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## Mahā,nidāna Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Connections | D 15  
Theme: Dependent arising, language and non-self  
Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.0 SUTTA CONTENTS

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- §2 **Dependent arising** (10 links): The reverse cycle
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#### 1.1 SUTTA THEMES

The theme of the **Mahā,nidāna Sutta** is *paṭicca,samuppāda*, which has been translated as **dependent arising**. The reasons for this have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> There are many versions of the dependent arising model given in the Canon. Hence, it is useful for us to know their various applications.<sup>2</sup> The Mahā Nidāna Sutta's presentation of dependent arising is mainly concerned with the relationship between consciousness (*viññāna*) and name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*). This relationship is, indeed, the heart of dependent arising.

#### 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

The Mahā Nidāna Sutta<sup>3</sup> is the longest and most detailed Dharma discourse of the Buddha. It is also the most important sutta dealing with dependent arising. It is regarded as a central teaching in Buddhism.

Despite its length, however, the Mahānidāna Sutta does not give the most complete formal exposition of dependent arising. It lacks the abstract formula and a statement of the sequence of cessation. Moreover, its series of conditions omits three factors of the standard version: ignorance, volitional activities [*saṅkhāra*], and the 6 sense-bases. These omissions have led some scholars to suggest that the twelvefold formulation may be a later augmentation of a shorter original; but such suggestions remain purely conjectural, misleading, and objectionable on doctrinal and textual grounds. All in all, omissions of the Mahānidāna Sutta are more than compensated for by its detailed explanations, interesting digressions, and supplementary sections. Indeed, it might well be suspected, contrary to the thesis of historical development, that in the present sutta the Buddha has varied the usual exposition expressly to create an opportunity for such a special treatment.

(Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:6)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (1).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed study, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16. On the Buddha's usage of the 12-link *paṭicca,samuppāda* as a polemic against the Vedic cosmogony, see Jurewicz 2000 & **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1(5.4).

<sup>3</sup> The Saṃyutta has its own **Nidāna S** (S 12.60/2:93 f), but while the opening sections [1-4] of the Saṃyutta version is identical to the Majjhima version [1], the rest of it forms a separate sutta of its own, **Mahā Rukkha S** (S 12.55/2:87 f). The identical passages share the same long commentary. See S:B 768 m152 & Bodhi (tr) 1984:58-73.

<sup>4</sup> See Table 1 for a tabular comparison of the 2 versions.

### 1.3 STUDIES

The scholar-monk Bodhi has done a very learned and insightful translation of **the Mahā Nidāna Sutta** together with all the doctrinally important passages from its Commentary and Subcommentary.<sup>5</sup> His long and useful introductory essay discusses the Sutta's rich doctrinal and philosophical implications, and an appendix explains the treatment of dependent arising according to the Abhidhamma system of conditional relations (*paṭ-ṭhāna*).

## 2 Terminology

### 2.1 THE SUTTA TITLE

#### 2.1.1 *Nidāna*

**2.1.1.1** Although *nidāna* in the title seems to sound better in English as “causation” or “causality” (Bodhi translates the title as “The Great Discourse on Causation”), I have rendered the title here to reflect the more likely historical reality, that is, the Buddha's deliberately turning the Vedic term *nidāna* on its head to expound what is perhaps the leading discourse on dependent arising.<sup>6</sup> Vedic scholar, **Joanna Jurewicz**, in her paper, “Playing with fire: The *pratīyasamutpāda* from the perspective of Vedic thought” (2000), explains that the word *nidāna* appears in the cosmogonic context in the Ṛgveda:

“What was the prototype, what was the counterpart and what was the connection between them?” (*kuṣīt pramā kiṃ nidānaṃ*) [Ṛv 10.130.3]. In ŚB [Śata, patha Brahmaṇa] 11.1.63 *pratimā* is the cosmos identified with the fire altar, in ŚB 11.1.83 *pratimā* is sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> The *pramā* is Prajāpati, the Creator, the *nidāna*, the link between the Creator and the creation: their identity. Thus *pramā* and *pratimā* resolve themselves into *nidāna* which guarantees and expresses their identity.

*Nidāna*, denoting the ontological connection between different levels and forms of beings, also refers to the epistemology: [sic] it gives the explanation of this connection.<sup>8</sup> I presume that this is the first meaning of *nidāna* in the title of the Buddha's sermon. It is really “a great explanation”: there is no *ātman*, the *nidāna* of the cosmogony. The negation of the ontological *nidāna* constitutes the Buddha's *mahānidāna*.  
(Jurewicz 2000:100)

**2.1.1.2** Jurewicz goes on to explain what other Indologists and Buddhologists would fully agree on, that is, at the least, the Buddha teaches some of his discourses to educated people who were well versed in brahmanic thought, and were familiar with the concepts and the general idea of Vedic cosmogony. Jurewicz explains in detail how the terms of dependent arising have a definite meaning, evoking definite associations. Having explained dependent arising in this manner, the Buddha then brilliantly turns the table against the brahmins!

The act of cutting off the *ātman*—or rather given his fiery nature, the act of blowing him out—deprives all the hitherto well-defined concepts of their meaning and challenges the infallibility of all their associations, exposing the meaninglessness, absurdity even, of all the cosmogonic development they express ...

And since fire is the intrinsic character of the *ātman*, *nirvāṇa* can mean not only the liberating recognition of the *ātman*'s absence, but also the refutation of the whole of the Vedic metaphysics, which postulates that fire underlies, conditions, and manifests itself in the cosmogony.

(Jurewicz 2000:100)

<sup>5</sup> See Biblio.

<sup>6</sup> For an important study on this connection, see Joanna Jurewicz 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Smith 1989:73-75 [Jurewicz's n].

<sup>8</sup> Smith 1989:79 [Jurewicz's n].

**2.1.1.3** The word *nidāna* comes from the prefix *ni-* (“down”) + *dāna* (from *√DĀ* or *DI*, meaning “to bind”): hence, “to tie down,” meaning “(figuratively & literally) ground, foundation, occasion; source, origin, cause; reason, reference, subject” (PED). In early Buddhist usage, *nidāna* (as used in the Sutta title) is often found in a string of synonyms related to the idea of “cause,” such as those occurring 17 times here in the Mahānidāna Sutta itself:

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for decay and death, that is to say, birth”

*Tasmā'ti-h'ānanda es'eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo jarā, maraṇassa, yad idaṃ jāti.*  
(§§4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)

### 2.1.2 Mahā

Based on such information, Bodhi has rendered *nidāna* as “source,” reserving “cause” for *hetu*.<sup>9</sup> Bodhi also thinks that the prefix *mahā* was used by the Sutta compilers “far more probably ... to emphasize the sutta’s own intrinsic greatness” rather than that it is a “great discourse” (cf Jurewicz’s “great explanation” above) in contrast to a short one (of which there is none) (1984:v).

However, Bodhi titles it as “The Great Discourse on Causation.” If the greatness is placed upon its topic, then, surely it would be more appropriate to title it as “The Discourse on the Great Connections.” I have translated *nidāna* as “connections,” reflecting the Buddha’s awareness of its Vedic usage, and this same familiarity of his intended audience, as discussed by Jurewicz above.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.2 SAṆKHĀRĀ

Another difficult but important term connected with dependent arising is *saṅkhārā* (plural), often translated as “formations.” This term is derived from *saṃ* (= com-, “together”) + *karoti* (“he does, he makes”). The noun has both the active and passive senses: as such, *saṅkhārā* refers both to what we deliberately project and construct (that is, our ideas and views), and also to the things that are in themselves put together and conditioned (such as our body).

*Saṅkhārā* occurs in the Nikāyas in many major doctrinal contexts.<sup>11</sup> As the 2<sup>nd</sup> link of dependent arising, they are the karmically *active* volitions responsible, in conjunction with ignorance and craving, for producing rebirth and clinging on to the cycle of existence. The term is rendered as “**volitional formations**” to distinguish it from the *passive* “formations” mentioned in **the Kāma, bhū Sutta 2** (S 41.6).<sup>12</sup>

## 3 Variations in the dependent arising formula

### 3.1 CONSCIOUSNESS AND NAME-AND-FORM

**3.1.1** In the dependent arising formula, it is important to note the relationship between **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) and **name-and-form** (*nāma, rūpa*): *with consciousness as condition, there arises name-and-form*, which in turn is the condition for **the 6 sense-bases** (*saḷāyatana*). Peter Harvey presents this fascinating notion:

As I have argued elsewhere, ... the Pali Suttas (though not later Pali) includes [sic] indications that the early Buddhists regarded consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as able to “break free” of the network of interactions (Harvey 1989:61-68, 58). Indeed, the Suttas often see personality as a vortex of interaction not between *nāma* (including consciousness) and *rūpa*, but between consciousness and *nāma, rūpa* (D 2:32, 63 f; S 3:9-10) [4]. By turning away from all objects, seen as ephemeral and worthless, consciousness

<sup>9</sup> Bodhi 1984:v.

<sup>10</sup> On the prefixes *mahā* and *cūḷa* (or *culla*) in sutta names, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22, M 10) @ SD 13.1 (2).

<sup>11</sup> Further see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6 (5).

<sup>12</sup> S 41.6/4:293 (SD 48.7). On volitional formations, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6.

