

Our identities

Source: SD 31.4 (1.2)

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[As you read this (or anything else), notice how your mind says: "I like this!" "I hate this!" At some points (plural), your mind will change the words or ideas and insert your own—"This is what I think!" "This is better!" We tend to read what we have thought; rarely do we read what is really there! For most of us, anyway.]

1.2 HOW WE ARE RECKONED

1.2.1 We are reckoned by our **defilements** our existential cloudedness: we are clouded up in lust, ill will, delusion. This cloudedness hides from us the true nature of *what we really are*. So, we chase and cling to whatever vision that seem to form before us when the clouds momentarily part.

We are caught in one or other of the 5 aggregates of clinging—form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness¹. We live clouded in form, clouded in feelings, clouded in perceptions, clouded in formations, clouded in consciousness. We are blinded by these clouds; we are so used to this cloudy darkness that we think we can actually see. But what we see are imagined shadows and shapes.

1.2.2 As members of society, we often profess views that shape us and our imagined world. Often, we also shape the minds and worlds of others for a long time. Yet, none of these professed views ever stand the test of time. We keep changing our views, forgetting them and finding new ones.

We are all **professors and professionals**, defined by how we view the aggregate we identify with. We are compelled to identify with one or other of the aggregates—with form, with feeling, with perception, with formations, with consciousness.

When we identify with **form** (*rūpa*), we are reckoned (*saṅkha gacchati*) as a “physical” person, enjoying appearances and touches: we are likely to be a “materialist” or an “aesthete (a lover of beauty).” We are driven to collect forms, reject forms, ignore forms.

When we identify with **feeling** (*vedanā*), we are reckoned as an “affective” person, full of emotions: we are likely to be an “artist (a creator of beauty)” or a “hedonist.” We are driven to collect feelings, reject feelings, ignore feelings.

When we identify with **perception** (*saññā*), we are reckoned as a “measuring” person, working with the senses, giving names to the unnamed: we are likely to be a “scientist” or a “scholar.” We are driven to collect perceptions, reject perceptions, ignore perceptions.

¹ See (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56), SD 3.7. Defined at SD 3.7 (6+7).

When we identify with **formations** (*saṅkhārā*), we are reckoned as “conative” person, moved by views and activity: we are likely to be a “philosopher” or a “politician.” We are driven to collect formations, reject formations, ignore formations.

When we identify with **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), we are reckoned as a “cognitive” person: we are likely to be a “psychologist” or “religious guru.” We are driven to collect consciousness, reject consciousness, ignore consciousness.

1.2.3 Social conditioning and latent tendencies

1.2.3.1 As long as we are unawakened, we lack the free will to really decide what’s right what’s wrong, what’s good what’s bad. Our collective experiences as a society, working for the greater good, induce us to work out ways to set this right. The reality is that we are moulded and moved by the forms around us, the feelings, the perceptions, the formations, the consciousness we experience in our crowded life. So far as a society is able to maintain a healthy level of the right and the good, we have a **good society**.

1.2.3.2 To a significant extent, our previous conditionings by family, peers, religion, school and society moderate us to act rightly and good. Such conditioning, however, on account of their worldliness, are still unable to fully free us from acting in a wrong or bad way, even from being selfish.

Personally, as unawakened beings, we are often helplessly compelled by greed, hate and delusion to have things our way. Our life is but raw reactions of being hooked by the bait of pleasure, torn by the disgust for displeasure, burdened by what we make no sense of. What hooks us is **greed**, what tears us up is **hate**, what burdens us is **ignorance**. These just keep growing unstopably.

1.2.3.3 This is the dreamworld of our **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), dark forces that lie deep sleep in our mind since ages past, ready to raise their hydra heads at strike at the slightest provocation of liking, disliking, apathy. This leaves us in violent storms of pushing, pulling, and being stuck in the wilderness of our emotions.

These latent tendencies, even in our dreams, especially in our dream called life, compel us to act in such stormy deluded and selfish ways. They are the deeper and darker roots of greed, hate and delusion: **lust, ill will and ignorance**². These are the unconscious reflexes we have built up our whole life, and forgettably long before that, in countless past lives. As ordinary worldlings, we must but act and react to the slightest tickle of external stimuli as we fumble to make sense of things—we are the helpless creatures and playthings of the latent tendencies.

The Aññatara Bhikkhu Sutta 1 (S 22.35) commentary explains that if we have a **latent tendency** towards form by way of sensual lust, etc, then we are reckoned by that latent tendency as being lustful, hateful or deluded. But when that latent tendency is absent, we are not reckoned so (SA 3:265). Only with the wisdom of the path—when we are to some

² For details, see *Anusaya*, SD 31.3.

level transformed by moral good, mental focus and wisdom—are we able to overcome these latent tendencies effectively. We begin to free our mind and brighten our heart.

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