

## 17

**(Sattaka) Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti Sutta**

The (Sevens) Discourse on the Stations of Consciousness | A 7.41 [A:Be 7.44]

Theme: The various kinds of existence that consciousness assumes

Translated by Piya Tan ©2017 2020

**1 Summary and significance****1.0 STUDY METHOD**

If you are new to this topic, you may like to start by reading **Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti** (SD 23.14), which is an introduction to the teaching on the stations of consciousness. **SD 23.14** deals with the following topics:

- (1) **karma** as the basis: the 4 stations of constructive consciousness (*abhisankhāra viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti*), that is, **the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 aggregates** as the bases for consciousness; [1.2]
- (2) **rebirth** as the basis: the 7 stations of consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti*).

Having studied SD 23.14, then, return to **SD 57.17** to study **the (Sattaka) Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti Sutta** (A 7.41), which deals with (2), the 7 stations of consciousness.

**1.1 SUMMARY**

**The (Sattaka) Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti Sutta** (A 7.41) is a short “topical” sutta that lists the 7 ways in which consciousness can manifest itself in terms of rebirth (*paṭisandhi*), that is, as any of the 7 stations of consciousness (*viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti*).<sup>1</sup> **The 7 stations of consciousness** are as follows:

**They are beings who are:**

- |  |                          |                        |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) different in body, different in perception<br>(humans, some devas, some in the downfallen states); | <i>nānatta,kayā</i>      | <i>nānatta,saññino</i> |
| (2) different in body, same in perception<br>(the 1 <sup>st</sup> -dhyana brahmas);                    | <i>nānatta,kayā</i>      | <i>ekatta,saññino</i>  |
| (3) same in body, different in perception<br>(the Ābhassara devas);                                    | <i>ekatta,kayā</i>       | <i>nānatta,saññino</i> |
| (4) same in body, same in perception<br>(the Subha,kiṇha devas);                                       | <i>ekatta,kayā</i>       | <i>ekatta,saññino</i>  |
| (5) the base of infinite space;  | <i>ākiñcaññāyatana</i>   |                        |
| (6) the base of infinite consciousness; and  | <i>viññāṇaṅc'āyatana</i> |                        |
| (7) the base of nothingness.   | <i>ākiñcaññāyatana</i>   |                        |

**1.2 THE FIRST 4 AGGREGATES**

**1.2.1** The term “**station of consciousness**” (*viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti*) is used here in a different sense than in **the Bija Sutta** (S 22.54), where the 4 stations of consciousness are the first 4 aggregates—form, feeling, per-

<sup>1</sup> On the 7 stations of consciousness, see also: **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15,33), SD 5.17 Table 1; **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(10/-3:253); as the 4 elements (mahā,bhūta): **(Viññāṇa) Bija S** (S 22.54,7) n, SD 8.3(9); as grounds for rebirth (Comy): **Satta Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti S** (A 7.41), SD 57.17; Table, **Group karma?** SD 39.1 (1.4).

ception and formations—functioning as the supports for the 5<sup>th</sup> aggregate, **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*).<sup>2</sup> Consciousness gains a footing in any of the 4 aggregates in this way:

- (1) in relation to form, with form as object and basis, as a place of enjoyment, or similarly in regard to:
- (2) feelings,
- (3) perception, or
- (4) formations, and there it grows, increases, becomes abundant. (D 33,1.11(18); Nc 1)

**1.2.2** In the present sutta (A 7.41)—as in **the (Navaka) Satt’āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.24), SD 57.18—consciousness is seen as of those arising in the various planes of rebirth. The Commentary calls them “grounds for the rebirth-consciousness” (*paṭisandhi, viññāṇassa thāṇāni*). (AA 4:25,15 f).