**Table 3**Collation of the standard and variations  
of the dependent arising formula

<b>Standard version</b> [S 12.1, SD 59.17; SD 5.16]	<b>Mahā Nidāna version</b> [D 15,3, SD 5.17]	<b>Secondary sequence</b> [D 15,9, SD 5.17; A 9.23, SD 58.12]
ignorance	—	feeling
↓		↓
volitional formations	—	craving
↓		↓
consciousness	<b>consciousness</b>	seeking
↓	↓    ↑    [§3]	↓
name-and-form	<b>name-and-form</b>	gain
↓	↓	↓
6 sense-bases	—	judgement
↓	↓	↓
contact	contact	desire and lust
↓	↓	↓
feeling	feeling	attachment
↓	↓	↓
craving	craving	possessiveness
↓	↓	↓
clinging	clinging	avarice
↓	↓	↓
existence	existence	safe-guarding
↓	↓	↓
birth	birth	various bad, unwholesome phenomena
↓	↓	
decay and death	decay and death	

Note: An arrow represents a relationship of conditionality from the condition to the dependently arisen phenomenon.  
[Source: Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:143]

could become objectless. “It” would then not be a limited, conditioned process, but the unconditioned: Nibbāna. Unlike the situation of cessation,<sup>13</sup> this would not be the complete absence of consciousness, but the timeless experience of a “consciousness,” which had transcended itself by dropping all objects.  
(Harvey, 1993:12 digital ed)

**3.1.2** Elsewhere, we find variations in the relationship between consciousness and name-and-form. In **the Mahānidāna Sutta** (D 15), for example, we see consciousness and name-and-form mutually conditioning one another [§§21-22], and also in **the Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14),<sup>14</sup> **the Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65)<sup>15</sup> and **the Nala,kalapiya Sutta** (S 12.67).<sup>16</sup> Name-and-form is the condition for contact (*phassa*). [§3]

<sup>13</sup> “Cessation, ie, cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā.vedayita,nirodha*): see **MahaVedalla S** (M 43,25/1:296) + SD 30.2 (4); **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,16-21/1:301 f) + SD 40a.9 (2.5); also DEB: *saññā,vedayita,nirodha*.

When name-and-form is correlated with the **5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*),<sup>17</sup> form is identified with the aggregates of physical form (*rūpa*), and name with the three aggregates of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) (Vism 17.187/644 f).<sup>18</sup> Consciousness (*viññāna*), although inseparably linked with the three mental aggregates, is not included here as it is the condition for name-and-form. As such, **the Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2) gives this definition of name-and-form:

And what, bhikshus, is **name-and-form**? Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention. This is called name. And the 4 great elements and the material form derived from the 4 great elements. This is called form. Thus, this is name and this is form—this is called name-and-form.

(S 12.2,12/2:3), SD 5.15

### 3.2 ORIGINS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Mahā Nidāna Sutta gives an important variant sequence of dependent arising. In the usual sequence, after giving contact as the condition for feeling, feeling as the condition for craving would follow.<sup>19</sup> Here, however, the Buddha introduces a variation [§§9-18]. From feeling as conditioning craving, he elaborates on the effects of craving, that is, giving a new series—a **secondary sequence**—of 9 factors, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor [Table 3].

As a result, this more down-to-earth sequence shows how “there are born various bad unwholesome states” [§9]. The purpose of this sequence is clear: it shows that dependent arising explains the origins of social problems just as effectively as it can be used to understand the arising of individual suffering.<sup>20</sup> Further, craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, it also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.<sup>21</sup>

## 4 Summary of dependent arising

**4.1** The Sutta’s teaching begins with a short catechism on dependent arising, pointing out the condition for each dependent factor in the series [§2]. The catechism shows the factors in *reverse order* from decay-and-death being dependent on birth back to consciousness being dependent on name-and-form. The Buddha then presents the entire sequence again in *forward order*, without the catechism, adding the regular refrain identifying the series as the arising of suffering [§3].

**4.2** A longer exposition follows with the Buddha returning to each proposition of the original sequence and elaborating on its meaning. His explanations serve 3 purposes:

<sup>14</sup> **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.18-19/2:92), SD 49.8; **Nagara S** (S 12.65/2:104), SD 14.2. These 2 Suttas contains the passage “This consciousness turns back (*paccudāvattati*) at *nāma,rūpa* [name-and-form or mind-and-body]; it goes no further” (D 14,2.19/2:32 = S 12.65,9/ 2:104). See Bucknell 1999:317 & S:B 777 n177.

<sup>15</sup> **Nagara S** (S 12.65/2:104), SD 14.2. See Bodhi’s useful notes: S:B 776 n176 & 777 n177.

<sup>16</sup> **Nala,kalapiya S** (S 12.67/2:112-115), SD 83.11.

<sup>17</sup> **The 5 aggregates**: for a general survey, see **(Upādāna) Parivattā S** (S 22.56), SD 3.7; for study of the individual aggregates, see SD 17. On the difference btw dependent-arising and the 5-aggregate models, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6 esp (5.3).

<sup>18</sup> On some technical difficulties regarding this term, see Bodhi 1984:18 n1; Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); Hamilton 1996a ch VI, esp 124-127.

<sup>19</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (4).

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> Comy labels the 2 sides of craving, viz, “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa,mūla,tanḥā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra,tanḥā*) (DA 2:500).

- (1) to explain the meaning of specific conditionality (*idap,paccayatā*);
- (2) to give a precise understanding of dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) by analyzing the conditioning factors into their constituents; and
- (3) to show how each link or condition (*nidāna*) supports the arising of a state dependent on it.

Although no formal definition of specific conditionality is given, the explanation of the connection between each pair of factors suffices to make the underlying principle clear. Specific conditionality is a relationship of indispensability and dependency: the indispensability of the condition (eg, birth) to the arisen state (eg, ageing and death), the dependency of the arisen state upon its condition.

(Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:10 f; see Vism 17.68/612)

**4.3** The Buddha’s commentary begins with the statement that **decay-and-death** (*jarā,maraṇa*) occurs with birth as its condition [§4], affirming the fact that suffering cannot be avoided. By merely being born, one is subject to decay and death. But there is a solution to this since suffering like everything else in the world is conditioned. Conception does not occur through biological causes alone but involves a dynamic stream of consciousness<sup>22</sup> arising in the new life.

#### 4.4 EXISTENCE AND CLINGING

##### 4.4.1 Existence

The condition for birth, in other words, is **existence** (*bhava*) [§5], of which there are three: the sense existence (*kāma,bhava*), form existence (*rūpa,bhava*) and formless existence (*arūpa,bhava*). Because rebirth into each realm occurs through a particular kind of karma, the word “existence” also refers to the *karma* conducive to rebirth in that realm. The two applications of “existence” are distinguished as karma-existence (*kamma,-bhava*) and rebirth-existence (*uppatti,bhava*).<sup>23</sup>

##### 4.4.2 Clinging

The specific condition for existence in both aspects (karma-existence and rebirth-existence) is **clinging** (*upādāna*), that is:

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| (1) clinging to sense-pleasures             | <i>kām’upādāna</i>        |
| (2) clinging to views                       | <i>diṭṭh’upādāna</i>      |
| (3) clinging to vows and rituals            | <i>sīla-b,bat’upādāna</i> |
| (4) clinging to a doctrine of the self [§6] | <i>atta,vād’upādāna</i>   |

The specific condition for clinging is **craving** (*taṇhā*), which, in this Sutta, is subdivided in two ways: first, by way of its immediate object, it is divided into *craving* for each of the sense-objects [§7]; second, by way of its projected aim, it is divided into craving for *sense-pleasures* (*kāma,taṇhā*), *craving for existence* (*bhava,taṇhā*) and *craving for non-existence* (*vibhava,taṇhā*) [§18].<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted here that “stream” is only imagery. The consciousness “flows on” like electrical impulses, without any permanent form or abiding entity.

<sup>23</sup> Bodhi: “The distinction is explicitly drawn, with full definitions, in **Vibhaṅga** [Vbh 137]. It does not seem to be stated as such in the suttas, but may have been based on such passages as the following: ‘If, Ānanda, there were no kamma ripening in the sense-sphere, would sense-sphere existence be discerned?’ — ‘Certainly not, bhante.’ [A 3.76/1:223]. **Paṭisambhidā,-magga** too treats existence, in the context of dependent arising, as identifiable with volition, thus as kamma [Pm 1:52].” (1984:14 n2, slightly edited)

<sup>24</sup> Craving for existence leads to a belief in the immortality of the soul (the eternalist doctrine); craving for existence to a theory of personal annihilation at death (the materialist doctrine); craving for sense-pleasures can give rise to either an

## 5 Perceptual contact and sense-contact

### 5.1 A RESPONSE TO BH BODHI'S VIEWS

#### 5.1.1 Conditions for experience

**5.1.1.1** Whether one is enjoying a present object (mostly physical experience) or planning to do so (a mental experience), craving has **feeling** (*vedanā*) as its condition [§19]. Feeling, in turn, has **contact** (*phassa*) as condition [§20]. Contact is the coming together of sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

**5.1.1.2** This section contains 2 terms—**naming impression** or conceptual impression or “labelling contact” (*adhivacana, samphassa*) and **sense-impression** (*paṭigha, samphassa*)<sup>26</sup>—that are peculiar to the Mahā Nidāna Sutta. The Commentary glosses “conceptual impression” with *mind-contact*, and “sense-impression” with *the 5 kinds of sense-contact*, without discussing their special meanings here. The Buddha states that conceptual impression is impossible in the physical body (*rūpa, kāya*) when the special qualities of the mental body (*nāma, kāya*) are absent [§20]. As such, contact, in this context, depends both on the mental body and the physical body. It is then obvious that these two bodies “are intended in a narrower sense, as two sides of the sentient organism, rather than in the broader sense as including the objective spheres.” (Bodhi 1984:19-22)<sup>27</sup>

**5.1.1.3** Experience works both ways: from the world inwards into our mind or from our mind outwards into the world. **Inward experience** occurs with the respective sense-consciousnesses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body) when the mind passively receives the respective sense-objects. These sense-experiences are processed as they arise—this is a “sense-door” cognitive process.

Outward experience occurs with mind-consciousness, resulting in perceptual, conceptual and volitional activity. The outward experience begins with **designation** (*adhivacana*) or naming, that organizes the raw data of experience into a coherent construct or picture of the world—this is a “mind-door” cognitive process.

