Vaccha, someone were to ask you: ‘This fire that is burning before you, depending on what does it burn?’ What, Vaccha, would be your answer?”

“Master Gotama, on being asked thus, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns depending on grass and wood.’”

“Suppose, Vaccha, this fire before you were to go out, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if this fire before me were to go out, I would know it.”

“Now suppose, Vaccha, you were asked, ‘When that fire before you went out in which direction has it gone—to the east, or to the west, or to the north, or to the south?’ How would you answer it?”

“It does not apply, master Gotama! The fire had burned depending on grass and wood. When that fuel is used up and it does not receive any more fuel, being without fuel, it would be regarded as quenched.”²¹⁴

“In the same way, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned the form by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

(M 72,19-20/1:487), SD 6.15

11.3.2 There is nothing mystical about the answer that the Buddha has given here: it is simply a linguistic problem. The “taste of freedom” (*vimutti, rasa*) is a direct and personal experience: just as we have to taste salt to know what it is like, even so we have to experience freedom for ourselves. No one can save another: we can at best direct the way or stretch out a hand in assistance.

11.3.3 The other point is that the arhat’s consciousness is *unestablished*, since, like the extinguished fire, there is no more fuel for it. This point is best explained in connection with the death of the arhat Godhika. While the monk **Godhika** is at Kāla, silā (Black Rock) on the side of Isigili (today, Sona Hill),²¹⁵ he keeps falling

²¹⁴ *Tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbuto t’eva saṅkham gacchatî ti*. The fire simile here is balanced by the following great ocean simile. See SD 6.15 (5).

²¹⁵ **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:120-122). On the location of these places, see S Dhammika, *Middle Land, Middle Way*, 1999:97.

away from temporary release of mind due to his sickness.²¹⁶ So, when he has attained release of mind, he commits suicide to gain freedom.²¹⁷ It is said that Māra the bad one tries to look for his rebirth-consciousness but fails. Godhika has passed away with his rebirth-consciousness unestablished (SA 1:184).²¹⁸

11.3.4 The Subcommentary to the Godhika Sutta explains that the consciousness is not subject to arising (*anuppatti, dhammena*); for, if there were an arising, consciousness would be said to be “established.” The cause of the non-establishment of consciousness is precisely the cause for his parinirvana (*yad eva tassa viññāṇassa appatitthāna, kāraṇaṃ tad eva parinibbānaṃ, kāraṇaṃ*) (SAṬ:VRI 1:191).

11.3.5 In the **Upāya Sutta** (S 22.53), the Buddha declares, “When consciousness is unestablished, not coming to growth, non-generative, it is freed,”²¹⁹ that is, when it no more generates volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), or, according to the Commentary, it does not bring rebirth (SA 2:271). Only non-arhats have their consciousness “established.”²²⁰

11.4 THE UNMANIFESTED RADIANT MIND

11.4.1 Another interesting quality of the arhat’s consciousness is that it is said to be “radiant” (*pabha*). This quality is mentioned in the **Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11) in the Buddha’s reply to a certain monk’s question on how all matter totally cease to exist:

Your question should not be phrased in this way: ‘Where do these 4 primary elements—earth, water, fire, air—cease without remainder?’ Instead, it should be phrased like this:

Where do earth, water, fire, wind, find no footing?
Here long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
Name and form totally cease?

And the answer to that is:²²¹

The consciousness is unmanifested [without attribute],²²² without end, radiant all around²²³—

²¹⁶ “Temporary release of mind,” *sāmayika ceto, vimutti*, which SA explains as the mundane meditative attainments (*lokiya samāpatti*), ie the absorptions and formless attainments, so called because at the moment of absorption the mind is freed from the opposing states and is resolved upon its object. He fell away from this freedom on account of illness, being disposed to chronic illness due to (humours of) wind, bile and phlegm (SA 1:183).

²¹⁷ SA 1:183; DhA 1:431-433. A similar case of suicide is recorded of the monk Channa (M 144 = S 35.87), SD 11.12.

²¹⁸ A similar case is recorded of Vakkali’s death, also at *Isi, gili* (S 22.87), SD 8.8.

²¹⁹ *Apatitthitaṃ viññāṇaṃ avirulhaṃ anabhisāṅkhāraṇ ca vimuttaṃ*, S 22.53/3:53 f.

²²⁰ Bodhi: “When the monk is said to attain final Nibbāna with consciousness unestablished, this should not be understood to mean that after death consciousness survives in an “unestablished” condition (a thesis argued by Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, [1995:]208-210); for enough texts make it plain that with the passing away of the arahant consciousness too ceases and no longer exists (see eg [Parivīmaṃsana S] S 12.51).” (S:B 421 n314): see SD 11.5.

²²¹ The first stanza line, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato, pabhaṃ*, as in **Brahma, nimantanika S** (M 49, 25/-1:329), SD 11.7 (8-9).

²²² “Without attribute [signless],” *anidassana*, “invisible.” Ñāṇananda renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59). See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513.

²²³ “Radiant all around,” *sabbato, pabhaṃ*, where *pabhaṃ*, vl *pahaṃ*. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

There earth, water, fire, wind, find no footing. | There long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
Name and form are totally stopped. | With the cessation of consciousness all this stop.²²⁴

(D 11,85/1:222 f), SD 1.7

11.4.2 The key line, “[t]he consciousness without attribute [non-manifesting], without end, radiant all around” (*viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato, pabhaṃ*) is also found in the Buddha’s definition of nirvana in the **Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49).²²⁵ This sentence is, however, a difficult one and is often misinterpreted in post-Buddha times. The main problem lies in whether “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) here refers to nirvana or to the arhat’s mind.

Apparently, even Buddhaghosa has problems with this issue. The Majjhima Commentary takes the subject of the sentence to be *nibbāna*, called “consciousness” (*viññāṇaṃ*) in the sense that “it can be cognized” (*vijānitabbaṃ*). “This derivation,” says **Bodhi**, “is hardly credible, since nowhere in the Nikāyas is Nibbāna described as consciousness, nor is it possible to derive an active noun from the gerundive.” (M:NB 1249 n513)

11.4.3 The word *anidassana* means “without attribute, unpredicated, non-manifesting, signless, invisible.” The Majjhima Commentary explains *anidassana* as meaning “invisible,” because it (nirvana) does not come within the range of eye-consciousness—but again, notes Bodhi, “this is a trite explanation” (id).

The word *anidassana* also occurs in the **Kakacūpama Sutta** (M 21.14):

“What do you think, bhikshus? Could a man draw pictures and make pictures appear on empty space?”

“No, bhante. What is the reason? Because space is formless (*arūpī*) and **unmanifesting [signless]** (*anidassana*). It is not easy to draw pictures there or make pictures appear there.”

(M 21,14/1:127)

Here we see the statement that empty space is an unsuitable medium for painting pictures. Thus, concludes Bodhi, “the idea seems to be that of not making manifest” (id). **Ñāṇananda**, similarly, renders it as “non-manifesting.”²²⁶

11.4.4 Another problem word here is *sabbato, pabhaṃ*, “radiant all around,” where *pabhaṃ* has the variant reading of *pahaṃ*, “abandoned.” Ñāṇamoli, in his Majjhima translation, takes *pabhaṃ* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabhaṃ*—the negative prefix *a-* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to ‘all,’ or ‘not assuming of ‘all’ that it is or is not in an absolute sense’.” (M:NB 1249 n513)

“But,” argues Bodhi, “if we take *pabhaṃ* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id).²²⁷

²²⁴ The Buddha makes a similar statement by way of an Udāna (inspired utterance) on the parinirvana of Bāhiya Dārucīriya: “Where water, earth, fire and wind find no footing, / There neither brightness burns nor sun shines / There neither moon gleams nor darkness reigns. / When a sage, a brahmin, through wisdom has known this by himself / Then he is freed from form and formless, from joy and pain.” (U 9). A similar verse is found at S 1.69/1:15, and a similar teaching is given by Mahā Cunda to Channa 4.87/4:59. On this verse (D 11.85) see D:W 557 n242 & SD 9 (Mahā Parinibbāna S), Intro (9h).

²²⁵ M 49,25/1:329 @ SD 11.7 (8).

²²⁶ Ñāṇananda, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59. See also “Nibbāna Sermon 7” in 2004:138-159.

²²⁷ See D:W 557 n241.