## 2 The 7 stations of consciousness (details)

### **2.1 THE 1<sup>ST</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

**2.1.1** The Commentary<sup>3</sup> explains **the 1<sup>st</sup> station of consciousness**—beings who are different both in body and in perception (*nānatta, kayā nānatta, saññino*)—as comprising humans. **Human beings** are different in body (*nānatta, kāya*) because there are no two people whose bodies are exactly alike. They differ in perception (*nānatta, saññino*) because, in some cases, their rebirth perception (*paṭisandhi, saññino*) has 3 (good) roots, in others 2 roots, and in still others it is rootless.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.1.2 THE SENSE-WORLD DEVAS**

**2.1.2.1** The **devas** mentioned are the 6 sense-sphere devas, the highest of the sense realms in which the human world is located. These 6 deva realms are those of:<sup>5</sup>

the 4 great kings	<i>cātum, mahā, rājika</i>
the 33	<i>tāvatiṃsa</i>
the blissful devas	<i>yāma</i>
the contented devas	<i>tusita</i>
the devas who delight in creation	<i>nimmāna, ratī</i>
the devas who lord over others’ creation	<i>para, nimmita, vasavatti</i>

**2.1.2.2** The common characteristics of the sense-world devas are that they have consciousness and 5 physical senses. These devas or celestial beings, however, have a more refined physical body and special powers or abilities (like self-morphing and spatial travel), on account of their past good karma. If we do not accept the existence of devas or gods, then, we can imagine them to be some kind of advanced civilization of aliens.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> S 22.54/3:54,26 (SD 8.3(9)).

<sup>3</sup> AA 4:25-26,14.

<sup>4</sup> The “root” (*hetuka*) teachings here are classic Abhidhamma notions not found in the suttas. They may be of psychological interest and usefulness when we understand the suttas better. For details, see Abhidhamm’attha, saṅga-ha: Abhs:BRS 179-181, 211-219.

<sup>5</sup> For the location of these realms in the Buddhist cosmos, see SD 57.10 (App).

<sup>6</sup> For details, see SD 57.10 (6.1.1).

### 2.1.3 “Those free from the 4 suffering states” (*catu, apāya, vinimuttā*)

**2.1.3.1** Now, beings of the 4 suffering states are those “different in body” (*nānatta, kāya*) but “same in perception” (*ekatta, saññino*), that is, those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> station of consciousness [2.2]. The “downfallen” beings (*vinipātika*) who are “freed” from the 4 suffering states (*catu, apāya, vinimuttā*) refer to a special category of beings that we are more likely to encounter or become than those that belong to their specific realms.

These beings “outside” of their “downfallen” realms refer to animals, asuras, pretas and hellbeings who, on account of their karma, are neither confined nor limited in perception in the ordinary sense of the “suffering states.” In **the lower world**, for example, there are certain animals that are human-like or intelligent [2.1.3.2], certain yakshas and pretas with celestial mansions [2.1.3.4] and asuras [2.1.3.3] who are not listed as a “suffering state,” as evident in **the (Pañca) Gati Sutta** (A 9.68).<sup>7</sup>

**2.1.3.2** It is interesting that the Commentary mentions there are **animals** that are “freed of the suffering state” (*apāya, vinimuttā*).<sup>8</sup> I take this to mean animals that, in some way, are not caught up in the routine bestial nature of the jungle or domain of their existence, “Nature red in tooth and claw.”<sup>9</sup> These animals include the elephant and the monkey in Parileyya forest, who looked after the Buddha, and even offered fruits to him.<sup>10</sup> **The (Navaka) Nāga Sutta** (A 9.40) is about a tusker who enjoys solitude.<sup>11</sup> Then, there are many animals that are not only intelligent, wise, compassionate (and able to speak) in the Jātaka stories.<sup>12</sup>

These are examples of animals who are psychologically evolved (mentally developed) and ready for rebirth as humans. We will notice that when we treat our pets well, they behave in an intelligent and happy manner. Often, they even try to communicate with us, or imitate us. In other words, they are able to learn some wholesome conduct from us or even on their own. Most poignantly, when they (especially a cat or a dog) are dying, they seem to want us to know it. They feel safe and calm when we comfort them. Understandably, animals that die peacefully in this manner are likely to have a human rebirth or even as devas.<sup>13</sup>

**2.1.3.3 Asuras** never form a realm of their own since, mythically, they are devas,<sup>14</sup> the original inhabitants of Tāvatiṃsa, or what was before it, until Sakra and the 33 devas overthrew them for their drunken ways. On account of this downfall, they are called *a-sura* (non-gods or anti-god). Since then, they dwell on their own under the ocean at the foot of Mount Sumeru.<sup>15</sup> Sakra’s devas and the asuras,

<sup>7</sup> A 9.68/4:459 (SD 2.20).