#### 5.1.2 How we create our own experiences

**5.1.2.1** The mind’s internal picture comprises our own biases and cognitive schemes, whereby the mind weighs and shapes the external sense-data to fit its understanding, purposes and biases. Thus, nuances in feelings may make a person appear to be “friend” or “foe”; with a slight shift in perception, we consider a fruit as being “ripe” or “unripe”; a shift in volition leads us to designate a piece of plank as “future door” or “future table-top”; a shift in attention decides whether a distant object is “moving,” “stationary,” or “illusory.”

**5.1.2.2** When an object is designated thus, a union occurs between the designating consciousness and the designated object through the designation process. This union is called **naming impression**. This act occurs with a mental body, with or without an “external” physical body (that is, with only the respective physical sense-objects alone).<sup>28</sup> Here, “external” refers to the mind superimposing itself upon the experience.

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annihilationist view justifying indulgence here and now, or to an eternalist view promising a heaven of delight to those obedient to the religious injunctions. See Bodhi, 1984:15 f.

<sup>25</sup> See eg, **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.16/1:111) & SD 6.14 (4).

<sup>26</sup> Literally, “resistance contact” or “resistance impression.”

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller discussion, see **Saññā**, SD 17.4(2.2).

<sup>28</sup> A dream occurs without the direct involvement of the physical body, but with purely mental experiences, or memories of bodily experiences. We may dream that we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching someone or something.

### **5.1.3 Acting and reacting**

**5.1.3.1** Sense-perception begins with **impingement** (*paṭigha*), here used as a technical term referring to the “impact” or stimulus of an object upon a sense-faculty. The union of the consciousness with the impinging object is called **sense-impingement**. Technically, it belongs to the mental body, but it cannot occur in the mental body alone. We need the physical body to provide the “internal” (personal) bases for its arising or experience.

The two terms, impingement and designation, have a fundamental importance which ties them to dependent arising as a whole. They again indicate the basic oscillatory pattern of experience referred to earlier, its movement back and forth between the phases of reception and response. The receptive phase sees the maturation of the kammic inflow from the past; it is represented here by impingement issuing in sense consciousness. The responsive phase involves the formation of new kamma; it is represented by designation issuing in action. Each impinging object elicits from the mind an appropriate designation, and this sparks off an action considered the fitting response. Thus, the relationship between impingement and designation depicts in cognitive terms the same situation depicted in conative terms by feeling and craving: the regeneration of the round of existence through present activity building upon the kammic inheritance from the past.

(Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:21; emphases added)

**5.1.3.2** In significant ways, what we are now are shaped and influenced both by our past karma and present conditions. The present conditions include both the ambience and people in this life. The present conditions, for example, by way of our natural health, wholesome living conditions and good medical services keep our senses and mind in good order, so that we can live a full human life.

Furthermore, we all have the natural capacity for good, which may inspire and enhance peace and wisdom in the people we know or meet or those in touch with us. Through either past good karma or present right conditions, we are exposed to some kind of Dharma learning or training: this is likely to ripen more of our past good karma, and strengthen our present good. As a result, we are likelier to grow spiritually with better understanding how moral virtue supports wholesome mental training and living a moral life of mental cultivation.

When we read a beautiful sutta passage, for example, we notice the resultant joy and peace within us. We continue to read the suttas, keep the precepts and meditate. When we notice lapses in our spiritual life, we note and correct them, and the good, too, we note and enhance them. In this way, we keep strengthening our actions, speech and mind.

The benefit of such a Dharma-inspired life is that we are not disheartened by evil and failure; we are able to learn from them quickly enough. We have a sense of the impermanence of our personality and existence, which keeps us on an even keel as we face life’s vicissitudes. The overall effect of this upon us is that we keep seeing and embracing *the advantages of avoiding evil, the benefits of doing good, and the blessings of cultivating and purifying the mind*.

## **5.2 A RESPONSE TO N ROSS REAT’S VIEWS**

**5.2.1** Reat, in his insightful study, “Some fundamental concepts of Buddhist psychology” (1987:15-28),<sup>29</sup> comments on this passage [§20], saying that it identifies *nāma* and *rūpa* as 2 classes of objects of consciousness, *nāma* is perceptual (*adhivacana*); *rūpa* is sensory (*paṭigha*, “impact”). Reat observes that the *nāma, rūpa* of early Buddhism was a near-synonym to its counterpart in the pre-Buddhist Upanishads,<sup>30</sup> where it figures in an account of the manifestation of the universe. He concludes that

<sup>29</sup> See also Bucknell 1999:323 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.7; cf Reat 1987:18.

*adhivacana* (verbal) and *paṭigha* (sensual), as categories of *phassa*, are an alternative to the more commonly enumerated six kinds of *phassa*, and thus that *nāma-rūpa* is a dual categorization of the six types of objects of consciousness. (1987:18, 22)

In short, Reat is saying that *nāma,rūpa* refers to the two sense-categories: the *rūpa* category comprising physical sense-objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch), and the *nāma* category, comprising non-physical sense-objects (dharma, mind-objects).<sup>31</sup>

**5.2.2** “The textual basis for his [Reat’s] argument,” notes Bucknell, “is strengthened by the fact that the same account of the causal connection between *nāma-rūpa* and *phassa* appears in three of the four extant Chinese counterparts of the Pali Mahānidāna-sutta.” (1999:323 f).<sup>32</sup> Perhaps, concludes Bucknell, “the Buddha appropriated and adapted this important term precisely so that his teaching of Conditioned Arising would be recognized as a response to the doctrines of his opponents.” (1999:340).

### 5.3 A RESPONSE TO BH SUJATO’S ESSAY

#### 5.3.1 Name-and-form

This whole section, very insightful in itself—with an element of characteristic Buddhist humour—has been extracted from Sujato’s thought-provoking essay, “**The mystique of the Abhidhamma**” (nd),<sup>33</sup> and included here without comment:

**Name-and-form.** Let us continue the story of name-and-form in the specifically Buddhist context of dependent origination. There, name-and-form is shown to be dependent on cognition. This suggests that “name” is a term for certain mental functions exclusive of cognition, while “form” designates physical phenomena. There is a very interesting passage in the Mahā Nidāna Sutta which highlights the root meaning of “name.” I would therefore consider this to be an early conception of “name.” The passage is obscure even in Pali and nearly incomprehensible in a literal English translation, so I paraphrase.

“Name” and “form” are each shown to correlate with a particular kind of “contact.” Name correlates to “labelling contact,” while form correlates to “impact contact.” So let us have a look at this “contact.” In the normal analysis of contact, it is said to be the cooperation of three factors: the external sense object (eg, “image”), the internal sense organ (eg, “eye”), and the corresponding class of cognition (eg, “visual cognition”). In the case of the 5 physical senses, then, the “impact contact” would be the “impact” of the external sense object on the internal sense organ—light “hitting” the eye, or sound “hitting” the ear. In the case of mental cognition, we have the mental objects (*dhammas*), *mano* (usually rendered “mind”), and *mano*-cognition.

#### 5.3.2 Mano

What then is *mano*? It is not defined in this context in the suttas, so any explanation remains speculative. In simpler, non-specialized contexts, such as the three doors of action (body, speech, and mind), *mano* is more or less a synonym for “mind” (*citta*) or “cognition” (*viññāṇa*). But here, since *mano* is clearly distinguished from *mano*-cognition, it seems to carry a more specialized nuance. The Abhidhammikas invoke their notion of “mind-moment” here, opining that *mano* refers to certain kinds of mind-moments in the process of cognition,

<sup>31</sup> Like Reat, Tetsurō Watsuji (1971:228-231) & Shi Yinshun (1981:16 f, 20-22) too do not support the rendition of *nāma,rūpa* as “mind-and-body” or the like, but regard it as a collective term for the 6 types of sense-objects. Kōgen Mizuno (1969:142-144) & Ishii Yamada (1980:272) take the same understanding of *nāma,rūpa*. Reat’s reasoning (based only on the Pali texts), however, is criticized by Peter Harvey (1995:131 f) and Sue Hamilton (1995:126). See Bucknell 1999:324-326.

<sup>32</sup> See also Bucknell 1999:323 n 31.

<sup>33</sup> <http://santifm.org/santipada/2010/the-mystique-of-the-abhidhamma/>.

while *mano,viññāṇa* refers to certain others. Specifically, the *mano,dhātu* is defined as the “5-door adverting consciousness” and the “receiving consciousness” that accepts the 5-sense impingement; which is rather odd since the *mano,dhātu* is the support for *mano*-cognition, not 5-sense cognition.

Elsewhere, *mano* is sometimes identified with the *bhavaṅga*, the subliminal “life continuum consciousness,” which is interrupted by “adverting consciousness” to give rise to the process of active cognition. The suttas, however, clearly state that the mind (*mano*) must be intact, not cut off, for any mind-cognition to occur. In this case, we need to replace “give rise to” with reactivate. With such apparent difference in language and semantics, we see the context to understand Abhidhamma theories in the light of sutta teachings.<sup>34</sup>

### **5.3.3 Tinnarṃ saṅgati phasso**

**5.3.3.1** Furthermore, the suttas plainly shows that the “co-operation” (*sangati*, “coming together”) of *mano*, mental objects, and *mano*-cognition constitutes contact. How can separate mind-moments occur simultaneously? Since, in the Abhidhamma, the simultaneous occurrence of the 3 factors becomes stretched out into successive occurrences, it may seem only natural to further separate out contact, projecting onto it an existence of its own, rather than it being merely a function in the mental process.

**5.3.3.2** Thus, the Abhidhammikas alter the Sutta statement that “the 3 are contact” (*tinnarṃ saṅgati phasso*) into saying that the 3 give rise to contact (*tinnarṃ saṅgatiya phasso*). To sum up, then: the suttas say, “Dependent on *mano* and mental objects, *mano*-cognition arises. The co-operation of the 3 is contact.” The Abhidhamma explains: “Dependent on certain kinds of cognition and mental objects there arises sense-cognition or other kinds of mental cognition. *Due to* the co-operation of the 3 there is contact.” Surely, we can do a little better than this, complains Sujato.