- 1 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].
The untutored [ignorant] ordinary person does not understand things as they really are.
Therefore there is no mental development for the untutored ordinary person, I say!²²⁸
- 2 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].
The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are.
Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!²²⁹
(A 1.6.1-2/1:10; also 1.5.9-10/1:10)

In the **Pabbā Sutta 1 & 2** (A 4.141-142/2:139) the light of wisdom (*paññā, pabbhā*) is called the best of lights.²³⁰ In short, in this stanza, “[t]he consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around” refers not to nirvana (as suggested by the Commentaries) but to the nature of the arhat’s mind, that is, awakened consciousness (as commonly understood in the Suttas).²³¹

12 Viññāṇa, mano, and citta

12.1 DEFINITIONS

12.1.2 Abhidhamma and later

12.1.2.1 In the Nikāyas, we often find the terms *viññāṇa*, *mano* and *citta* appearing together as a set of synonyms [1.2].²³² The Abhidhamma, too, generally regards the terms *viññāṇa*, *mano* and *citta* practically as synonyms. In the **Vibhaṅga**, for example, the “seven minds” (*satta citta*) are defined as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, the mind-element, and the mind-consciousness element²³³ (*cakkhu, viññāṇam sota, ghāṇa, jīvā, kāya, viññāṇam mano, dhātu mano, viññāṇa, dhātu*) (Vbh 403 f). **The Dhamma, saṅgaṇī** defines the “states of consciousness” (*dharmā cittā*) in the same way (Dhs 209/1187). **The Visuddhi, magga** similarly states that *viññāṇa*, *mano* and *citta* have the same meaning (*viññāṇam cittam mano ti atthato ekam*, Vism 452).

²²⁸ *Pabhassaram idam bhikkhave cittam tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathā, bhūtaṃ n’appaṇāti. Tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa citta, bhāvanā n’atthi ti vadāmi ti.* Qu at MA 1:167; DhA 1:23; NmA 1:22; PmA 1:242; DhsA 68.

²²⁹ *Pabhassaram idam bhikkhave cittam tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vipparamuttam. Taṃ sutavā ariya, sāvako yathā, bhūtaṃ paṇāti. Tasmā sutavato ariya, sāvakassa citta, bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmi ti.*

²³⁰ See Bodhi’s important n at M:NB 1249 n513; and also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

²³¹ Further see SD 19.3 (1.3.6.3).

²³² Eg D 1:21; S 2:94 f: see below §12.4.

²³³ **Mano, dhātu** (mind-element), is one of the 18 elements (*dhātu*) that constitute the cognitive process. Unlike *man’āyatana* (the mind-base, a collective term for all the different states of consciousness), it does not apply to the whole of consciousness, but refers only to that special element of consciousness which first, at the beginning of the perceptual process (*viññāṇa, kicca*), performs the function of advertence (*āvajjana*) to the sense-object and, then after twice having become conscious of it, performs the function of reception (*sampañicchana*) into mind-consciousness. The **mano, viññāṇa, dhātu** (mind-consciousness element) is also one of the 18 elements, but generally refers to that consciousness-element which performs the functions of investigating (*santīrana*), determining (*votthapana*), registering (*tad-ārammaṇa*), etc. As such, in the perceptual process, the *mano, dhātu*, as it were, leads on to the *mano, viññāṇa, dhātu*. See Vbh 87-90. See BDict: *viññāṇa-kicca* & also above, §9.3 n on “registration.”

12.1.2.2 We might well wonder why have three different words when they all mean the same thing? The reason is that, in the Nikāyas at least, we can sometimes see that there are different *usages* for each of these three terms. They often overlap, but in certain contexts, one term applies better than the rest. In the Abhidhamma, too, where *viññāṇa* (consciousness) is the major focus, we see, for example, *viññāṇa* and *citta* are used synonymously.

12.1.2.3 The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, in defining *citta*, and **the Vibhaṅga**, in defining *viññāṇa*, use the same terms: “the mind, thought, mentation, the heart, the mind that is radiant [lucent],²³⁴ the mind, the mind-base, consciousness, the consciousness aggregate, (and) depending on the aforesaid, mind-consciousness-element” (*citta mano mānasam hadayaṃ paṇḍaram mano man’āyatanam viññāṇam viññāṇa-k, khandho tajjā mano, viññāṇa, dhātu*).²³⁵

12.1.2.4 The Attha,sālinī, the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī Commentary, gives a specific meaning to each of these terms,²³⁶ implying that they are not strictly synonyms. In fact, we begin to see the three terms being given specific meanings in the Commentaries,²³⁷ but they are also mutually inclusive, that is, as terms that help define one another (*pariyāya, vācanāni*).²³⁸

12.1.2.5 By the time of Vasubandhu (4th-5th century), the meanings of these three terms became more technical and well defined, as evident in his **Abhidharma,kośa**:

Cittam mano’tha vijñānam ekārtham
Cinotīti cittam
Manuta, iti manaḥ
Vijñātīti vijñānam

Citta, mana and *vijñāna* have the same meaning.
 It is called **citta** because it accumulates (good and bad).²³⁹
 It is called **manas** because it knows (*manute*).²⁴⁰
 It is called **vijñāna** because it distinguishes (its object).
 (Abhk 2.34ab) = Abhk:Pr 1:205²⁴¹ [Fig 6.1]

However, it should be remembered that such explicit technicalities are post-Buddha innovations that are absent from the early Buddhist texts, where their senses and usages need to be teased out from the context.²⁴²

12.1.3 Contemporary Buddhist psychology

12.1.3.1 Earlier on, we see *citta* rendered as “thought or mentation,” *mano* as “mind,” and *viññāṇa* as “consciousness” [Fig 6]. All this is not technically exact, as semantically these terms often overlap. However, in some contexts, they have more specific senses, and it is useful to know the semantic differences of the terms in such contexts so that we can understand the import of the teaching better. At the same, time,

²³⁴ “The mind that is radiant,” *paṇḍaram mano*, which is conjectural: this is the second *mano* mentioned in the list. Dhs:R apparently takes it as *mano man’āyatanam*, “ideation as the sphere of the mind” (Dhs:R 8).

²³⁵ Dhs §6/10; Vbh §249/144; also at ItA 2:22 f.

²³⁶ DhsA 3:274-276.

²³⁷ See Rune E A Johansson 1965; Aloysius Pieris 1979.

²³⁸ Cf NettA 254. See also Pieris 1979:6 f = 1980:214.

²³⁹ Amplification is from the Vyākhyā. Here Tib has ‘byed pas, “because it distinguishes”; cf Attha,sālinī: *cittan’ti ārammanam cintetī ti cittam, vijñātīti attho* (DhsA 63).

²⁴⁰ Also at Dhātu,pāṭha 4.67.

²⁴¹ Skt: http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/6_sastra/3_phil/buddh/vakobhau.htm. See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (4.2).

²⁴² For further discussion on *citta*, *mano*, *viññāṇa*, see SD 55.14 (2).

we need to remember that such definitions and usages are at best provisional (*pariyāyena*), useful for the understanding of the teaching at hand.

12.1.3.2 *Citta* is rendered as “thought or mentation.” This is based on such passages as this one from the **Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58), where we are advised to practise the perception of light to clear up the mind:

Thus, through a mind (*ceto*) that is open and unhindered, one should cultivate a mind (*citta*) of bright light. (A 7.58/4:86, SD 4.11; also **Saṅgīti Sutta**, D 33.1.11(5)/3:223 [12.4(3)])

Similar senses or contexts of *citta* are found in such terms as “mental cultivation” (*citta,bhāvanā*),²⁴³ a synonym for “concentration training” (*samādhi,sikkhā*).²⁴⁴ The “higher mental training” (*adhicitta*);²⁴⁵ and “mental solitude” (*citta,viveka*).²⁴⁶ All these terms have to do with mental training, that is, the cultivation of the mind (*citta*).

It is clear from such contexts that the *citta* needs to be cultivated, and the term *bhāvita,citta* (“of cultivated mind”) is common.²⁴⁷ If we are to cultivate the mind, we need to be mindful of it. As such, the term “mind,” although sometimes applicable here, is too broad, as we are not always mindful.

Being *mindful* means that we are fully aware of our thoughts (not the whole mind), speech and actions. This is on the preconscious level of life [Fig 6.1]. In other words, we are not only aware how we think, but also how we speak and act. It is a sort of premeditated or properly prepared process. This is an important sense of what it means to be “well restrained” or “restrained in our senses.” Hence, technically we can call this the “**conative consciousness**,” a mind of deliberate or conscious actions that are morally significant.

12.1.3.3 The term *mano* or “mind” refers to the third of the 3 doors of karmic action (body, speech and mind) and the sixth internal sense-base (that is, the only physical sense, the others being the 5 physical sense-faculties). As the mind-base (*man’āyatana*), it coordinates the data of the 5 physical senses (hence, it is a collective term for the sense-consciousnesses), and also cognizes mental phenomena or mind-objects (that is, its own object), that is, purely mental events (*dhamma*). Technically, we can call this “mentation.”

Mano or “mind” is a broad that includes *citta*, and also other mental processes, especially those outside of our conscious control, such as the latent tendencies (*anusaya*) [6.1.2.1] and the life-continuum (*bhav’ān-ga*).²⁴⁸ This is also called the “**existential consciousness**” [6.1.2]: we “exist” on account of various mental processes beyond our control, especially the rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,citta*), also known as “*gandharva*” (*gandhabba*) and so on.²⁴⁹ This is the mind, which includes the mind-element (*mano,dhātu*), the mind-consciousness element (*mano,viññāṇa,dhātu*)²⁵⁰ [12.1.2.1] and karma (which is essentially rooted in mental processes), that we shape, and that in turn shapes us, back and forth, life after life, in samsara. This is the “mind” meant by *mano* in, for example, **Dh 1+2**.