<sup>8</sup> *Catu, apāya, vinimutta*, also DA 2:509,21 ff; AA 4:26,1; NcA 59; PmA 1:111,17, 3:676,28-35 *kamma, vipākajā, id-dhi*; cf Vism 12.39/382.

<sup>9</sup> Its best known occurrence is in Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A H H* (1850). For an interesting study: <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/01/a-short-analysis-of-canto-lvi-from-tennysons-in-memoriam/>. Dickens wrote, “I go at it tooth and nail” in *David Copperfield* (1850 ch 42).

<sup>10</sup> DhA 1.5b/1:58-65; the elephant story is repeated at DhA 23.7/4:26-29.

<sup>11</sup> A 9.40/4:435.

<sup>12</sup> Such as the “monkey” stories: **Vana-r-inda J** (J 57/1:278-280); **Tayo, dhamma J** (J 58/1:280-283); **Mahā Kapi J 1** (J 407/3:369-375); **Mahā Kapi J 2** (J 516/5:67-74). For a list of the Bodhisattva’s births, see *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, 1979:15-19. For a study: A S Kulasuriya, “Jātaka,” *Ency Bsm* 6:2-23.

<sup>13</sup> Animals reborn as devas apparently attain Tāvatiṃsa as the highest realm: **Animals go to heaven**, SD 81.8. On **animals**, see SD 57.10 (3.2.4).

<sup>14</sup> On **the asuras** as a psychological state, see SD 39.2 (1.3).

<sup>15</sup> On the asuras’ origins, see SD 15.5 (3.7.1). On Sakra’s devas and the asuras, see SD 54.3a (3.5.4).

in due course, reconciled, especially beginning with Sakra's marriage with Sujā, daughter of the asura leader, Vepa,citti.<sup>16</sup>

**2.1.3.4** Interestingly, the Commentary here seems to mention yakshas alongside the **pretas**, that they are "those freed of the suffering state" (*apāya,vinimuttā*) [2.1.3.1]. Specifically mentioned are the yakshinis (female yakshas, *yakkhinī*), that is, Uttara's mother,<sup>17</sup> Piyaṅkara's mother,<sup>18</sup> Phussa,mittā<sup>19</sup> and Dhamma,guttā<sup>20</sup> who are "pretas with celestial mansions" (*vemānika,petā*), or simply, "mansioned pretas" (*vimāna,petā*). They are each said to have a complexion such as white, black, golden, or dark tan, and of various shapes, sizes and height. (AA 4:26,1-5)

**The mansioned pretas** are a special kind of pretas who are not always wretched but experience both pleasure and pain due to their mixed karma. The preta's "mansion" (*vimāna*) is the kind of celestial dwelling or vehicle, often standing mid-air or capable of flying through the air.<sup>21</sup> If we reflect on the spirit of **the (Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (A 10.177), these pretas who enjoy great powers<sup>22</sup> (but are still pretas) were possibly religious practitioners (including Buddhists) who did much good, like giving alms and social work, but did not keep the Vinaya or precepts.<sup>23</sup>

**2.1.3.5 Hellbeings**, interestingly, are not detailed in this connection, except for the mention that they have very dishevelled long hair (AA 4:26,24 f), like many of the pretas (PvA 56). We are told that they are "different in body and different in perception" [§2]. In other words, like humans, the hellbeings perceive suffering each in their own way according to their bad karma.<sup>24</sup>

**The Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129) gives us an interesting insight into the nature of hellish suffering. First, the Buddha describes how when we habitually commit bad karma, we fear people will know about it—this causes us both bodily and mental suffering here and now (§2 f). Then, we actually see how the king tortures criminals (§4), and this, too, strikes fear in us, when we imagine being caught and punished in the same way (§§5, 8). But even worse than this are the sufferings of hell! (§§6 f, 9-17). We see here a hint of how the tortures by the authorities acting as a comparison of the nature and severity of hellish suffering.