The Abhidhammika, in other words, is wrong in attributing *causality* to the 3 factors of experience, when they are merely conditions for an experience to arise. If we speak of any “cause,” it would be ignorance or craving underlying the whole process, and not the experience itself. In simple terms, then, all the links work co-ordinately together, one link working with the previous and the next links, bringing about experience.

The Abhidhammikas are saying that these factors cause *an* experience. The suttas only say *these factors, when present, bring about an experience*, how we sense the world. There is a subtle working of characteristic of “nonself” here that we may need to take some time to figure out properly for ourself.

**5.3.3.3** The mind (*mano*) and mental objects here give rise to cognition, in the same way that name-and-form gives rise to cognition. And just as the physical sense-organs are physical constructs that enable or facilitate the act of physical cognition, so too *mano* would seem to be a mental “construct” that enables or facilitates the act of mental cognition. I would therefore suggest that this is similar, if not identical, with “name” itself. We might therefore render it in this context as “mentality.” The “mental objects” would most commonly consist of “thoughts,” etc, which are related to “name,” and also “mental images,” which are part of “form.”

### **5.3.4 Sense-impression & naming impression**

**5.3.4.1** But we digress. To return to the Sutta: we now have form giving rise to **sense-impression** or “impact contact,” consisting of the impact of external sense-objects on the sense-organs [§20(1)]. Then, name, appropriately enough, gives rise to **naming impression** (also “labelling contact” or “mental impression”), consisting of name-processing of sense data [§20(2)]. In simple terms, we may see both processes as the working of **perception** (*saññā*).

**Sense-impression** is the process of synchronous (same-time) perceiving sense-experiences, that is, how we engage with sense-data as they arise before us right now. **Naming impression** is when we perceive some sense-

<sup>34</sup> On the language of “conascent arising” (instead of the causal language of the Abhidhamma) see, eg, §20. On *citta*, *mano* and *viññāna*, see SD 20.2 (2).

based experienced *in the mind*. In other words, the mind conceives images of sight, sound, smell, taste or touch that are pleasurable and lust after them; or imagine unpleasant states and feel hatred towards them. This is an asynchronous perception; there is no actual sense-experience occurring; the mind is imagining it all in its own time.

**5.3.4.2** We can see that “sense impression” deals primarily with receiving data from “outside” (that is, from sense-objects), while “naming impression” deals primarily with processing inner, perceptual information. Thus, the earlier, mystical understanding of name-and-form receives a strictly rational, psychological treatment.

The components of name-and-form are clearly interdependent. If there were no name, there could be no labelling, that is, no perceptual processing of sensory experience. If there were no form, there would be no awareness of the world outside. Finally, in its closing half, the Mahā, nidāna Sutta passage proceeds by way of synthesis to show that both of these processes are essential aspects of “contact.”

**5.3.4.3** So far, I have treated this analysis in a general, psychological (mind-centered), manner. But the context, and elsewhere, too, suggest that it may be applied, albeit in a special way to the stages of infant development. Thus, we can see that, without sensory stimuli, the infant’s mind would not develop past an undifferentiated, “oceanic” Unconscious, remaining like a foetus in the womb. And without developing cognitive abilities, we will not be able to learn to assimilate and process sensory input in a meaningful and useful way.

### **5.3.5 Buddhist ontology**

**5.3.5.1** I have, however, omitted a very important aspect of this passage for understanding early Buddhist ontology. Normally, in dependent origination, existence is simply described in terms of the existence or being of the factor itself, as in the famous formula: “This being, that is ... this not being, that is not.”<sup>35</sup> But our present passage speaks, not of the existence of, say, “name,” but of the existence of “qualities, traits, signs and indicators” by which there is a concept of name [§20].

If these “qualities” or “properties” are absent, no “labelling contact” regarding “form” can be “found.” Conversely, if the “qualities” by which there is a “concept” of “form” are absent, no “impact contact” regarding “name” can be “found.”

**5.3.5.2** This demonstrates in a most emphatic and explicit way that the “qualities” by which phenomena are known are, for all Dhamma purposes, equivalent to the phenomena themselves, since they perform the identical function in dependent origination. We cannot distinguish between a thing’s properties and the thing itself, since the label we give a “thing” is just a concept denoting the exercise of certain functions. To say a thing “exists” is to say it is “found.” And the very workings of experience, the fundamental structure of information processing, is necessarily dependent on this cognitive apparatus.

**5.3.5.3** Without “labelling,” without the qualities or properties by which a thing is “cognized” (perceived or conceptualized) stimulus, and hence the entire perceptual process cannot work. Thus, this passage thoroughly demolishes any attempt to wedge a division between “ultimate reality” and “conventional reality.” Wisdom does not consist in going past convention to the ultimate substratum, but in understanding how conceptualizing is inherent in the cognitive process itself. Hence the Buddha said that the extent of concepts, language, and labelling is precisely the domain of wisdom; that is, birth, ageing and death, cognition together with name-and-form.

### **5.3.6 The 3 ways of speech**

Bodhi, however, reads this passage in just the opposite way. For him, the mention of the “properties” implies that they are conceptually distinct from the thing in and of itself. But he is surely just reading a later agenda

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<sup>35</sup> This is from the specific dependent arising (*idap, paccayatā*) formula: see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,19/1:167), SD 1.11); **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (6).

into an earlier teaching. He buttresses his position concerning the 3 “ways” of speech, designation, and language, mentioned below in our sutta. Claiming support from the Commentaries (although they are not consistent here, which is a suspicious sign), he says that “speech” refers to conceptual description, while the “way” of speech refers to the objective referent of speech, that is, the 5 aggregates.

Unfortunately, when the identical phrase occurs in **the Khandha Saṃyutta**, it refers to, not 5 but the 3 “ways” of speech—that is, *past tense, future tense, and present tense* (remembering that in Pali these tenses often mean past lives, future lives and the present life). Any statement must be phrased in terms of these modes, and must therefore factor time into the course of rebirths. This is especially so in a heavily inflected language like Pali, where the tenses are built into the verb forms; the statement would perhaps lose some of its punch when applied to, say, Chinese or other uninflected languages where tenses may be omitted.

### **5.3.7 Theory of the 2 truths**

**5.3.7.1** Understanding the difference between “ultimate” and “conventional” truth was upheld by later Buddhists as a sign of profound wisdom, a key to penetrating the inner mysteries of the Dhamma. But any specialized field of endeavour—from mechanics to mathematics, from fishing to physics—will develop a technical vocabulary of terms used in narrowly defined and sometimes eccentric ways—a jargon. Dhamma is no different. We just take our jargon a tad too seriously.

Tracing the arbitrary and inconsistent usage of this ontological apartheid in its chequered career through Buddhist history, we can discern only one constant factor—to exalt our teachings as “ultimate” and denigrate that of others’ as “conventional.”

Thus, the Abhidhamma is “ultimate” while the suttas are “conventional”; or the Mahāyāna sutras are “ultimate” while the Abhidhamma is “conventional,” and so on. It is a standard Abhidhamma rhetoric to claim that the entire Abhidhamma is phrased in terms of “ultimate truth.” But this is a transparent bluster. There are two whole books, and much material elsewhere in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, that straightforwardly talk of what even the Abhidhammikas would consider to be “conventional” truth.<sup>36</sup>

**5.3.7.2** Thus, **the Kathāvatthu** enlightens us with learned discussions on such crucial issues as, say, the smell of the Buddha’s excrement. However, we can see that every word in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, from “*kusala*” to “*paccayo*,” is nothing but convention. Probably, the composers of the Abhidhamma Pitaka would agree with us.

**5.3.7.3 The Puggala Pannatti** (“The Concept of the Person”) lists 6 concepts—the concepts of aggregates, sense media, elements, truths, faculties and persons. The Puggala Pannatti itself deals with the 6<sup>th</sup> kind of concept, and the rest of the Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with the remaining concepts.

**5.3.7.4** Thus, in harmony with the suttas and the rest of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, there is no attempt to sanctify the aggregates, etc., with a privileged ontological status above the “person.” The later Abhidhammikas, drawing on the subtle epistemology of the Sautrantikas, proposed that conventional truth is known through inference (*anvaya, anumana*), while ultimate truth is known through direct perception (*paccakkha*). Ultimate truth is then said to constitute the objects of *vipassanā*, while the objects of *samatha* are mere conventional truth.

**5.3.7.5 Samatha & vipassanā.** We have discussed elsewhere at length that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are not distinguished in the suttas by their objects, but by their characteristic emphasis on either peace or understanding. But I do not need to resort to the subtleties of dialectic to refute this theory. We need only glance at the way “direct knowledge” (*dhamme ñāṇam*) and “inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇam*) are treated in the Nidāna Saṃyutta to see that they are *both* aspects of *vipassanā*. Direct knowledge understands the present; inferential knowledge understands the past and future.

<sup>36</sup> See SD 7.14 (4) & SD 10.6 (3.3).

### **3.8 Name group & form group**

**5.3.8.1** In the Mahā Nidāna Sutta passage, name and form are also called the “name group” (*nāma-khandha*) and the “form group” (*rūpa,khandha*), implying that each consists of several factors.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere in the suttas, they are indeed defined, not synthetically as above, but analytically. “**Name**” is feeling, perception, attention, contact and volition. “**Form**” is the 4 great material elements and their “derived forms.”<sup>38</sup>

**5.3.8.2** One factor which is, however, associated with cognition (“knowing”) is “perception.” This is an associative aspect of sense-consciousness. “Perception” (*saññā*) relates to “cognition” (*viññāna*) by the senses, just as “connotation” relates to “denotation” by the mind-cognition. The suttas treat perception as a key aspect of cognition, which works with concept formation. In everyday usage, it can mean “contract” or “agreement.” In this sense, *perception* approaches the meaning of convention (*sammuti*). The two are etymologically parallel. Noteworthy by its absence from name is “thought” (*vitakka*), which is not an essential factor for consciousness. Elsewhere, the factors constituting “name” are said to precede thought. So, it seems that despite the terms “name” and “labelling,” name deals with very fundamental, *perceptual* or pre-linguistic proto-conceptual processes.