²⁴³ M 1:237,25 (MA 2:285,3, explained as *samatha*); A 1:10,14 (AA 1:63,4). On mind-cultivation (*citta,bhāvanā*), see above SD 41.3 (2.1.2) n on *bhāvita,kāya*. For a contrast btw body-cultivation and mind-cultivation, see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.4-10/1:237-240), SD 49.4.

²⁴⁴ *Tisso bhāvanā: kāya,bhāvanā ~ā paññā,bhāvanā*, D 3:219,15. Glossed as the 8 attainments (4 dhyanas + 4 formless attainments) (*aṭṭha samāpattiyo pi ~a nāma*, DA 1003,19).

²⁴⁵ *Adhi,citta* is the 2nd “higher training” (*adhisikkhā*) (a higher level of the 3 trainings, *ti,sikkhā*): V 3:235,3; A 1:236,-8*, 240,17, 254,11; glossed as “a mind of calm and insight” (*samatha,vipassanā,cittaṃ*. AA 2:362,12); see BHSD: śikṣā

²⁴⁶ *Citta,viveka* is one of the 3 kinds of solitude (*viveka*), see **Viveka,nissita**, SD 20.4 (4.2).

²⁴⁷ M 1:239 f; S4:111; A 1:249, 250, 251, 253, 5:42-45.

²⁴⁸ See **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (6.1) & **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1 (3.8).

²⁴⁹ See eg SD 2.17 (3+8).

²⁵⁰ *Mano,viññāṇa,dhātu* is, according to Abhidhamma, generally used as a name for that consciousness-element which performs the functions of investigation (*santīraṇa*), determining (*voṭṭhapana*), registering (*tad-ārammaṇa*), etc: see **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14 (2) & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (5.1.3).

12.1.3.4 The term *viññāṇa* or “consciousness” is the broadest of the 3 terms. Simply, it is any conscious activity of the 6 sense-bases (the 5 physical senses and the mind). It is characterized as awareness (“consciousness”) of things in relation to one another, including both self-awareness (reflexive consciousness) and discriminating cognition or “knowing” of various objects [12.5.2].

Viññāṇa refers to both the “physical” consciousness (of the 5 sense-faculties) and “mental” consciousness. If we provisionally take *viññāṇa* here as referring specifically to the awareness of the physical sense-faculties, then *mano* refers only to the mental awareness of such sense-activities. However, none of these—that is, the “cognitive consciousness”—is reborn.

It is sometimes said that it is “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) that is reborn which, in a saint’s case, is said to be “unestablished” [13.3]. This specific usage, on the other hand, does not refer to any of the 5 physical sense-faculties, but only to the “existential consciousness,” which we here take as the “mind” (*mano*), or more specifically, the *gandharva* or the life-continuum (*bhav’aṅga*) [Fig 6.1].

12.2 KĀYA AND KHANDHA

12.2.1 The Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61) gives this insight into how the untutored worldling or ordinary person views his body and mind:

2 “Bhikshus, the untutored worldling²⁵¹ might be revulsed towards this body (*kāya*) composed of the 4 great elements, or he might be dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

3 What is the reason for this? Because, bhikshus, growth and decline is seen in this body composed of the 4 great elements, as it is seen being taken up or left aside.

Therefore, the untutored worldling might become dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

4 But, bhikshus, as regards that which is called “mind” (*citta*), and “thought [mentation]” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*)—the untutored worldling is unable to feel revulsed towards it, or is unable to be dispassionate towards it, nor be freed from it.

5 What is the reason for this?

Because for a long time, this has been held, cherished, and grasped by him, thus:

“This is mine; this I am; this is my self.”²⁵²

Therefore, the untutored worldling is unable to feel revulsed towards it, or is unable to be dispassionate towards it, nor be freed from it. (S 12.61/2:94 f), SD 20.2 [1.2, 3]

The ordinary person finds it easier to be detached from *the body* because it is easily seen to be impermanent, but not so *the mind* because he identifies with it.

²⁵¹ The untutored worldling (*assutava puthujjana*) is one who lacks learning, questioning and discerning of the aggregates. He may either be a crowd-follower or a highly opinionated individual guided by self-identity. For details, see **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61.2/2:94), SD 20.2 n ad loc.

²⁵² These are the 3 graspings (*gāha*): “this is mine” (*etam mama*) is the grasp of craving; “this I am” (*eso’ham asmi*), the grasp of conceit; and “this is my self” (*eso me attā*), the grasp of views. The noble disciple, on the other hand, reflects thus: “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (S 3:18 f; cf 3:16). When this is applied to the 5 aggregates in turn, we have the 20 wrong views of the untutored worldling, who views *form*, etc, as the self, the self as possessing *form*, etc, *form* as in the self, the self as in *form*, etc (M 3:188, 227; S 3:3, 16, 96). Both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma def self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) as comprising these 20 wrong views (M 1:300, 3:17 f; S 3:102; Dhs 182). See Gethin 1985:44 f.

12.2.2 The Assutava Sutta 1 goes on to say, however, as far as self-views go, that it is “better” to identify the self with the body—since it appears to remain stable longer—rather than with the mind, and the reason for this is given in the monkey parable:

Bhikshus, that which is called “mind” (*citta*), or “thought [mentation]” (*mano*), or “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another.

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, wandering through the forest, seizes one branch, lets go of that and grabs another—even so, bhikshus, that which is called “mind,” or “mentation,” or “consciousness,” night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another. (S 12.61/2:95), SD 20.2²⁵³

In this famous passage, the term *viññāṇa* has both the generic or general sense of “mind,” as well as the specific sense of an aggregate (*viññāṇa-k,khandha*). It is also interesting to note that when the body is mentioned in connection with the view of the “untutored worldling,” the word *kāya* is used (S 12.61,2). This is to reflect the worldly conventional view of the “body” as a sort of solid entity.

12.2.3 On the other hand, the instructed noble disciple (*sutava ariya,sāvaka*) views the body as it really is, that is, conditionally or by way of dependent arising of the 5 aggregates, thus:

9 Therein, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple closely and wisely attends to dependent arising itself, thus:

‘When this is, that is, with the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that is not, with the ending of this, that ends.’²⁵⁴ That is,

10 [The dependent arising and dependent ending formulas.]

11 REVULSION TOWARDS THE AGGREGATES. Seeing thus, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple is revulsed towards form;

he is revulsed towards feeling, too;

he is revulsed towards perception, too;

he is revulsed towards formations, too;

he is revulsed towards consciousness, too.

Being revulsed, he becomes dispassionate.

Through dispassion, (his mind) is freed.

When it is freed, there arises the knowledge: ‘Freed!’

He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is no more of this state of being.’” (S 12.61,9-11/2:95), SD 20.2²⁵⁵

12.3 SA,VIÑÑĀṆAKA KĀYA

12.3.1 Where *viññāṇa* is used in a generic sense opposite “body,” the expression *sa,viññāṇaka kāya*²⁵⁶ — “the body with its mind,” “the body with its consciousness” or simply “the conscious body” —is usually

²⁵³ Although this simile is often quoted to illustrate that the restless mind is like a monkey in a tree, neither the Sutta nor its commentary does so, but points to the fact that the mind is always dependent on a sense-object. See S:B 771 n157.

²⁵⁴ This is the full specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*) formula: see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (2).

²⁵⁵ See also Lily de Silva 1984:74 f & Brahmavamso 2006:201 f.

²⁵⁶ **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109/3:18 f), SD 17.11, **Cha-b,bisodhana S** (M 112,10/3:32, 3:36), SD 59.7; (**Rāhula**) **Anu-saya S** (S 18.21/2:252 x2), (**Rāhula**) **Apagata S** (S 18.22/2:253 x2), (**Khandha**) **Rādha S** (S 22.71/3:80 x2), (**Khandha**) **Suradha S** (S 22.72/3:80 f x2), (**Khandha**) **Puṇṇama S** (S 22.82/3:103 x2), (**Khandha**) **Rāhula S 1** (S 22.91/3:136 x2), (**Khandha**) **Rāhula S 2** (S 22.92/3:136 x2), (**Khandha**) **Kappa S 1** (S 22.124/3:169 x2), (**Khandha**) **Kappa S 2** (S 22.125-

used. In **the Mahā Puṇṇāma Sutta** (M 109 = S 22.82), for example, a certain monk questions the Buddha thus:

“Bhante, how does one know, how does one see, so that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs (*bahiddhā sabba, nimittesu*), there is no latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit?”²⁵⁷

“Bhikshu, whatever kind of **form** (feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness) there is (are), whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near²⁵⁸—one sees all forms (all feelings ... etc) as they really are with right wisdom, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’ ...”