The Buddha then declares: "Bhikshus, in many different ways indeed could I tell you about Niraya (hell), but, bhikshus, it is not easy to fully describe the extent of suffering in Niraya."<sup>25</sup> There is a broad hint that the suffering will arise in our own minds, even when we presume not to believe in hell, or think that such sufferings will not befall us. The fear that arises in us regarding hellish sufferings are *more real* than the stories that we read here!

The "hell-beings" in this category—"those freed of the suffering state" (*apāya,vinimuttā*) [2.1.3.1]—refer to each of us who, at different times, when our bad karma ripens, will feel the hellish sufferings in our own way. Even though we are not technically beings residing *in* hell, **hell** is always *with* us, within us, on account of our habitual breaking of the precepts and committing unwholesome karma.

<sup>16</sup> On the reconciliation between Sakra's devas and Vepa,citti's asuras, see SD 54.22 (4.7.2); **Na Dubbhiya S** (S 11.7) + SD 54.7 (2.5.2). On asuras, see SD 57.10 (3.2.6).

<sup>17</sup> *Uttara,mātā*: **Uttara,mātu Peti,vatthu** (Pv 2.10/39 f); PvA 140-150 (PvA:BM 149-157).

<sup>18</sup> *Piyaṅkara,mātā*; Be *piyaṅgara,mātā*. See **Piyaṅkara S** (S 10.6/1:209).

<sup>19</sup> *Phussa,mittā*: DA 2:509; PmA 79; Vism 382.

<sup>20</sup> *Dhamma,guttā*: DA 2:509; PmA 79; Vism 382.

<sup>21</sup> See Punnadhammo, *The Buddhist Cosmos*, 2018:310-314 (§3:3:5)

<sup>22</sup> Said to be "psychic powers born of karmic fruition (*kamma,vipāka,jā,iddhi*)" (PmA 3:31-35; Vism 12.39/382): SD 27.5a (6.7.2).

<sup>23</sup> A 10.177,10-26/5:271 f (SD 2.6a). On pretas, see SD 57.10 (3.2.5).

<sup>24</sup> On hell-beings, see SD 57.10 (3.2.3).

<sup>25</sup> M 129,1-17/3:163-167 (SD 2.22).

## 2.2 THE 2<sup>ND</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The Commentary explains the **2<sup>nd</sup> station of consciousness** as referring to the **1<sup>st</sup>-dhyana** beings, that is, the devas of the brahma host (*brahma, kāyika*). This realm comprises those of Mahā Brahmā (the great Brahma), Brahma’s ministers (*brahma, purohita*) and Brahma’s retinue (*brahma, pārisajja*). Their bodies are different in terms of pervasion (spatial extension), depending on their respective brahma-level, but their perception is the same since they all have the blissful perception of the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana. (AA 4:26,13-25)

The beings in the **4 suffering states**—the asuras, animals, the pretas and hellbeings—also belong to this category. Even among themselves, each being’s body is different from those of the others, but they all have the same (rebirth) perception, that of suffering. The Abhidhamma speaks of this as being “a rootless unwholesome resultant,” that is, a mental state lacking in non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion.<sup>26</sup> (AA 4:27,1-7)

## 2.3 THE 3<sup>RD</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The Commentary says that the **3<sup>rd</sup> station of consciousness** refers to the devas of streaming radiance (*devā ābhassarā*), which here represents all the 3 classes of devas of the **2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana**, that is:

the devas of limited radiance	<i>paritt’ābha</i>	2 aeons <sup>27</sup>
the devas of measureless radiance	<i>appamāṇ’ābha</i>	4 aeons
the devas of streaming radiance	<i>ābha-s, sara</i>	8 aeons