These are stages in our cognitive process from perceiving at the physical sense level to conceptualizing on the mental level. In simple terms, the senses “perceive” and the mind “conceives,” but not necessarily always in that order. We can, for example, imagine (conceive) something in the mind, and then actually *think* that we are seeing, or hearing, or feeling it. When both processes—perceiving and conceiving—are meant, or we are not certain which, we use the convenient, “**cognize**,” which thus means “perceive or conceive.” This term should, of course, be understood in its proper context, and may in special cases only mean perceive or merely conceive. In English, we often use the convenient word, “think” here. This is reflective of the language of the unawakened trying to describe our cognitive processes.

### **5.3.9 Abhidhamma conception of “name”**

By the time of the Abhidhamma (beginning around 300 BCE), “name” (*nāma*) has drifted even further from its basic meaning<sup>39</sup> [5.3.8.1]. Now, *name* becomes an umbrella term for all mental phenomena, including cognition, which, as we saw above, was specifically excluded in the suttas. This is justified by relying on a spurious connection with the verb “to bend” (*namati*), and asserting that cognition “bends” towards its objects—a highly athletic accomplishment for our agile mind-moment!

Thus “name-and-form” becomes translated as “mind and body,” the “ultimate reality,” and wisdom is the ability to mince these into very small bits. Which rather misses the point. A skilled surgeon is not one who can hack their patient into shreds, but one who can delicately remove just the diseased tissue. (Sujato, “The mystique of the Abhidharma,” 12-15, digital ed)

<sup>37</sup> On the nature of name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*), see SD 17.2a (12).

<sup>38</sup> On “derived forms” (*upādāya,rūpa*), see SD 17.2a (10).

<sup>39</sup> On how name-and-form works with consciousness, see the parable of the sheaves of reeds in **Naḷa,kalāpī S** (S 12.67/2-:114), SD 83.11.

## 6 The latent vortex

### 6.1 NAME-AND-FORM AND CONSCIOUSNESS

**6.1.1** The next two sections [§§21-22] are intimately interconnected, dealing with the interaction between **name-and-form** and **consciousness**.<sup>40</sup> In his *The Magic of the Mind*, **Ñāṇananda** calls this activity “the hidden vortex” (1971:25) and claims that this discovery of the Buddha is “[t]he most outstanding contribution made by the Law of Dependent Arising to the ethical, psychological and philosophical enquiries of all times” (id).

We call it **the latent vortex**: it reminds us of the latent tendencies that keep us going in samsara in a *passive* manner. This latent vortex is what we are caught in right now, in this very existence, that *actively* keeps us going in samsara.

**6.1.2** The Buddha first shows how **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), as the specific condition for **name-and-form** (*nāma,-rūpa*), is necessary to the latter in 4 ways: at conception, during gestation, when emerging from the womb and in the course of life [§21]. That consciousness is a condition for conception is also mentioned in **the Mahā Taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), that is, conception can only successfully occur when consciousness “has descended into the womb” (M 38.26/1:265 f). **Bodhi**, however, cautions us:

The description of consciousness as descending is metaphorical; it should not be taken literally as implying that consciousness is a self-identical entity which transmigrates from one life to another. The Buddha expressly repudiates the view that “it is the same consciousness that travels and traverses (the rounds of rebirths)” [M 38.5/1:258]. Consciousness occurs by way of process. It is not an ongoing subject but a series of transitory acts of cognition arising and passing away through conditions. Each act is particular and discrete—an occasion of eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, or mind-consciousness. Based on its sense faculty it performs its function of cognizing the object, then, gives way to the next act of consciousness, which arises in immediate succession.

(1984:22)

### 6.2 THE 6 SENSES AND CONTACTS

In the next section of the sutta, instead of going on to **the 6 senses** and their respective **contacts**, as in the standard formula, the Buddha reverses his last statement and says: “With name-and-form, there is consciousness” [§22.1]. To prevent any misunderstanding, the Buddha then introduces a remarkable passage unique to this Sutta [§22.2]:

It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born, and 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 samsaric round (of lives) turns for describing this (state of being), that is, when there exist name-and-form together with consciousness. [§22.2]

In other words, just as conception cannot occur without “the descent of consciousness” (for biological conception), so, too, consciousness cannot arise unless it “finds a footing” in name-and-form. In fact, consciousness requires name-and-form throughout life.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> **Naḷa,kalapiya S** (S 12.67) compares this intimate interconnection between *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).

<sup>41</sup> On this important topic, see Bodhi 1984:22-25.

## 7 The problem of language

### 7.1 PERCEPT, CONCEPT, LANGUAGE AND REALITY

**7.1.1** According to the Dīgha Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*), the terms “**designation**” or naming (*adhivacana*) [§20], “**language**” (*nirutti*) and “**description**” (*paññatti*) are near-synonyms generally referring to verbal statements expressing *meaning*. The “pathway” (*patha*) for designation, language and description, that is, the world of *reference* or the connecting of words and things,<sup>42</sup> is the same for all 3, namely, the 5 aggregates,<sup>43</sup> referred to here as “name-and-form together with consciousness”<sup>44</sup> (DA 2:504,4 f; DAṬ 2:140).

It’s helpful to understand that all the terms here (and other terms related to them) relate to our mind-body interactivity that are the 5 aggregates. All such terms refer to our conscious body and its activities; it’s a matter of where the focus of reference is. Each term, then, is simply an emphasis on an aspect of our conscious process that are all interconnected, that is, sense, object, contact, feeling, percept, concept, language, reality and so on.

**7.1.2** There is, as such, an interesting relationship between percepts, concepts, language and reality. In showing how this is relevant to our understanding of existence, Bodhi adds an instructive note:

To bring that relevance to light it is necessary to investigate briefly the nature of **reference**, the act which establishes connections between words and things. Designation, language and description are the tools of reference, enabling us to interpret and evaluate our experience privately to ourselves and to communicate our thoughts to others ... But reference involves more than simply the indicating of a referent. It is also **signification**, the ascribing of meaning to the referent. While the referent provides the locus for meaning, the meaning itself is contributed by the mind<sup>45</sup> making the reference.  
(1984:28; emphases added)

In summary, then, we should note these key terms:

<b>percept</b>	<i>saññā</i>	what is <u>sensed</u> by a physical sense: the seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, and cognized so by the mind.
<b>concept</b>	<i>(maññanā)</i>	what is <u>conceived</u> by the mind, whether as a result of what was sensed (perceived) or from the mind’s own imagining; <i>maññanā</i> also means “imagination.” The term <i>paññatti</i> is also used here [SD 60.1e (8.6)]
<b>language</b>	<i>nirutti</i>	a broad term for <u>language</u> , a mastery of which is one of the 4 “analytic skills” ( <i>paṭisambhidā</i> ). [SD 60.1c (9.8.2)]
<b>reality</b>	<i>tathata, yathā, bhūta</i>	this refers to “ <u>true reality</u> ”; a Pali word close to the sense of “ <u>virtual reality</u> ” is <i>vitathā</i> , which is also a synonym for <i>atathā</i> , “falsehood, a lie.”

Please note that (except for the term *nirutti*) we should not take the other terms and their Pali cognates as synonyms. They are at best “near-synonyms,” with overlapping senses. Since we are working with early Buddhism as

<sup>42</sup> An example in English is the relationship between the word *tree* and the object “tree” (referent) in the real world.

<sup>43</sup> The 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*): form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

<sup>44</sup> This identification is confirmed by **Nirutti, patha S** (S 22.62) which speaks of 3 “pathways for language, designation and description”: the 5 aggregates which have ceased are the pathway for the designation “was” (*ahosi*), those aggregates which have not yet arisen are the pathway for the designation “will be” (*bhavissati*), and those that have presently arisen are the pathway for the designation “is” (*atthi*) (S 22.62/3:71-73), SD 68.1. As the 5 aggregates encompass all that we are, they include both internal and external sense-bases (the sense-faculties and their respective sense-objects).

<sup>45</sup> See **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44): “Having first thought and pondered, one then breaks out into speech.” (M 44,15/1:301), SD 40a.9.

a **living religion**, that is, a path to be cultivated—not a dead religion of ancient India of the scholars—there is no question about whether such a “category” exists in the suttas. By understanding what the suttas and related teachings are saying, we better understand the realities (real and virtual) that confront us today, and thus know better how to deal with them as part of our personal training and spiritual evolution.

## 7.2 LANGUAGE AND THE UNWHOLESOME ROOTS

This process of language and cognition is further complicated by the infiltration of greed, hate and delusion, causing one’s attention to waver and veer about unsteadily. In such a case, the mental body can hardly be expected to mirror the world according to reality through precise ideas and words. Even when the meanings given to words conform to the popular conventions governing their use, this is no guarantee against aberrant references; “for often these conventions stem from and reinforce unrecognized common error, the ‘collective hallucinations’ of the world” (Bodhi, 1984:29).

Of all the tools of reference a person may use, those of greatest importance to himself are the ones that enable him to establish and confirm his sense of his own identity. These are the designations “mine,” “I am,” and “myself.” In the Buddha’s teaching such ideas and all related notions, in the way they are ordinarily entertained, are regarded as conceptual outcroppings of the ego-consciousness. They are fabrications of the mind (*mathita*), subjective conceivings (*maññita*), conceptual proliferations (*papañcita*),<sup>46</sup> grounded in ignorance, craving, and clinging ... Through the designation “mine” he establishes a territory over which he claims control, through the designation “I am” and “myself”<sup>47</sup> he establishes an identity upon which he builds his conceits and views. (Bodhi, 1984:29)

## 7.3 WORDS AND THE SELF

### 7.3.1 W S Waldron makes a similar insightful remark:

And what is our most important source of human categorization and classification, whose distinctions have no spatial location either inside or outside of our brains, and is, furthermore, one of the most salient features of our physical and mental structures? Language. It appears that we embody not only the results of what we have thought, felt and done, but, in addition, of what we have heard and said. We are, in short, the word become flesh. (Waldron 2002:147; fn omitted)

**7.3.2** In the ultimate analysis, the referents are simply the 5 aggregates themselves, which when carefully examined will reveal nothing of an abiding self. However, even though there is no abiding “self,” words like “I,” “me” and “mine” are useful as tools of communication. The Buddha and his saints use ideas and words freely like everyone else, but when used by the Buddha and the saints those ideas and words do not betray latent tendencies of craving, conceit and wrong views, but simply a recognition of their referential function:

These, Citta, are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world. And a tathāgata [thus come] uses them, but indeed, he does not misapprehend them.