(M 109,13/3:18 f = S 22.82/3:101), SD 17.11

It should be noted that although the body and consciousness (= mind) are separately mentioned here, this is not a dualism, because “the distinction between the bodily and mental *khandhas* in Buddhism is not intended to suggest that human beings consist of two ontologically distinct substances, one physical and the other mental” (1996a:149), like “ice and steam” (1996a:169).²⁵⁹

12.3.2 In all such passages, where *sa, viññāṇaka kāya* is used, no other analysis of the person is given. As such, concludes **Sue Hamilton**,

So *saviññāṇa[ka] kāya* is a general expression which serves well in a situation where one wants to convey the meaning of the whole human being’s bodily and mental faculties. In contexts where it appears with *bahiddhā sabba, nimittesu*, the implication is that one should not think in terms of “I” or “mine” (that is, separate individuality) in anything at all, whether it be subjectively or objectively. So in such contexts *saviññāṇa[ka] kāya bahiddhā ca* also serves well to convey everything within *saṃsāric* existence as a whole. (1996a:103)²⁶⁰

12.3.3 There was a time some scholars (like T W Rhys Davids) thought that the generic meaning of *viññāṇa* is its “simpler uneclesiastical unscholastic popular meaning” and that its classification as a *khandha* is part of “ecclesiastical scholastic dogmatic” (PED 618, sv *viññāṇa*). The simplicity of the term *sa, viññāṇaka kāya* may well attest to its being early, or at least earlier than the *khandha* analysis.

This may well be the case in some passages, such as **the Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2) passage on the gem parable [4.1]. However, it should be noted that we often find both terms and analyses together, in many passages, such as **the Mahā Puṇṇāma Sutta** (M 109) passage quoted here.²⁶¹

/3:170 x2); (**Tika**) **Ānanda S** (A 3.32/1:132 f x4), (**Tika**) **Sāriputta S** (A 3.33/1:133 x2), **Methuna S** (A 7.49/4:53 x3). See also SD 56.1 (4.3.2.2).

²⁵⁷ *Imasmiñ ca sa, viññāṇake kāye bahiddhā ca sabba, nimittesu ahaṃ, kāra, mamaṃ, kāra, mānānusayā na honti*. I treat the cpd *ahaṃkāra, mamaṃkāra, mānānusayā* as all referring to latent tendencies, ie, “the latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit,” rather than as “I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit” (S:B 927). “Conceit” (*māna*) here refers to measuring oneself against others (as better than, inferior to, or equal with) (Nm 80; Nc 226; Vbh 389). **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6) mentions 3 latent tendencies (*anusaya*): the latent tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighānusaya*), and of ignorance (*āviññānusaya*) (S 36.6.8bcd), SD 5.5. It is clear here that the latent tendency of lust refers to “mine-making,” of aversion to “conceit,” and of ignorance to “I-making.” While the Pali version speaks of overcoming selfish tendencies, the Chinese version inquires how to practise so that “the complete destruction of the cankers is attained,” 盡得漏盡 *jīndélóujīn* (SĀ 58 = T2.15a6).

²⁵⁸ On this “totality formula,” see §8 above.

²⁵⁹ See also 1996a:102 f, 123-125, 148 f, 169 f, 178. See also D Keown 1997:304.

²⁶⁰ See SD 56.17 (6.1.1.2).

²⁶¹ See Hamilton 1996a:103-105. On the names for the physical senses as organ and as faculty, see SD 17.2a (9).

12.4 CITTA AND MANO

As we have already seen, the term *viññāṇa* sometimes refers to “the mind” in a generic non-technical sense [1]. Here, *viññāṇa* is synonymous with *mano*, as explained in the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the **Uṇṇābha Sutta** (S 48.42), where it is stated that the 5 physical sense-faculties, each have their own resort (*gocara*) and range (*visaya*)—or sense-data—and do not experience one another’s resort or range.²⁶² They all however “resort to the mind, and only the mind experiences all the sense-data” (*mano, paṭisaraṇaṃ mano ca nesam gocara, visayaṃ paccanubhoti*).²⁶³ [4.4]

Like, *viññāṇa*, both *citta/ceto*²⁶⁴ and *mano* are sometimes used in the same generic non-technical sense to mean “the mind,”²⁶⁵ for example:

(1) “Here, Kevaddha, a monk reads the minds (*citta*) and mental states (*cetasika*), the thoughts and ponderings, of other beings and other individuals, thus: ‘This is your mind (*mano*); this is how your mentation (*mano*) is; such is your thought (*citta*).’” (**Kevaddha Sutta**, D 11,6/1:213;²⁶⁶ also at (**Pāṭihāriya**) **Saṅgārava Sutta**, A 3.60,5/1:170).²⁶⁷

(2) “[O]ne declares: ‘Thus is your mind (*mano*): this is in your mentation (*mano*); such is your mind (*citta*).’ ... one knows the mind (*ceto*) of another with his own, thus: ‘By the way the mental formations of this good man are inclined, the depth of that mind (*citta*) will think such and such a thought (*vitakka*).’²⁶⁸ (**Sampasādaniya Sutta**, D 28,1.6/3:103)²⁶⁹

(3) [On the perception of light (*āloka, saññā*):] “...then one should attend to the perception of light, determine the perception of daylight: just as day is, so is night; just as night is, so is day. Thus through a mind (*ceto*) that is open and unhindered, one should cultivate a mind (*citta*) of bright light.” (**Pacalā Sutta**, A 7.58/4:86;²⁷⁰ also at **Saṅgīti Sutta**, D 33,1.11(5)/3:223)

(4) Thereupon the venerable Moggallāna searched their minds (*citta*) with his own mind (*ceto*), and saw that they were released, without acquisitions. (**Moggallāna Sutta**, S 8.10/1:194)

(5) Lust and hatred have their source here; discontent, delight, hair-raising terror is born here | Having arisen from this, the mind’s thoughts toss one about like boys toss a crow about. (**Sūci-loma Sutta**, S 10.3/1:207)

(6) “In this way, bhikshus, this son of family is one who has gone forth, but he is covetous, strongly lusting after sense-pleasures, with a mind (*citta*) of ill will, with a mind (*mano*) of corrupt-

²⁶² On *synaesthesia*, see SD 29.3 (2).

²⁶³ M 43,21/1:295 = S 48.42/5:218. Comy explains *mano* here (following the Abhidhamma tradition) as the mind-door impulsion (*javana*), which experiences the object by way of lust, hate or delusion (SA 3:245). **Bodhi**, however thinks, “In my view, this introduces an unnecessary ethical slant on the passage, which I take to be primarily epistemic [having to do with knowing] in import. I interpret the sentence simply to mean that mind-consciousness has access to the data provided by the five types of sense consciousnesses, which it collates, categorizes, and interprets with its own stock-in-trade, namely, concepts.” (S:B 1936 n226). On what the mind resorts to, see 4.4 above.

²⁶⁴ *Ceto* is effectively syn with *citta*, except that it is more commonly used as a prefix, eg, *ceto, pariya, ñāṇa* (D 1:79, 3:100), *ceto, vimutti* (V 1:11; D 1:156; M 1:197; S 2:165; A 1:124), *ceto, samādhi* (D 1:15; S 4:297; A 2:54). Other common forms of *ceto* are *cetasa* (adj), *cetaso* (gen sg), *cetasā* (ins), *cetasika* (adj). See Hamilton 1996a:106-110, 114.

²⁶⁵ **Boisvert** says, “All the sense-organs except the mental organ (*mano*) belong to the six sense-doors, while the sense-objects along with the mental organ are included in contact (*phassa*)” (1995:147). **Harvey**, in his review of Boisvert, notes: “Here one can object: (a) *mano* is in fact the sixth of the six sense-doors, (b) *phassa* is part of *nāma*, and so cannot include physical sense-objects, (c) *mano* is not the same as *phassa*, though it can condition its arising.” (JBE 3 1996:7)

²⁶⁶ SD 1.7.

²⁶⁷ SD 16.10.

²⁶⁸ *Yathā imassa bhoṭa mano, saṅkhārā paṇihitā imassa cittassa antarā amun, nāma vitakkaṃ vitakkissatī ti.*

²⁶⁹ SD 14.14.

²⁷⁰ SD 4.11.

ed intentions,²⁷¹ muddle-headed, lacking concentration, scatter-brained (*vibbhanta*, *citta*), uncontrolled in faculty.²⁷² (**Piṇḍolya Sutta**, S 22.80/3:93)²⁷³

(7) “Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having seen an agreeable form with the eye, a monk does not covet it, nor is excited by it, or breed lust for it. His body is steady, and his mind (*citta*) is steady, inwardly well-composed and well freed ... ” (**Kuṇḍaliya Sutta**, S 46.6/5:74)²⁷⁴

(8) And he dwells perceiving after and before: “As before, so after; as after, so before; as below, so above; as above, so below; as by day, so by night; as by night, so by day.” Thus, with a mind (*ceto*) that is open, with a mind (*ceto*) unhindered, he cultivates the mind (*citta*) of light. (**Pure Sutta**, S 51.11/5:263; cf (**Iddhi, pāda**) **Vibhaṅga Sutta**, S 51.20/5:278)

(9) This is nothing better than this for a brahmin,
When holds his mind (*mano*) back from lovable things.
The more he turns away a violent mind (*mano*),
The more suffering is truly stilled. (Dh 390)

(10) He should commit no theft, he should tell no lie,
He should suffuse with lovingkindness the moving and the still.
Whatever turbidity of mind (*mano*) he might know,
He should push it away, thinking, “(This is) the Dark One’s ally!” (Sn 967)

(11) Aged am I, feeble in strength.
As such, my body runs not there.
Always, I go on a mental journey (*sāṅkapp’ayattāya*).
For, my mind (*mano*), brahman, is joined to him [the Buddha]. (Sn 1144)

The Suttas sometimes give the three terms—*citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*—in sequence to refer to one’s mental activities as a whole, such as in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61):

But, bhikshus, as regards that which is called “mind” (*citta*), and “thought [mentation]” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*)—the untutored worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be freed from it.