The bodies of these brahmas in each of the 3 realms, are identical in that they all have the same pervasion (*eka, vipphāro va*) of radiance, but their perception (even in the same realm) is different in that some are without thought but have pondering (*avitakka, vicāra, matta*), while others are with neither thought nor pondering (*avitakka, avicāra*). Their lifespans are the same in each realm, but different from those in the other 2 realms [above]. (AA 4:27,8-18)

## 2.4 THE 4<sup>TH</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

**2.4.1** The 4<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness, according to the Commentary, is that of the devas of radiant glory (*subha, kiṇhā*). They are identical in body (comprising of radiance), and also identical in perception because they all have the perception of the **4<sup>th</sup> dhyana** (that is, in the Abhidhamma scheme of 5 dhyanas).<sup>28</sup> (AA 4:27,19-28,2)

There seems to be a discrepancy in the lifespan of the Subha, kiṇha devas. **The (Catukka) Puggala Sutta** (A 4.123) says that it is 4 aeons, but the Abhidhamma and Commentaries apparently extended it to 64 aeons. Understandably, we should accept the sutta figure as the “right” one. It is possible that the commentarial idea of a celestial aeon is 16x longer. Such a relativity of time in the suttas and commentaries should be further studied to better understand this discrepancy.<sup>29</sup>

**2.4.2 The devas of abundant fruit** (*veha-p, phala*) (whose rebirth is categorized in terms of the 5<sup>th</sup> dhyana of the fivefold scheme) also come under the 4<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness (AA 4:28,2-18). On account of their very high level of meditative state, the Vehapphala brahma-realm escapes all the cycles of cosmic destruction, whether by fire,

<sup>26</sup> In ordinary language, this simply means that these beings are perpetually overwhelmed by greed, hate, delusion.

<sup>27</sup> An aeon (*kappa*) is the duration of a world-cycle. For the location of these brahma-realms, see SD 57.10 (app).

<sup>28</sup> On the Abhidhamma system of 5 dhyanas, see SD 46.6 (2.2).

<sup>29</sup> On the relativity of time in the Buddhist texts, see **Pāyāsi S** (D 23,11.1-4), SD 39.4. On Tāvātimsa time and earth time: **Pati, pujikāya Vatthu** (DhA 4.4), SD 54.15.

wind or water<sup>30</sup> (AA 4:28,3-5). In other words, even the worst destruction of the cosmic, the one by wind, stops just before Veha-p,phala.<sup>31</sup>

Veha-p,phala is, in fact, the first of the 4<sup>th</sup>-dhyana realms, just below the non-percipient beings (*asañña,sattā*) and the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*) of the non-returners. Traditionally, it is said that their common lifespan is said to be 500 aeons, like that of the non-percipient beings. Their long lifespan is partly due to their world being out of reach of any cosmic destruction.

The Veha-p,phala is not only a 4<sup>th</sup>-dhyana realm, but also characterized by the 4<sup>th</sup> divine abode, that of equanimity (*upekkhā*). Hence, their bliss is unlike any of the lower heavens: its bliss is profoundly peaceful, the most refined of celestial bliss, which is also characteristic of the formless world.

## 2.5 THE 5<sup>TH</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The 5<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness is that of the base of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*). This is the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 4 formless bases. In the 4<sup>th</sup> form dhyana, our mind completely settles in the absolute now: there is *no more perception of time* as we know it in the worldly sense. On the one hand, there is a sense of timelessness, but on the other, we have all the time in the world, as it were. Time is here undefined, empty and immeasurable—it is infinite (*ananta*).<sup>32</sup> Time is simply our perception of space; so, when time is seen as infinite, space, too, is experienced as infinite.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.6 THE 6<sup>TH</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The 6<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness is that of the base of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañc'āyatana*). This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 4 formless bases. In the 1<sup>st</sup> formless attainment, we perceive *space as infinite*. Here, as we continue doing this, that infinite space soon begins to lose its meaning. **Space** as we know it (as an external object or reality) disappears.