(D 9,53/1:202)<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> W S Waldron speaks of *papañca* as “language’s endless recursivity” (2002:152).

<sup>47</sup> See SD 19.1-3.

<sup>48</sup> Further see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11.

## 8 Direct experience

### 8.1 CONSTRUCTION AND REALITY

An important purpose of the Mahā Nidāna Sutta is to enable us to discriminate between 2 kinds of phenomena: the actual phenomena pertaining to the “pathways for designation, language and description” and the mental constructs derivative upon them.<sup>49</sup> Reality is signified by those “qualities, traits, signs and indicators by which there is a description of the mental body” [§20], which are experienced immediately as objects of direct cognition. Hence, cognition constructs their reality as things existing independently from conceptualization.

The mental constructs, on the other hand, do not reveal their own distinctive “qualities, traits, signs and indicators.” Our mental process, in short, comprises 2 streams: one responsible for the mental constructions and the other the “pathways” providing the raw materials and the objective basis to which the completed constructs are ascribed. How well we notice and understand this defines the kind of reality we construct for ourself. As a rule, these constructs are the virtual realities of our self-created world. With some training, we learn to see through them to notice true reality.

### 8.2 THE 2 LEVELS OF TALK

**8.2.1** In the long insightful introduction to his Mahā Nidāna Sutta translation, **Bodhi** goes on to discuss the significance of these sutta passages [§§21-22] regarding description, especially in terms of religious philosophy and language. He speaks of two levels of religious talk: veridical description and deviant description (that is, truthful discourse and false discourse). **Veridical description** or truthful discourse is

description [that is] true from the special standpoint of insight-contemplation, [that] not only represents actuality correctly, but represents it solely in terms of what is discovered in contemplation—its constituent phenomena, their qualities, and their relations. Examples would be such statements as: “The earth element has the characteristic of hardness, consciousness that of cognizing an object,” etc; “All material form is impermanent,” etc...  
(Bodhi 1984:33)

**8.2.2 Deviant description** or false discourse either posits mental constructs as actual existents (eg, a Creator God, the universal soul, the personal soul, etc) or else ascribes to the actual phenomena attributes they only appear to possess due to cognitive distortion. From the Dharma level, the most important of these are the appearance of beauty (*subha*), permanence (*nicca*), pleasure (*sukha*) and self (*attā*). The relevance of this distinction becomes clear when we come to the section of description of the self [§23].

**8.2.3** The “**pathways**” (*patha*) for designation, language and description not only make possible the vortical interaction between consciousness and name-and-form, but also make possible “**a sphere for wisdom**” (*paññāvacara*) [§22.2]. The sphere for wisdom is the pathways themselves: the 5 aggregates in process of dependent arising. When the aggregates are examined with mindfulness and clear comprehension—thus, “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self”—they are transformed into the basis for the growth of wisdom, as stated in **the Rāhula Sutta 1** (S 22.91):

When one knows and sees thus, Rāhula, then, in regard to this body with its consciousness and in regard to all external signs, the latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit no longer occur (within oneself).  
(S 22.91,9/3:136), SD 19.2a

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<sup>49</sup> In later scholastic terminology, as in Yogācāra philosophy, a contrast is made between *pariṣpanna,dharmā* (P *parinipphannā dhammā*), ie, ultimate truth, and *parikalpita,dharmā* (P *parikkappitā dhammā*), the “imagined” reality.

## 9 Seeking the self

### 9.1 DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SELF

**9.1.1** In the next section [§23] of the Sutta, the Buddha appears to digress to a new and unrelated topic—that of **the different descriptions of the self** (*atta,paññatti*) proposed by speculative thinkers—but the Dīgha Commentary explains that this new section connects to the Buddha’s original statement that “this generation has become like a tangled skein” [§1.3]. The purpose of the ensuing passages is to clarify this statement by identifying the tangles and showing how they have occurred. In other words, the Buddha takes a new angle of approach in discussing the causal process of existence (*vaṭṭa,kathā*).<sup>50</sup>

**9.1.2** The Dīgha Commentary explains that these self-views can arise either from meditative experiences or from mere reasoning. In terms of meditation, says the Commentary, these wrong views arise from the misinterpretation of the kasina sign (the inwardly visualized image of the external meditation object). If the sign itself is apprehended as the self, it is conceived as *material*; if the area covered by the sign or the mental factors covering it are apprehended, then, the self will be conceived as *immaterial*; if the sign is unextended (that is, confined to a small area), the self is conceived as *limited*; if the sign is extended as far as visualization will allow, the self will be conceived as *infinite*. (DA 2:504,14-28). These are the 4 basic views of the self arising from meditation.

### 9.2 IGNORANCE AND VIEWS

**9.2.1** “This generation has become like a tangled skein” because it fails to understand and realize dependent arising. That is to say, they are kept bound to the rounds of existence due to their own lack of insight into the conditions that keep them bound. The root of these conditions is **ignorance**, the absence of true knowledge, the knowledge of the 4 noble truths. Since nature abhors a vacuum, when this true knowledge is absent, its place is filled with false knowledge or views (*ditṭhi*). These views are the mental tangles, knots and matting that prevent one from going beyond the cycle of existence.

**9.2.2** According to **Bodhi**, “Of all the tools of reference a person may use, those of greatest importance to himself are the ones that enable him to establish and confirm his sense of his own identity” (1984: 29) [§7]. Similarly, of all the views one may hold, the ones clung to with the greatest tenacity are one’s views of the self, which define for one that identity. One’s intellect (or lack of it) then creates for oneself a conceptualized view of the self. “Therefore, in order to dislodge ignorance and craving, a preliminary step often becomes necessary: to take away their protective shield of views.” (Bodhi 1984: 36).

### 9.3 DESTINIES OF THE SELF

**9.3.1** The next section [§24] talks about **the present and future destinies of the self**. Temporal speculations, however, admit three possibilities (in terms of the past, the present and the future), which in principle can be combined with any of the 4 basic views [9.1.1]. However, in actuality, notes Bodhi,

there is a tendency for certain of the basic views to combine with one of the temporal views more readily than the other. Thus, a description of the self as limited and material will tend to the annihilationist mode, a description of the self as infinite and immaterial will tend to the eternalist mode.

(Bodhi, 1984:38 n1)

**9.3.2** A short passage on the “**non-description of the self**” [§§25-26] states that, unlike the speculative theorists, the Buddha’s disciples, on the basis of their spiritual attainments or practice, refrain from describing the self.

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<sup>50</sup> See Bodhi 1984:106-108, 27-34.

The Commentary notes: “They know that the counterpart-sign<sup>51</sup> of the *kaṣiṇa* is only a counterpart sign, and that the formless aggregates<sup>52</sup> are only formless aggregates.” (DA 2:505). That is to say, they only describe the describable, namely, as dependently arisen phenomena that are all impermanent, suffering and non-self.

#### 9.4 SELF-CONSIDERATIONS

**9.4.1** Next [§27] the Buddha explains how a **consideration of the self** (*atta,samanupassanā*) can lead to 20 forms of the self-identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*). He selects one aggregate, that of feeling, and shows how in 4 alternative ways it can become a basis for conceiving self: one who recognizes a self either considers feeling as self, or the self as altogether without feeling, or the self as being distinct from feeling but is of the nature to feel (or, subject to feeling).

**9.4.2** The view that **feeling is self** is then examined [§§28-29]. The 3 kinds of feeling—pleasant, painful and neutral—are found to be distinct and mutually exclusive, experienced only one at a time. Feeling, in other words (like any of the other aggregates) is a succession of distinct states lacking an enduring entity essential to self-hood.

**9.4.3** The Buddha then rejects the view of a completely insentient self on the ground that such a self could not even conceive the idea “I am” [§30]. In the third view, the Buddha shows how an attempt is made by theoretical thinkers to avoid the faults of the first 2 positions by making the self as having the nature to feel [§31]. Perhaps the closest historical parallel to this view is the Sāṅkhya philosophy with its dualism of *puruṣa*, the self as the changeless witness of nature, and *prakṛti*, nature itself, the ever-changing psychophysical field.

### 10 The 8 liberations (*attha vimokkha*)

#### 10.1 THE 2 KINDS OF ARHATS

**10.1.1** Having abandoned all these speculative views, one becomes an arhat; the saint is then described in a general way [§§32-36]. Then, the Buddha introduces a division of the spiritually freed into 2 kinds: “the one freed by wisdom” (*paññā,vimutta*) and “the one freed both ways” (*ubhato,bhāga,vimutta*).<sup>53</sup> Both win arhathood through wisdom, and their wisdom is the same, as stated in **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58).<sup>54</sup>

The distinguishing mark between them, then, is the “bodily suffusion” of the immaterial liberations—the four immaterial [formless] attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling. The *ubhato-bhāgavimutta* arahat has this experience, the *paññāvimutta* lacks it.

(Bodhi 1984:47 f; see 48 n1)

<sup>51</sup> The “counterpart-sign” (*paṭibhāga,nimitta*) is a clear, stable and effortless mental image of the meditation object that is attended by a profound bliss or powerful rapture.

<sup>52</sup> That is, feeling, perceptions, formations, and consciousness.