(S 12.61/2:94 f), SD 20.2 [1.2, 3]

12.5 CLOSE INTERCONNECTION

12.5.1 In fact, the suttas often use the words *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *citta* (mind) and *mano* (thought) interchangeably to refer to what we call the mind. *Citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* are all synonyms here. Bodhi uses “mentality” for *mano*.²⁷⁵ However, here I am influenced by the Buddhist Dictionary’s definition of *citta*, where *adhicitta* is defined as “higher mentality.” Moreover, as Bodhi himself notes: “*Mano* serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense-base (along with the 5

²⁷¹ *Paduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo*.

²⁷² *Pākat’indriyo*.

²⁷³ SD 28.9.

²⁷⁴ SD 35.3.

²⁷⁵ S:B 595 & 769 n154. *Mano* (Skt *manas*) is derived from the root √MAN, “to think, believe, imagine, suppose, conjecture.” *Manas* is cognate with Latin *mens*, “mind, reason, intellect,” and from this we get the English “mind, mentate,” and “to mean” (PED: *maññati* & *mano/mana(s)*; SED: *manas*).

physical sense-bases); as the mind-base, it coordinates the data of the other 5 senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects.”²⁷⁶

As such, “mentation” (a function) is clearly a better translation for *mano* than “mentality” (more of a state or a condition). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate *citta* and *mano* simply as “mind,” as most translators now do, too. On the other hand, in most contexts, the word “thought/s”²⁷⁷ would better translate *citta*.²⁷⁸

12.5.2 The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43) explains the nature of the relationship amongst the three,²⁷⁹ and defines the characteristics of three closely connected aggregates as follows:

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>viññāṇa</i> | <u>cognizes</u> (<i>vijānāti</i>) | the 3 feelings (pleasant, painful and neutral); ²⁸⁰ |
| <i>vedanā</i> | <u>feels</u> (<i>vedeti</i>) | the 3 feelings, and |
| <i>saññā</i> | <u>notes</u> (<i>sañjānāti</i>) | various colours. |

The Sutta then goes on to say that these 3 states (*dhamma*) should be regarded as being closely connected (*saṃsatṭha*) since “what one feels, that one notes; what one notes, that one cognizes.” As such, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* are seen here as working together as different aspects of the process of being aware of a particular object of consciousness. As such, concludes **Gethin**,

Viññāṇa can perhaps best be characterised as awareness or consciousness of things in relation to each other; this seems to relate both the notion of self awareness and that of discriminating [cognizing] various objects. (Gethin 1985:37)

12.5.3 Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit scholar of Buddhism, in his study of the commentarial usages of the 3 terms, gives a helpful summary, albeit based on mostly a commentarial context:

Semantically, *mano* is the most precise, while *viññāṇa* is the most elastic and elusive of the three. *Mano* denotes the “noetic²⁸¹ awakening” of the *bhavaṅga*, or the subliminal consciousness, in response to an external stimulus (*bāhirāyatana*); or, more precisely, it is the noetic “opening” (*dvāra*) to the outside world, ie an act of advertence (*āvajjana*).²⁸² *Viññāṇa* would normally stand for the general undifferentiated (or, anoetic or “ontic”)²⁸³ consciousness sometimes coinciding with the subliminal continuum (or *bhavaṅga*); it can also frequently mean apperception or full noesis (*mano-viññāṇa* or, simply, *viññāṇa*).

Citta, as it occurs most often in Pali exegesis, amounts to being an explanatory equivalent of both *mano* and *viññāṇa* described above. It is employed as a comprehensive term for the entire

²⁷⁶ S:B 769 n154.

²⁷⁷ Cf Hamilton 1996a:106.

²⁷⁸ See **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61/2:95), SD 20.2. See also A Pieris 1980:213.

²⁷⁹ M 43.4-6/1:292 f.

²⁸⁰ See **Khajjanīya S** (S 22.79), where consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is defined as cognizing various tastes (S 22.79,9/3:87), SD 17.9.

²⁸¹ “Noetic” is adj of “noesis,” which in **philosophy**, refers to a mental event grasped by pure intellect; in **psychology**, the general functioning of the intellect, or simply, cognition or “knowing.”

²⁸² *Sāvajjanam bhavaṅga mano, dvāram* (Pm 43). Cf ItA 1:101. [Pieris’ nn]

²⁸³ “Ontic” means having to do with existence or being; “ontology” is the philosophical study or metaphysical inquiry into the question of existence apart from specific objects and events, incl the conceptual reality of categories, and the underlying conceptual systems of theories of mind.

complex of consciousness (ie *viññāṇa* in the “ontic” sense) together with its potential or actual noetic center (ie, *mano*).²⁸⁴ (Pieris 1979:6 = 1980:213 f)

12.5.4 Here is a summary of the main meanings and usages of the 3 terms, and their similarities and differences:²⁸⁵

| <i>citta</i> | <i>mano</i> | <i>viññāṇa</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| preconscious THOUGHT ; the “knower” <u>before</u> we act; feeling, perception, <u>intention</u> | unconscious MIND ; the “doer” (controller); latent tendencies; karmic fruition | consciousness : the aggregate <i>how</i> we experience; feeds the latent tendencies |
| the heart of <u>human experience</u> : our learning process | the roots of being ; emotions, subhuman + human | the construction of experience; roots of feelings |
| our personality subject of <u>thinking</u> and <u>feeling</u> ; to be known, trained, <u>freed</u> ; the “conative consciousness” [6] | the 6th <i>internal sense-base</i> : through which all senses operate: “cognitive consciousness”; the mind-door (3rd karmic door): the “mind” (behind all our actions) | particularizing <u>awareness</u> through a sense-faculty; “existential consciousness” [6]; the life-continuum (<i>bhav’aṅga</i>), incl the subconscious : rebirth |

Table 12.5: *Citta, mano & viññāṇa*²⁸⁶

(1) [Read across the 3 columns first.] It is vital to understand that we cannot really take any of the 3 terms in themselves. They are closely interrelated and often overlap in sense and function. What should be note is what *happens* to us in such processes. This is the “contextual” approach; then, it makes good sense because, in the long run, more than understanding the terms (which is mainly academic), we understand how they work and how we progress (or not) mentally.

On the 1st level, that of “active external” manifestation, *citta* is our **preconscious thought**: basically, our decisions (intention) before we act based on our feelings and perceptions. This is a private sphere that we usually do not express before others. We do this deliberately (but not necessarily consciously or knowingly), that is, our **intention** (*cetanā*); hence, this has karmic consequences. It is habit-forming, meaning, we *become* our karma (what we do, say or think). As a shorthand, we can remember this stage of our mental process simply as “**thought**.”

On a deeper, less active or conscious level, that is, what influences our decision to act, comes from *mano*, our **unconscious mind**, this is our shadowy “doer,” the controller or puppet master, who pulls our strings just before we act. In other words, this comprises our latent tendencies (*anusaya*), which is a kind of reservoir of our past karma, or “karmic genes,” which keeps shaping and directing our being and lives.

²⁸⁴ H Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidhamma*, Lucknow, 1957:19, accuses the Pali scholiasts of extending the notion of *citta* to include also that of apperception. [Pieris’ n]

²⁸⁵ Further see the iceberg diagram, SD 17.8b (Fig 2.2). For more details on what is summarized here, see SD 41.6 (2.3.5.15). See also R E A Johansson, “Citta, mano, viññāṇa—A psychosemantic investigation,” *Univ of Ceylon Review* 23,1+2, Apr/Oct 1965:165-215; Aggacitta, “What actually is *citta*? And how is it related to *mano*?” (based on Johansson 1965), 2019: <https://youtu.be/w5I9KHglAzk>.

²⁸⁶ Cf S:B 770 n154 & Hamilton 1996a: ch 5.

Viññāṇa is, of course, the aggregate itself; here, functioning as an umbrella term for all our mental states and activities. They are our sensory actions and reactions that bow to the “will” of the unconscious, and keep on feeding it (as latent tendencies). When we speak of “having no free will,” we are referring to this level of our being, when our consciousness is simply “how” we experience things, mentally, as a human or a subhuman.