Then, from attending to an *external* object, as it were, we turn *inward* to a more refined object—our awareness of space itself—that is, to consciousness itself. Since there is no more external object, we go on to attend it as “**infinite consciousness**,” or simply as “consciousness” (Vbh 262), cultivating the sign again and again, so that it is an absolute one-pointedness of consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.7 THE 7<sup>TH</sup> STATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The 7<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness is that of the base of nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*), the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 4 formless bases. Within the preceding base of infinite consciousness, lies the base of nothingness. As we maintain a constant focus on *the infinite consciousness*, the consciousness begins to disappear. This leaves behind only the infinity, that is, of “nothingness” (*ākīñcañña*).

Only in letting go of the perception of infinite consciousness can we proceed to the next level: here again, we see the practice of true renunciation. Otherwise, we could remain stuck in that state: what is meant to free us then becomes a noose, holding us back. Dhyana, in short, is about **supreme letting go**—the highest and total renunciation—until there is *nothing* more to let go of. This is true renunciation.<sup>35</sup> Then we are ready for liberation.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> On the world and its cycle, see SD 57.10 (1.5), esp (1.5.3.4).

<sup>31</sup> *Veha-p,phalato heṭṭhā vātena viddhamāsatī* (VA 1:159,25; AA 3:134,135,1 f; ItA 2:135,28; CA 11,32 f; PmA 1:-367,29-31).

<sup>32</sup> See SD 24.15 (2.0).

<sup>33</sup> See *Ākāsānañc'āyatana Pañha S* (S 40.5), SD 24.15.

<sup>34</sup> See *Viññāṇañc'āyatana Pañha S* (S 40.6), SD 24.16.

<sup>35</sup> See *(Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha S* (A 9.42/4:449-451), SD 33.2.

<sup>36</sup> See *Ākīñcaññ'āyatana Pañha S* (S 40.7), SD 24.17.



## 2.8 THOSE EXCLUDED FROM THE 7 STATIONS

**2.8.0 The non-percipient devas** [2.8.1] and the devas of **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception** [2.8.2] are included among the 9 abodes of beings [A 9.24] but not among the stations of consciousness. Then, there are **the pure abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*) [2.8.3], which are a world in their own right, but are neither included in the 7 stations of consciousness nor the 8 abodes of beings. Let us briefly examine why all this is so, beginning with the last.

**2.8.1 The pure abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*) is neither one of the 7 stations of consciousness nor one of the 9 abodes of beings. One reason for this exclusion is that it does not exist outside of the Buddha-period. When there is no Buddha, there is no practitioner who attains non-returning. Since only non-returners dwell in the pure abodes, they only arise when the Buddha's teaching is available and practised so that there are non-returners. (AA 4:28,5-14)<sup>37</sup>

**2.8.2 The non-percipient beings** (*asañña,sattā*) do not have consciousness and thus are not included (AA 4:28,2-18). The non-percipient or non-conscious beings (*asañña,satta*) are those meditators who had cultivated dispassion towards "perception" or consciousness. According to **the Nava Satt'āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.24), they are "beings with neither perception nor feeling" (*sattā asañño appaṭisaṃvedino*).<sup>38</sup> They are located in the 4<sup>th</sup>-dhyana heavens just below the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*). Their life-span is 500 aeons or world-cycles (Vbh 1028/425).<sup>39</sup>

**2.8.3 The base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception** (*nev'asaññā,nāsaññ'āyatana*) is the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 4 formless bases, and the highest of the dhyanic realms. It is the highest that any meditator can ever attain; but the Buddha went beyond it by rejecting the notion of an abiding self, and attained awakening.

