

How we form views

[Source: Simplified version of §§2.2.2-2.2.4, **Sallekha Sutta** (M 8), [SD 51.8](#); also as fb170714.]

The Sallekha Sutta (M 8) tells us that views should be disowned “**wherever** they arise.” “Wherever” here refers to the object or basis of our attention (*ārammaṇa*), that is, any of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*)—form (“things,” shapes and colours), feeling, perception (recognizing), formations (karmic activity through mind, speech and body) and consciousness (cognizing). All false views regarding the self and the world refer only to these aggregates or to one of them.

There seems to be a commentarial wordplay here on *ārammaṇa*, which has a primary or literal meaning of “point of support, hold” or “starting-point.” Post-Buddha Abhidhamma gives *ārammaṇa* two key senses:

- (1) as *paccaya* (mental condition) or *hetu* (cause), that is, foundation, base; ground, cause, reason;
- (2) as *visaya* (sense-field) or *gocara* (mental range), that is, object (of the senses or thought).

We can see here a more developed psychological theory of what in the suttas is called **name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpa*). *Nāma* is the mind, the ground, condition or “cause” that is the sense-faculty; *rūpa* is the object or “result” of the senses.

In the dependent arising formula, we have this starting sequence of 4 links, as, for example, laid out in **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15)¹:

Ignorance → formations → consciousness → name-and-form → ... (suffering).

Our view-formation can be explained as starting with **ignorance** (*avijjā*), which moves us to act—motivated by *craving* in the form of lust, hate and delusion. We are driven by intentions as the **formations** (*saṅkhārā*) arising through mind, speech and body. This feeds our consciousness (or “conscious mind”) (*viññāṇa*) making it more sensitive and sophisticated at detecting and “making sense” of experiences, that is, at constructing name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*) out of them—giving names to forms, giving forms to names, making sense of things, giving our reasons for everything that confront us.

The view-formation, on a deeply mental level, starts with mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), when we are driven by an intention to form ideas in our mind, and then to speak and act on them. Such views or ideas rise and fall with the moment, and will not really trouble us if we do not pursue them, or do not store them as memories and images in our consciousness—as “prototypes” or fixed views (conceptions and later perceptions) of our experiences: our actions (through mind, speech and body) are somehow dictated by such mental “prototypes.”

This is where we construct views of self, identifying with our body and its actions, or feelings, or perceptions, or formations (intentions), or consciousness (general awareness of things). With this habitual pattern of dependent arising, we form self-views and world-views. And this is where we can and must end this view-formations before we are swallowed up by them.

¹ **Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15/2:16 f), [SD 6.13](#).

A view is a very private but potent idea of our world of experiences that attracts more of its kind to itself. It is a self-replicating mental process with only the purpose of self-proliferation and constructing the notion of an abiding self. Psychologically, this is called a meme.²

Once we assimilate any views—or rather when a view assimilates “us”—they “**lie latent or dormant**” (*anusenti*) like viruses, gathering strength through our continued keeping and showing them. Our unfettered sense-experiences—measuring people, liking and disliking things—feed these mental viruses that infest our “unconscious”—in fact, they *are* our **unconscious**, the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), that control our thought, speech and action, like a puppet-master holding and playing with us with its many and strong strings of lust, hate and delusion.

Our views—or rather, the roots of these views: lust, hate and delusion in their various forms—lie latent in our unconscious (we do not even know they are there). But at every opportune moment, they **assail** (*samudācaranti*) us tenaciously bending, twisting and crushing us to reinforce our identity with **self-view** (“This is *me*”), to measure our self against others with **conceit** (“This *I am*”), and relentlessly pushing us to do this with **craving** (“This is *mine!*”).³

When we grasp a view, we take the shape of that view. We become the view: we think, speak and act *as* those views. It is like living in blinding darkness and looking into it. Then, as our eyes adjust to the darkness, we begin to make out things. The reality is that when we gaze into this darkness, it stares back at us with images that we project from our own minds—our greed, hate, delusion and fear.

Each view leads to many more: they proliferate; one thought arouses many others—leading to a **mental proliferation** (*papañca*). We are drowned in our thoughts; they overflow through our speech and actions drowning others, too, especially those already drowning in their own thoughts.⁴

And so we become our views—as we think, so we are—we exist through them, and are reborn as them to repeat and replay everything all over again, as long as we are unawakened. In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha teaches us how to break this vicious cycle and completely free ourselves from suffering and rebirth.⁵

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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² Memes, [SD 26.3](#).

³ For studies, see **I: The nature of identity**, [SD 19.1](#); **Me: The nature of conceit**, [SD 19.2a](#); **Mine: The nature of craving**, [SD 19.3](#).

⁴ On mental proliferation (*papañca*), see **Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), [SD 6.14](#) (2). On non-identifying with sense-objects, see **Atammayatā**, [SD 19.13](#).

⁵ On not identifying with anything, see **Atam,mayatā**, [SD 19.13](#).