(2) On the 2nd less active “internal” level, **citta** is the heart of our experiences. In important ways, it knows or can know what is going on at the sense-experience level, whether we are acting in a subhuman manner (as an asura, animal, preta or hell-being)²⁸⁷ or in a human way (expressing love, ruth, joy, peace). This, clearly, sounds like the wholesome formations (*saṅkhārā*), temporarily free of greed, hate, delusion; or the mind of an arhat, permanently free of these unwholesome roots.

A strong *citta* is able to learn from such experiences, knowing how **mano** works or arises. In this case, **mano** broadly refers to our emotions (an important sense of *saṅkhārā*). This is rooted in our latent tendencies; the unconscious; hence, *mano* is here the “(mental) roots of our being.”

In psychological terms, these are all our “conscious” activities, **viññāṇa**. This is how we *construct* the virtual reality, our “world,” that is more real than the external world, but only for oneself in the moment. How we see and evaluate this “world,” how we feel, arises at this level of our sense-experience. Hence, this is the roots of our feelings.

(3) On the 3rd level, the broadest in the theoretical sense, **citta** is our personality, what we are as a *person*.²⁸⁸ In this sense, we can call it “**conative consciousness**,” since this is when we are ready and able to decide *not* to act on impulse, but to consider better alternatives, even the best course of conduct. It is the subject of our thinking, feeling and minding in the positive sense, arising from what we have learned or understood, but which still can and needs to learn and develop. Hence, in an important sense, this is what is liberated or awakens.

Technically, **mano** is our 6th *internal* sense-base, through which all our senses operate, or where “the mind” activates and directs our sense-experiences. Hence, we can call this “**cognitive consciousness**.” It is the mind-door, our thinking/feeling process (the 3rd karmic door). Basically, this is the level of our “raw sense-experiences,” subliminal consciousness, when we are likely to *act or react* on internal impulse, external stimuli, or, simply, out of habit.

In important ways, this is when we “make sense” of our world, how we exist in our virtual world. Hence, this level is that of “**existential consciousness**,” that is, what keeps us alive. On the deepest level, this is our **subconscious**, that is, the life-continuum (*bhav’āṅga*). This is what is reborn, fed and shaped, as it were, by our karmic genes.

13 The transformative process

13.1 VIÑÑĀṆA LINKS LIVES

13.1.1 Linking lives

Viññāṇa is not only the bearer and transmitter of karma, it is also the only process said to leave the body at death and enter another at conception. Karmic momentum takes over the last moments of life, conditioning it into a new one, but this is part of the same unbroken stream of consciousness that continues to feed the new life. This is **existential consciousness**, the *viññāṇa* that links lives, feeds them, and provides them with a sense of continuity. But it is not a static form or abiding entity—for whatever exists, only does

²⁸⁷ For a psychological application of these subhuman states, see SD 48.1 (5.2.4).

²⁸⁸ See **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,8-10), SD 4.17; **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b.

so in a time/space continuum, or more simply, impermanence—but it is also *a transformative consciousness*: either it devolves (*samvattati*), that is, falls into lower states of being, or it evolves (*vivattati*), even spiralling ever upwards, heading towards freedom.

13.1.2 Subject-object construction

This transformative process is directly influenced by the perceptual process, that is, the outcome of the dynamics between the “objective” biases of the 6 types of perception,²⁸⁹ and the “subjective” influence of the 6 types of sense-impressions. **Ñāṇamoli** aptly describes the internal sense-faculties (*ajjhātikāyatana*) as “the organization of experience,” and the external sense-fields (*bahiddhāyatana*) as “the experience as organized.”²⁹⁰

Analayo gives his own observation, thus:

Supposedly objective perceptual appraisal is in reality conditioned by the subject as much as by the object.²⁹¹ One’s experience of the world is the product of an interaction between the “subjective” influence exercised by how one perceives the world, and the “objective” influence exercised by the various phenomena of the external world. (2003:218 f)

13.1.3 Deconstruction of reality

This understanding is highly significant in meditation and mindfulness practice, where in satipatthana practice, we are instructed to direct the attention to each sense-faculty and apply “**the Bāhiya teaching**,” as recorded in **the Māluṅkyāputta Sutta** (S 35.95), thus:

Here, Māluṅkyāputta, regarding things²⁹² seen, heard, sensed²⁹³ and cognized [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 cognized | there will only be the cognized. | (S 35.95,12/4:73), SD 5.9 ²⁹⁴ |

This verse is the crux of the Māluṅkyāputta Sutta and of satipatthana. In sutta terms, as stated in **the Anattā, lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59), such experiences are not to be seen

- as “This is mine” (*etam mama*) which arises through craving, *taṇhā*, or
- as “This I am” (*eso’ham asmi*) due to conceit, *māna*, or
- as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*. (S 22.59/3:68), SD 1.2

In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ For details on the perceptual process, see **Saṅṇā**, SD 17.4.

²⁹⁰ *The Thinker’s Notebook*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1971:159. See also Analayo 2003:218 f, esp fn 8.

²⁹¹ Cf eg Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, Kandy, 1984:16; Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, London, 1977:21; H Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*, Delhi, 1974: 16; C Naranjo et al, *On the Psychology of Meditation*, London, 1971:189. (Analayo’s fn)

²⁹² “Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized,” *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.

²⁹³ *Muta*, that is, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

²⁹⁴ See also **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/6-9), SD 34.3.

²⁹⁵ See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

13.1.4 Reality, true and virtual

In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. 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 true reality or “ultimate truth” (*param’attha sacca*). After it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes virtual truth or “conventional (or defined) reality” (*paññatti sacca*) that brings us suffering due to greed, hate or delusion.

13.1.5 The 3 characteristics

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.²⁹⁶ This is how mindfulness training becomes the most effective path of spiritual evolution—because it deals directly with the cognitive process.

An understanding the 3 characteristics equips us with the basic tools of living full and true lives heading towards true happiness and spiritual freedom. This understanding or wisdom works, in simple terms, in this manner:

| <u>The universal characteristic of:</u> | <u>helps us to</u> |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) impermanence | see the true fleeting nature of life and all things, especially thoughts, ideas and views: this helps to free us from clinging to people and things; |
| (2) suffering or unsatisfactoriness | accept suffering and failure as learning or evolving processes, that is, they are not so much things to “fight off,” as to fully understand: this transmutes suffering into wisdom; |
| (3) non-self | understand why there is no abiding self or entity: everything is a process (at best a state of “being”), not being a state: this wisdom liberates us from others, ourselves and our views. |

13.2 THE DEPENDENT ARISING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

13.2.1 Suffering arises to us, the unawakened worldlings, simply because we view the 5 aggregates as our self or as a permanent entity (*attā*), and are attached to them through our “desire, lust, delight, craving, engagement, and mental standpoints, inclinations and latent tendencies.”²⁹⁷ As a result, the aggregates continue to manifest themselves. Only when we do not cling to the aggregates in this manner, as pointed in **the Hāḷiddakāni Sutta 2** (S 22.4), that they cease to bring about suffering.

13.2.2 The Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta (M 28) gives a practical guideline on how to deal with the aggregates. If the 4 primary elements—earth, water, fire and wind—great as they are, “are seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, subject to disappearance, subject to change—what more of this body that lasts for only a short while, but which is clung to by craving?

There can be no considering the earth element, for example, as “I” or “mine” or “I am,”²⁹⁸ or as ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’²⁹⁹ This is the practice of “disowning the elements.” The Sutta describes the benefit of such a practice—that of noting the aggregates as being impermanent—thus:

²⁹⁶ See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta*, tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

²⁹⁷ *Yo chandā yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā ye upāyūpādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānuyā, Hāḷiddakāni S 2* (S 22.4-/3:12 f).

²⁹⁸ “‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am,’” *ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f).

²⁹⁹ M 28,6.2/1:185. *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*. This threefold formula is the contrary of “the 3 graspings” (*ti, vidha gāha*), that is, of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*), of view (*ditṭhi*) (MA 2:111, 225). A brief version of this is given below: “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ [wrong view] or ‘mine’ [craving] or ‘I

So, then, friends, if others abuse, revile, scold, harass a monk (who has seen the elements as they really are),³⁰⁰ he understands thus:

‘This painful feeling born of **ear-contact** has arisen in me. It is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact.’³⁰¹

Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, those formations are impermanent, that consciousness is impermanent.

And his mind plunges into that very object that is the element [earth, water, fire, wind],³⁰² brightens with faith, becomes steady, and is resolute.³⁰³ (M 28,8/1:185 f), SD 6.16

The Mahā Hatthi, padopama Sutta goes on to state that the manifestation (*pātubhāva*) of any class (or type) of consciousness (*viññāṇa, bhāga*) is to be regarded as the result of 3 conditions, that is,

- (1) the sense-faculty is intact (*aparibhiṇṇa*),
- (2) the corresponding sense-object comes within the sense-faculty’s range (*āpātha*), and
- (3) that there is appropriate attention (*samannāhāra*), thus:

26 Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber, creepers [for binding], grass and clay, it is reckoned as a ‘house,’ even so, when a space is enclosed by bones, sinews, flesh and skin, it is reckoned as ‘form.’