As our experience of "nothingness" (*ākiñcañña*) steadily deepens, we begin to understand that underlying it is a perception that goes beyond nothingness. If our mind is refined enough to see this, then the perception of nothingness disappears and is replaced by that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n'eva saññā nāsaññā*). The consciousness here is so refined that *it cannot be said whether there is perceiving or not*. In other words, our consciousness is at its most subtle.<sup>40</sup>

## 3 RELATED SUTTAS

It is unclear exactly what **the 7 stations of consciousness** originally meant. However, using the sutta's teachings and their commentaries, we can have a good working idea with our practice-based understanding of them. The following essay and suttas should be studied for a better sutta understanding of the 7 stations, especially in terms of our practice of the Dhamma for the attaining of the path in this life itself:

<i>Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti</i>	(Essay)	On the 7 stations of consciousness (overview)	SD 23.14
<b>(Khandha) Bīja Sutta</b>	S 22.54	On <u>the first 4 aggregates</u> as bases for consciousness	SD 8.3(9)
<b>Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti Sutta</b>	A 4.71	On <u>the 7 stations of consciousness</u>	SD 57.17
<b>Upāya Sutta</b>	S 22.53	Letting go of the 5 aggregates; freeing consciousness	SD 29.4
<b>Cetanā Sutta 1</b>	S 12.38	Karma still works without intention	SD 7.6a
<b>Cetanā Sutta 2</b>	S 12.39	Latent tendencies lead to rebirth	SD 7.6b
<b>Cetanā Sutta 3</b>	S 12.40	Our inclinations are conditioned by latent tendencies	SD 7.6c
<b>Atthi,rāga Sutta</b>	S 12.64	Craving as the basis for consciousness	SD 26.10
<b>(Khandha) Deva,daha Sutta</b>	S 22.2	How to teach the Dharma	SD 46.2

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<sup>37</sup> Further see SD 23.14 (3.2.5).

<sup>38</sup> A 9.24/4:401 (SD 67.2).

<sup>39</sup> See **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,68), SD 25.2; SD 23.14 (3.2.6); SD 23.14 (3.2.6); SD 53.23 (2.1.5).

<sup>40</sup> See **N'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.8), SD 24.18.

## (Sattaka) Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti Sutta

### The (Sevens) Discourse on the Stations of Consciousness

A 7.41

**1** “Bhikshus, there are these **7 stations of consciousness**.<sup>41</sup>

What are the seven?

**2** (1) There are, bhikshus, beings that are different in **body** and different in **perception**, such as humans, some devas, and some in the lower world.  
This is the 1<sup>st</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>42</sup> **[40]**

**3** (2) There are beings that are different in **body** but same in **perception**, such as the devas of Brahma’s host (*brahma, kāyika*) that are reborn through the 1<sup>st</sup> [dhyana].  
This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>43</sup>

**4** (3) There are beings that are same in **body** but different in **perception**, such as the Ābhassara devas (of streaming radiance).  
This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

**5** (4) There are beings that are same in **body** and same in **perception**, such as the Subha, kiṇṇha devas (of radiant glory).  
This is the 4<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

**6** (5) There are beings that, with the complete transcending of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, (perceiving) ‘Space is infinite,’ attain **the base of the infinity of space**.  
This is the 5<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

**7** (6) There are beings that, by completely transcending the base of the infinity of space, (perceiving) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ attain **the base of the infinity of consciousness**.  
This is the 6<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Viññāṇaṭṭhitiyo* [1.2].

<sup>42</sup> See (2.1).

<sup>43</sup> See (2.2).

<sup>44</sup> See (2.3).

<sup>45</sup> See (2.4)

<sup>46</sup> See (2.5).

<sup>47</sup> See (2.6).



8 (7) There are beings that, by completely transcending the base of the infinity of consciousness, (perceiving) 'There is nothing,' attain This is the 7<sup>th</sup> station of consciousness.<sup>48</sup>

**the base of nothingness.**

9 These, bhikshus, are the 7 stations of consciousness.”

*sattamaṃ*

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<sup>48</sup> See (2.7).