<sup>53</sup> On the 4 types of arhats, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8(2.1). **Richard Gombrich**, in ch 4 of his book *How Buddhism Began* (1996:96-134), discusses how he thinks *ceto,vimutti* and *paññā,vimutti* came to mean different things in the early development of Buddhist doctrine. This development was closely connected with the later scholastic view that one could gain awakening without meditation, which some scholars like Gombrich think the Buddha did not envisage (1996:96). See also Brekke 2002:67.

<sup>54</sup> S 22.58.3:65 f (SD 49.10).

**Formless realm** (*arūpāvacara*)

<i>Base only</i> <sup>55</sup>	Base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception	<i>n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana</i>
7 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Base of nothingness	<i>ākīñcaññāyatana</i>
6 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Base of infinite consciousness	<i>viññāṇaṅc’āyatana</i>
5 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Base of infinite space	<i>ākāsānaṅc’āyatana</i>

**Form realm** (*rūpāvacara*)

[ <i>Not stations</i> ]:	The pure abodes	<i>suddh’āvāsa</i> <sup>56</sup>
<i>Base only</i> <sup>57</sup>	Base of non-perceiving beings	<i>asañña,sattā</i>
4 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings same in body, same in perception (ekatta,kayā ekatta,saññino)</i>	Gods of abundant fruit Gods of radiant glory Gods of boundless glory	<i>vehapphala subha,kiṇha appamāṇa,subha</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings same in body, different in perception (ekatta,kayā nānatta,saññino)</i>	Gods of limited glory Gods of streaming radiance Gods of boundless radiance Gods of limited radiance	<i>paritta,subha ābhassara appamāṇ’ābha paritta,subha</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings different in body, same in perception (nānatta,kayā ekatta,saññino)</i>	Great Brahmā Gods of Brahmā’s Ministers Gods of Brahmā’s Host	<i>mahā brahmā brahmā,purohitā brahmā,parisajjā</i>

**Sense realm** (*kāmāvacara*)

1 <sup>st</sup> station for consciousness: <sup>58</sup> <i>beings different in body, different in perception (nānatta,kayā nānatta,saññino)</i>	Gods who lord over others’ creations Gods who delight in creating The contented gods The Yāma gods The gods of the 33 The gods of the 4 Great Kings Human beings Some beings in the lower realms	<i>para,nimmita,vasavattī nimmāṇa,ratī tusita yāma tāvatiṃsa cātum,mahārājika manussa,loka āpaya,bhūmi</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings different in body, same in perception (nānatta,kayā ekatta,saññino)</i>	The host of asuras [titans] The realm of the departed [ghosts] The animal kingdom The hells	<i>asura,kāya pitti,visaya tiracchāna,yoni niraya</i>

**Table 10. The 7 stations for consciousness and the 2 bases**<sup>59</sup> [§34]

<sup>55</sup> This is called a “sphere” (*avacara*), not a “station” (*ṭhiti*), because the consciousness is extremely subtle here so that it cannot be said to exist or not exist.

<sup>56</sup> **The pure abodes** (*suddh’āvāsa*), the 5 highest of the form worlds (*rūpa,loka*), are not listed as “stations for consciousness.” They are inhabited only by non-returners who will reach their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. Hence, it is not a rebirth-sphere, but a “resting place” for non-returners living their last life. These abodes are Aviha (“non-declining”), Atappa (“unworried”), Sudassā (“clearly beautiful”), Sudassī (“clear-visioned”) and Akañiṭṭhā (“peerless”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46; cf D 3:253; A 4:39). See **Viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhiti**, SD 23.14.

<sup>57</sup> According to **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1) and **Pāṭika S** (D 24), this is not a “station for consciousness” because *no* consciousness is found in the beings there. All cognitive activities are suspended here. As soon consciousness arises in a being there, he vanishes from that world. (D 1,2.31/1:28, 24,2.20/3:33), SD 63.3.

<sup>58</sup> The first 6 are the sense-sphere deva-realms, the lowest of the celestial realms.

<sup>59</sup> See **Viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhiti**, SD 23.14, & **Group karma?** SD 39.1 (1.4).

**10.1.2 The wisdom-freed arhat** is described in terms of his understanding of the different realms of existence. This allusion to the realms gives the Buddha the occasion to present a psychocosmic map.<sup>60</sup> Having explained the conditions for rebirth, the Buddha goes on to show how the realms (abodes of beings) are divided into **the 7 stations for consciousness** (*viññāna-ṭṭhitiyā*) and the 2 bases (*āyatana*)<sup>61</sup> [Table 10]. The 8 liberations [10.2], on the other hand, are deep meditations that are capable of freeing us from these 7 stations of consciousness.

**10.1.3 The arhat freed both ways** or “dual-freed” arhat, on the other hand, is described by way of his mastery over the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*) [§35]. These liberations include the 9 successive attainments reached by the power of concentration: the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*ārūpa samāpatti*),<sup>62</sup> and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha = nirodha,samāpatti*).<sup>63</sup>

## 10.2 THE 8 LIBERATIONS DEFINED

The 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*) are 8 grades or levels of mental liberation based on spiritual cultivation of profound states, that is, the form dhyanas and the formless attainments. They are described in discourses like **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15) [§35] and **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16).<sup>64</sup>

The first 3 of the 8 liberations are *kaṣiṇa* meditations,<sup>65</sup> which are explained in some detail in **the Mahā Sakul’udāyi Sutta** (M 77,23), but a more detailed exposition is found in **the Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm 2:38-40). **The 8 liberations**, shown in Table 10, can be explained as follows:

(1) **The 1<sup>st</sup> liberation** is that of one with physical form who sees physical forms (*rūpī rūpāni passati*) internally. The Majjhima Commentary explains that the meditator does the preliminary exercise (*parikamma*) on an internal form (in our own body), for example, the dark (*nīla*) of the eyes for a blue *kaṣiṇa*, the skin for a yellow *kaṣiṇa*, the blood for a red *kaṣiṇa*, the teeth for a white *kaṣiṇa*, but the concentration sign (*nimitta*) arises externally (MA 3:258 f). The “transcending” (*abhibhāyatana*) of the forms is the attainment of dhyana together with the arising of the sign. On emerging from the dhyana, he considers, “I know, I see.”

(2) **The 2<sup>nd</sup> liberation** is that of one who does not see physical forms internally, but sees physical forms externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpa,saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*). Here, the preliminary *kaṣiṇa* exercise is done on an external form (a *kaṣiṇa* object) and on the arising concentration-sign. The formulation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *vimokkha* “suggests that it is a shorthand for all the eight abhibhāyatanas which consist of variations on the theme *ajjhataṃ arūpa-saññī eko bahiddhā rūpāni passati*” (Gethin 2002:267 n7).

(3) **The 3<sup>rd</sup> liberation** is that of one freed after contemplating the idea of the beautiful (*subhan’t’eva adhi-mutto hoti*). This is said in reference to the attainment of form dhyana (*rūpa jhāna*) by means of concentrating the mind on perfectly pure and bright colours as the *kaṣiṇa*-object. **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** says that this men-

<sup>60</sup> “Psychocosmic” means “mental universe,” esp in ref to the early Buddhist idea of the higher existential realms being attainable through meditation even while we live.

<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere these are called “the 9 abodes of beings” (*nava,satt’āvāsa*) (D 33,3.2(3)/3:263 + 2.2(3)/3:288; A 9.24/4:401). Here *āyatana* is rendered as “sphere,” referring to a realm or level of meditation; where it refers to the senses, it is tr as “base.” *Avacara* (*ava*, “down, out” + *cara*, “wandering”) is tr as “realm,” but “sphere” is often used here, too. See SD 17.8a (5.2) & (11.2).

<sup>62</sup> Or, *arūpa,samāpatti*. These terms are commentarial.

<sup>63</sup> Further, on the *paññā,vimutta* and the *ubhato,bhāga,vimutta* arhats, see SD 49.10 (1.1.3).

<sup>64</sup> D 16,3.33 (SD 9).

<sup>65</sup> The *kaṣiṇa* is a physical meditation device (a colour, a primary element or light) that provides support for visualization exercise until one acquires the mental image (*nimitta*). For example, a disc made of clay is used in earth *kaṣiṇa* meditation, a bowl of water in water *kaṣiṇa* meditation. On the 10 kasinas, see **Mahā Sakuludāyi S** (M 77,24/2:14 f); SD 49.5b (1). For details, see Vism chs 4-5 (where, however, the space *kaṣiṇa* is restricted to limited space, and the consciousness *kaṣiṇa* is replaced by the light *kaṣiṇa*). See SD 15.1 (9.2).

tal state is also produced through the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), as a result of which all beings appear perfectly pure and glorious, and thus the mind turns to the beautiful (Pm 5.20/2:39).

These first 3 are said in connection with *kaṣiṇa* meditation by way of the “bases of mastery” or “bases for transcendence” (*abhibhāyatana*), that is, one of the 8 stages of mastery over the senses through *dhyana* (*jhāna*).<sup>66</sup> The following 4 (4-7) are the formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*):

(4) **The 4<sup>th</sup> liberation.** Through the utter transcending of the perception of physical form, the passing away of the perception of impingement [*paṭigha*, sense-contact], and non-attention to the perception of diversity, contemplating, “Space is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the base of infinite space. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> liberation.

(5) **The 5<sup>th</sup> liberation.** Through the utter transcending of infinite space, contemplating, “Consciousness is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the base of infinite consciousness. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> liberation.

(6) **The 6<sup>th</sup> liberation.** Through the utter transcending of the base of infinite consciousness, contemplating, “There is nothing,” one enters and dwells in the base of nothingness. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> liberation.

(7) **The 7<sup>th</sup> liberation.** Through the utter transcending of the base of nothingness, one enters and dwells in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> liberation.