27 ³⁰⁴If, friends, internally (**the sense-faculty**) is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention]³⁰⁵ [1.3.3], then, there is no appearance of that class of consciousness.³⁰⁶

am’ [conceit]” [7]: also at §§11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22 below. These three graspings are syn with the three kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) and of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). In **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:68), the formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/ 3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements: see SD 6.16 (5).

³⁰⁰ Cf **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22), where the Buddha instructs the monks not to feel negative when others abuse them, and not to be elated when others praise them (M 22,39/1:140).

³⁰¹ Comy: This passage shows the mental strength of the monk meditating on the elements in directing his understanding to undesirable objects arising at the ear-door. By regarding such experiences as conditioned and impermanent, he transforms the potentially negative situation of being subjected to abuse, etc, into one for insight. (MA 2:226)

³⁰² *Tassa dhāt’ārammaṇam eva cittaṃ pakkhandati*. See SD 6.16 (2).

³⁰³ See **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 28), where Rāhula is taught the meditation of the 4 “element-like” meditations (M 28,13-17/1:424 f), SD 3.11.13-17.

³⁰⁴ **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18) has a similar analysis of the 18 elements (6 sense-organs + 6 sense-objects), beginning with: “Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. **The meeting of the three is contact**. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates. What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.” (M 18,16/1:111 f)

³⁰⁵ “Appropriate conscious engagement,” *tajjo samannāhāro hoti*, or “an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind” (Jayatilke, 1963:433). *Tajjo* (*tad + ya*), “this like,” appropriate; “engagement [of attention]” (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasikāra*, “attention” (M 1:445; Vbh 321). Comy explains it here as attention arising in dependence on the eye and forms. It is identified with the “five-door adverting consciousness” (*pañca, dvāra, vajjana, citta*), which breaks off the flow of the life continuum (*bhavaṅga*) to initiate the process of cognition (MA 2:229). Even when a sense-object (external stimulus) comes within the range of the sense-organ, if attention is not directed towards the object (because one is occupied with something else), there is still no appearance of “the corresponding class of consciousness.” Here [27a], meaning that no eye-consciousness would arise. See Harvey 1996:95.

³⁰⁶ “Class of consciousness,” *viññāṇa, bhāga*. Comy: This section introduces form derived from the 4 great elements. Derived form, according to the Abhidhamma analysis of matter, includes the 5 sense-faculties (*pasāda, rūpa*) and the

27.2 If, friends, internally ⟨the sense-faculty⟩ is unimpaired [intact] and external forms come into its range, but there is no appropriate conscious engagement [attention], then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness.

27.3 If, friends, internally ⟨the sense-faculty⟩ is unimpaired [intact] and external forms come into its range, and there is an appropriate conscious engagement, then there is the appearance of that class of consciousness.

28 The form in what has thus come into being is grouped into the form aggregate of clinging.³⁰⁷
The feeling in what has thus come into being is grouped into the feeling aggregate of clinging.
The perception in what has thus come into being is grouped into the perception aggregate of clinging.

The formations in what has thus come into being are grouped into the formations aggregate of clinging.

The consciousness in what has thus come into being is grouped into the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

28.2 He understands thus:

“This, indeed, is how there comes into being the grouping, gathering and accumulation of things into these 5 aggregates of clinging.”

28.3 Now this has been said by the Blessed One: **“One who sees dependent arising sees the Dharma; one who sees the Dharma see dependent arising.”**³⁰⁸

And these 5 aggregates are dependently arisen.

The desire, indulgence, inclination and clinging³⁰⁹ based on these 5 aggregates of clinging is **the arising of suffering.**

The removal of lustful desire, the abandonment of lustful desire,³¹⁰ for these 5 aggregates is **the ending of suffering.’**

To that extent, too, friends, much has been done by that monk.³¹¹ (M 28/1:190 f), SD 6.16

The sutta instructions here illustrate dependent arising, and it declares that what dependently arises is nothing but the 5 aggregates. The point here is to understand how the aggregates arise and stand in relation to each other, how they are conditioned and sustained within a particular cognitive process.

first 4 kinds of sense-object, the tangible object being identified with the primary elements themselves (MA 2:229). This passage is qu at Kvu 620; cf Miln 56 ff. **Peter Harvey** renders *viññāṇa, bhāga* literally as “share of discernment [consciousness]” (1995:129-133), where he also argues against **N Ross Reat**’s rendition of it as “type of consciousness” (1987:19) and **R E A Johansson**’s interpretation of the dependence of *rūpa* on consciousness (1979:32).

³⁰⁷ This section shows the 4 noble truths by way of the sense-doors. “What has thus come to be” (*tathā, bhūta*) refers to all the states and conditions that arise by way of eye-consciousness. Sāriputta analyzes these states and conditions to show that any sense-experience or factors related to it would fall under the truth of suffering.

³⁰⁸ This quote is untraced in the Pali Canon as we have it and possibly belongs to some lost texts. Comy glosses the statement thus: “One who sees conditionality (*paccaya*) sees dependently arisen states (*paṭicca, samuppanne dhamme*); one who sees dependently arisen states see conditionality” (MA 2:230).

³⁰⁹ *Chanda, ālaya, anunaya, ajjhosaṇā*. These are syns for *taṇhā* (“craving”).

³¹⁰ The prec 2 phrases are syns for nirvana (MA 2:230).

³¹¹ Although only 3 of the 4 noble truths are explicitly elaborated in the Sutta, the fourth truth—the path—is implicit. Comy says that this refers to the penetration of these truths by the development of the eight factors of the path (MA 2:230).

13.3 WHAT IS REBORN?

13.3.1 “Neither the same nor not the same” (*na ca so na ca añño*)

13.3.1.1 The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38) explains that *viññāṇa* does not pass over into a new life unchanged; it is *not* the same consciousness that moves on life after life.³¹² However, we must take care not to think in absolute terms here: that every conscious moment or the consciousness that is reborn is a totally new one. Then we would fall into the notion of eternalism (*sassata, diṭṭhi*).

13.3.1.2 The candle parable is helpful here. Suppose we have an unlit candle in our hand, and we then place its wick near the burning flame of another candle, the wick would light up (assuming, of course, it has all the proper conditions for lighting up). Now, has anything been transferred from the flame of the lit candle to the wick of the first one?

We can answer “No” because the wick is capable of burning by itself and the second candle does not lose anything, so to speak. We can answer “Yes” and say that some “heat” is passed over, igniting the wick. Hence, it is meaningful to answer “yes and no”!³¹³ Both answers are correct, depending on how we look at the situation: such an idea is common in quantum physics.

13.3.1.3 The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38) also defines cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness. **The Papañca,sūdanī**, the Majjhima Commentary, says that the monk Sāti, a fisherman’s son, is not learned. He was a Jātaka Reciter, so he thinks that, although the other aggregates (*khandha*) cease now here, now there, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) runs on from this world to the beyond and from the beyond to this world. As such, he concludes that consciousness arises without any condition (*paccaya*).

13.3.2 Consciousness is conditioned

The Buddha however teaches that where there is a condition, it arises, and with no condition, there is no arising of consciousness. Sāti therefore professes what the Buddha does not teach, giving a blow to the Conqueror’s wheel, and was a “thief” in his dispensation. (MA 2:305).

The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38) records thus:

“What is this consciousness, Sāti?”

“Bhante, it is that which speaks and feels here and there; it feels the results of good and bad deeds.”³¹⁴

“O hollow man,³¹⁵ to whom have one ever known me to have taught the Dharma in that way? O hollow man, have I not stated in many ways that consciousness is dependently arisen;³¹⁶ that without a condition there is no arising of consciousness?

³¹² M 38/1:256-271 @ SD 7.10, esp (1-4).

³¹³ This is, in fact, the 3rd of the 4 alternatives: see **Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63), SD 5.8 (2) & **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10. When Nāgasena is asked by king Milinda whether the one who is reborn is the same or different person, Nāgasena answers, “Neither the same nor different” (*na ca so na ca añño*) (Miln 40), which applies here, too. In a sense we are reborn “anew,” as a different person or being. However, we still bear with us (as latent tendencies) the karmic potential that could recur or react to the right conditions.

³¹⁴ As in **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2.8/1:8) where it is one of a number of examples of *diṭṭhi,gata*. This statement by Sāti is his second wrong view, the first being stated at M 2.8.3/1: of the Sutta, SD 17.10.

³¹⁵ *Mogha,purisa*, lit “empty person”; often tr as “misguided one.” However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, “misguided” connotes more of psychosocial errancy. I’m influenced by TS Eliot’s “Hollow Men” (where “empty men” is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem.

³¹⁶ “Consciousness is dependently arisen,” *paṭicca,samuppannam viññāṇam*. Cf **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28): “These 5 aggregates of clinging are dependently arisen.” (M 28.28/1:191), SD 3.13.

But you, O hollow man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured³¹⁷ yourself, and stored up much demerit—for, this will bring one harm and suffering for a long time.”

(M 38,5.3/1:258), SD 7.10

13.3.3 The fire parable

The Buddha then lists the 6 kinds of consciousness, follows up with the fire parable, showing how a fire is named after its fuel, “even so, too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises.” (M 38,8.21:259 f). This is **cognitive consciousness**, the rudimentary awareness that is the basis of our daily experience.

13.3.4 Do not treat a view as a possession

In the following sections (M 38.9-21), the Buddha expounds how “this being” arises, how we come into being, through “food” (*āhāra*) and dependent arising. This means that rebirth occurs because, by clinging to various things, consciousness becomes dependent on them.

In due course, the Buddha makes this remarkable declaration, as recorded in the same Sutta (M 38):

“Bhikshus, no matter how pure and clear this **view** may be, if we stick to it, prize it, be acquisitive about it,³¹⁸ treat it as a possession,³¹⁹ would we then understand that the Dharma has been taught *as being comparable to a raft*³²⁰ that is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping?”

(M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10

13.3.5 Consciousness conditions name-and-form

The Cetanā Sutta 2 (S 12.39) elaborates, first saying, “When consciousness is established (*patitṭhite*) and grows, there is descent (*avakkanti*) of name-and-form,”³²¹ that is, a new being arises in the womb.³²² Conversely, the Sutta declares at the end:

But, bhikshus, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for the support for consciousness.

When there is no mental basis, there consciousness is not established.

When consciousness is not established and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth.**

When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.³²³

(S 12.38,4/2:65 f), SD 7.6b

³¹⁷ “Injured,” *khaṇasi*, 2nd p sg of *khaṇati*: (1) hurts, injures; impairs (V 2:26 = M 1:132; D 1:86; S 1:27; A 1:89, 3:350; Tha 1173); (2) digs; digs up; excavates (V 3:48, 76, 4:32; M 2:51; S 1:127; A 4:159; Dh 247, 337; U 15). There is a word-play here: Sāti harms himself with wrong view, and also dig up his wholesome roots.

³¹⁸ “Be acquisitive about it,” *dhanāyati* (denom of *dhana*, “treasure”) lit “make a treasure of it,” he desires (like money), wishes for, strives after. Also read as *vanāyati*, he hankers after.

³¹⁹ This verse up to here qu in Comy to **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22) (MA 22.21/2:109).

³²⁰ “Being comparable to a raft,” *kullūpamaṃ*. The whole phrase can be alt tr as “would you then understand the Dharma as taught in the parable of the raft...?” See **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.13/1:134). “This is said to show the bhikkhus that they should not cling even to the right view of insight meditation” (M:ÑB 1233 n406).

³²¹ S 12.39/2:66), SD 7.6b. On the question of conception and when does life begin, see SD 7.10 (8).

³²² See Harvey 1995:96.

³²³ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See Intro (5) for detailed nn.

13.3.6 “Unestablished” consciousness

Bodhi interprets the phrase “when consciousness is not established” (*appatitthita viññāṇa*) here to refer to “a consciousness without the prospect of a future rebirth through the propulsive power of ignorance, craving, and the volitional formations” (S:B 760 n114). The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87). Let us now examine this important point a little more closely.

14 The after-death consciousness of an arhat

14.1 GODHIKA AND VAKKALI

In both **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87), Māra is said to be looking for the rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi, citta*) of dead arhat monks. Both **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.3) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87) close with this same passage:³²⁴

Now on that occasion a mass of smoke and darkness was moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between.³²⁵

The Blessed One then addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, do you see that mass of smoke and darkness moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“That, bhikshus, is Māra the bad one seeking the consciousness of the son of family Godhika (Vakkali), wondering, ‘Where now has the consciousness of the son of family Godhika (Vakkali) established itself [is reborn]?’

But, bhikshus, with consciousness unestablished, the son of family Godhika (Vakkali) has attained nirvana.”
(S 4.23/1:122 = 22.87/3:124), SD 8.8

Elsewhere, such as in **the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49), it is said that Māra finds the rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi, citta*) of normal dead people.³²⁶ However, he fails to do so here, since the arhat’s consciousness (or rebirth-consciousness) is unestablished (*appatitthita*), that is, finds no footing for a new life. It is clear here that the rebirth-consciousness (= death consciousness, *cuti, citta*) does not survive in an “unestablished” condition, since the texts (here and at S 1:122) state that when an arhat passes away, his consciousness ceases, too.³²⁷

14.2 NO “UNSUPPORTED” CONSCIOUSNESS

This conclusion to the two Suttas is instructive in countering the wrong view that some form of “unsupported” consciousness remains after the passing away of an arhat (as proposed, for example, by Peter Harvey).³²⁸ There is a vast difference between what is meant by the English terms “unestablished consciousness” and “unsupported consciousness.”

The term “unestablished consciousness” means that *no* consciousness is established or occurs, since there is no more “footing” or basis for it. In other words, all the 5 aggregates (not just those of clinging)

³²⁴ S 4.23/1:122 & S 22.87/3:24 respectively. The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122) and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24). See SD 7.6b (4) for more details.

³²⁵ *Tena kho pana samayena dhumāyitattarṃ timirāyitattarṃ gacchat’eva purimarṃ disarṃ gacchati pacchimarṃ disarṃ gacchati uttararṃ disarṃ gacchati dakkhiṇarṃ disarṃ gacchati uddharṃ gacchati adho gacchati anudisarṃ.* (**Godhika S**, S 1:122 = **Vakkali S**, 3:124).

³²⁶ M 49.5/1:327 @ SD 11.7; cf S 4:38 f.

³²⁷ See **Parivimamsana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84), SD 11.5; e also S:B 421 n314 where Bodhi disagrees with Harvey’s view.

³²⁸ 1995a:208-210.

have stopped functioning and ceased to exist. However, it is also not right to say that the dead saint has “ceased to exist,” which would be a notion based on an annihilationist view (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*).³²⁹ Here, we can neither say he exists nor does not exist after death,³³⁰ just like a fire that had gone out has not really “gone” anywhere.³³¹

To assert that there is “unsupported” consciousness is to suggest that there is some kind of consciousness that exists, that is, the saint is still conscious in some way, which would be falling into an eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*).³³² It is probable that Harvey arrived at his thesis from translating *appatitṭhita* as “unsupported” rather than “unestablished,” which would then not support his thesis. Here it helps to think in Pali, rather than in English.

15 Closing remarks

15.1 AN ANALYSIS OF MAN

Some contemporary scholars explain the aggregates as a “Buddhist analysis of man.” Correct as this may be, it is only one aspect of the 5 aggregates, and this should not be highlighted at the expense of the others. As **Rupert Gethin** notes,

the five *khandhas*, as treated in the *nikāyas* and early *abhidhamma*, do not exactly take on the character of a formal theory of the nature of man. The concern is not so much the presentation of an analysis of man as object, but rather the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject. Thus at the most general level *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* are presented as five aspects of an individual being’s experience of the world; each *khandha* is seen as representing a complex class of phenomena that is continuously arising and falling away in response to processes of consciousness based on the six spheres of senses. They thus become the five *upādānakkhandhas*, encompassing both grasping and all that is grasped. As the *upādānakkhandhas* these five classes of states acquire a momentum, and continue to manifest and come together at the level of individual being from one existence to the next. For any given individual there are, then, only these five *upādānakkhandhas*—they define the limits of his world, they are his world. This subjective orientation of the *khandhas* seems to arise out of the simple fact that, for the *nikāyas*, this is how the world is experienced; that is to say, it is not primarily as having metaphysical significance. (Gethin 1986:49 f)

15.2 SUMMARY

Viññāṇa is impermanent [3], but provides a continuity of experience [4, 9], which is often mistaken by the unawakened to be some sort of abiding entity [5]. We have discussed the 2 kinds of consciousness (cognitive and existential) [6]; *viññāṇa* as “subjective consciousness,” that is, as “consciousness of” [7]; *viññāṇa* as a factor in the cognitive process [8]; *viññāṇa* and karma [10]; and as evolving [11]; transformative [13] and liberating [14]. We have also discussed various terms related to *viññāṇa*, namely, *kāya*, *mano*, and *citta* [12]. This has given us an overview of *viññāṇa* as taught in early Buddhism and as understood in modern scholarship, with the hope that such a study will be of practical help in our spiritual development. — — —

³²⁹ On the annihilationist view (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*) and the eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*) below, see **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,2-3) & SD 1.1 (3).

³³⁰ See **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,16/1:487), SD 6.15 (3).

³³¹ See **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,19/1:487) & SD 6.15 (4); also the parable of the great ocean (M 71,20).

³³² On the eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*) and the annihilationist view (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*) above, see **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,2-3) & SD 1.1 (3).

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[For papers on consciousness, see <http://consc.net/chalmers/>. For other titles, see SD 17.1a, Biblio.]

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