(8) **The 8<sup>th</sup> liberation.** Through the utter transcending of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This last stage requires both concentration and insight, and can be attained only by non-returners and arhats who have mastered the formless attainments. This is the 8<sup>th</sup> liberation.

The Commentary on **the Mahā Sakuludāyi Sutta** (M 77,22/2:13) says that these liberations (*vimokkhā*) are the mind’s full (but temporary) release from the opposing states and its full (but temporary) release by delighting in the object (*ārammaṇa*) (MA 3:255, cf 255-259).<sup>67</sup>

## 11 “Positive” dependent arising

In the Mahā Nidāna Sutta, conditionality is depicted in negative mode, that is, showing the impossibility of a dependent state arising without its condition. On the other hand, conditionality is presented positively — showing how a condition flows into the dependent state—in suttas such as:

<b>Āhāra Sutta</b>	S 12.11/2:11 f	SD 76.1	The 4 kinds of food
<b>Upanisā Sutta</b>	S 12.23/2:29-32	SD 6.12	Mundane and supramundane dependent arising
<b>Paccaya Sutta</b>	S 12.27/2:42 f	SD 39.12	Specific conditionality and ignorance as root
<b>Sammasa Sutta</b>	S 12.66/2:107-112	SD 14.4	How the Buddha awakened
<b>Upayanti Sutta</b>	S 12.69/2:118 f	SD 83.17	How suffering is conditioned

It is said that the nun Khemā had listened to the Mahā Nidāna Sutta in the time of Kassapa Buddha (Ap 34/-2:546), and on hearing it again, expounded by our Buddha, she recalled the event and became an arhat (Ap 72/-2:549).

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<sup>66</sup> **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.24/2:110); **Mahā Sakuludāyi S** (M 77.22/2:13); **Abhibhāyatana S** (A 8.65/ 4:305), **Kosala S** (A 10.29/5:61). **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī** apparently regard the *abhibhāyatana* as being “concerned with the mastery and facility in certain aspects of *jhāna* practice” (Gethin, 2001:267). See Dhs 45-52 where the 8 *abhibhāyatana* (with slight variations from the Nikāya formulation) are treated as an aspect of *jhāna* that is of the form realm (*rūpāvacara*); cf DhsA 187-190. See BDict: abhibhāyatana.

<sup>67</sup> For further details, see SD 49.5b (3).

# Mahā,nidāna Sutta

## The Discourse on the Great Connections

D 15

**[55]**

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying among the Kurus.<sup>68</sup> There was a market-town of the Kurus called Kammāsa,damma.<sup>69</sup>

### Ānanda's declaration

1.2 Then, the venerable **Ānanda** approached the Blessed One. Having approached and saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side.

Seated thus at one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

“It is wonderful, bhante; it is marvellous, bhante, **how deep this dependent arising is**, how deep it appears to be.<sup>70</sup> Yet it is as clear as can be to me!”

1.3 “Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda!

**Dependent arising appears deep; it is deep.**

Ānanda, because of not understanding, because of not penetrating this truth, this generation has become like a tangled skein,<sup>71</sup> like a knotted ball of thread,

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<sup>68</sup> Comy to **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15) says: “It is said that the Blessed One was unable to find any dwelling-place at (ie, near) the market-town. So leaving the market-town, the Blessed One went into the great forest, where he found a certain suitable and pleasant spot with water, and there he dwelt, making the market-town his alms-resort” (*Bhagavato kira tasmim nigame vasan’okāso koci vihāro nāma nāhosī. Nigamato pana apakkamma aññatarasmim udaka,sampanne ramanīye bhūmi,bhāge mahā,vana,soṇḍo ahoṣi tattha bhagavā vihāsi, taṃ nigamaṃ gocara,gāmaṃ katvā*) (DA 2:483). See Intro (1.2) & (12).

<sup>69</sup> This odd sentence is syntactically a “naming parenthesis,” and is identical to that in **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22) and **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), where see n ad loc. As such, it is very likely that this sutta was taught at the same venue around the same time. DA explains that there was no place in town for the Buddha to stay, so he stayed outside, in the jungle. The same setting opens **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15,1/2:55). Kammāsa,damma, Kammāsa,dhamma, or Kammasa~: Comy here says: “It is said that the Blessed One was unable to find any dwelling-place at (ie, near) the market-town. So leaving the market-town, the Blessed One went into the great forest, where he found a certain suitable and pleasant spot with water, and there he dwelt, making the market-town his alms-resort” (*Bhagavato kira tasmim nigame vasan’okāso koci vihāro nāma nāhosī. Nigamato pana apakkamma aññatarasmim udaka,sampanne ramanīye bhūmi,bhāge mahā,vana,soṇḍo ahoṣi tattha bhagavā vihāsi, taṃ nigamaṃ gocara,gāmaṃ katvā*) (DA 2:483).

**The Kuru kingdom** was located in the plain of Kurukṣetra between the Yamunā and the Ganges, where its capitals of Hastina,pura (Pali *Hatthina,pura*) (NE of Meerut) and Indra,prastha (Pali *Inda,patta*) (near Delhi) played important roles during the Epic period. According to Buddhaghosa the people of Kammāsa,damma had a good diet and great wisdom; hence, out of compliment, the Buddha taught them profound suttas: (Mahā) Satipaṭṭhāna S (D 22; M 10), Mahā Nidāna S (D 15) and **Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106/2:261 ff) (SA 2:87). The **(Cūḷa) Nidāna S** (S 12.60/2:92), **Sammaṣa S** (S 12.66/2:107 f) and **Ariya,vasā S** (A 18.20/5:29 f) were also delivered at Kammāsa,damma.

<sup>70</sup> Bodhi: “We might perhaps understand the first phrase [“The dependent arising is deep’] to refer to dependent arising as an objective principle, the second [“appears deep’] to the verbal exposition of that principle. Together they indicate that dependent origination is deep both in essence and in manifestation.” (1984:7). Comy explains that dependent arising is “deep” in 4 respects: (1) depth of meaning (ie, from the effect looking back to its condition); (2) depth of phenomena (ie, from the condition looking to its effect); (3) depth of teaching (diversity of methods use by the Buddha to teach it); (4) depth of penetration (it makes one realize the true nature of existence). (DA 2:485 f; see also 1984:7-9).

<sup>71</sup> “Tangled skein” (*tantā,kulaka,jātā*). “Skein” is a quantity of thread or yarn, wound to a certain length on a reel; broadly, any coil(s) of worsted yarn; a “hank,” a coil of rope, wool or yarn.

like matted muñja-grass<sup>72</sup> and reeds<sup>73</sup>—

it does not cross beyond the cyclic life<sup>74</sup> with its plane of misery, its bad destination, its lower realms.

## I. THE CYCLES OF DEPENDENT ARISING [4]

### Reverse cycle

2 (1) Ānanda,

if one were asked, 'Is **decay-and-death** due to a specific condition?<sup>75</sup> One should say, 'They are.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *decay and death*?' one should say,

'With **birth** as condition, there is decay and death.'

(2) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **birth** due to a specific condition?' [56] one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *birth*?' one should say,

'With **existence** as condition, there is birth.'

(3) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **existence** due to a specific condition?' one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *existence*?' one should say,

'With **clinging** as condition, there is existence.'

(4) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **clinging** due to a specific condition?' one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *clinging*?' one should say,

'With **craving** as condition, there is clinging.'

(5) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **craving** due to a specific condition?' one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *craving*?' one should say,

'With **feeling** as condition, there is craving.'

(6) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **feeling** due to a specific condition?' one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *feeling*?' one should say,

'With **contact** as condition, there is feeling.'

(7) Ānanda, if one were asked, 'Is **contact** due to a specific condition?' one should say, 'It is.'

If one were asked, 'With what as condition, is there *contact*?' one should say,

'With **name-and-form**<sup>76</sup> as condition, there is contact.'

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<sup>72</sup> *Muñjā*, a kind of grass reed, *Saccharum munja* Roxb (Sn 440). Cf *muñja,kesa*, "having dark flowing mane (like *muñjā* grass)," D 2:174). It is sometimes made into slippers (*muñja,pādukā*) (DhA 3:451). The *muñjā* reed itself (as opposed to the sheath) is called *isikā*, but this is found only in similes (D 1:77 = M 2:17; cf J 6:67; DA 1:222). SED (Monier Williams), under *ikṣukāṇḍa*, says that *muñja* is a kind of sugar cane. According to the University of Melbourne (Australia)'s "Multilingual Multiscript Plant Name Database," *muñjā* is the Bengal cane, see <http://rimmo.mur.csu.edu.au/Plantnames/Sorting/Saccharum.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Prec + this lines: *evam ayam pajā tantā,kulaka,jātā kula,gaṇṭhika,jātā muñja,pabbaja,bhūtā*. See prec nn.

<sup>74</sup> "Cyclic life," *samsāra*, lit "perpetual wandering," ie, round/s of rebirth. This is the unbroken chain of the aggregates (*khandha*) that are inherently painful due to their impermanence.

<sup>75</sup> *Atthi idap,paccaya jarā,marañan ti*, lit "Is there specific condition in decay and death?" "Specific condition," (*idap,paccayā*), that is, the proximate cause and effect. See Bodhi 1984:10-13.

<sup>76</sup> While this sutta defines the terms for the other links, it does not define *nāma,rūpa*, but goes on to discuss the causal connection between *nāma,rūpa* and *phassa* (omitting *sa'āyatana*) [§§19-22]. Reat (1987) gives an insightful study of *nāma,rūpa*. See also Bucknell 1999:322 ff.

(8) Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is **name-and-form** due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’  
If one were asked, ‘With what as condition, is there *name-and-form*?’ one should say,  
‘With **consciousness** as condition, there is name-and-form.’<sup>77</sup>

(9) Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is **consciousness** due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’  
If one were asked, ‘With what as condition, is there *consciousness*?’ one should say,  
‘With **name-and-form** as condition, there is consciousness.’

### Forward cycle

3 Thus, Ānanda,

(1) with <u>name-and-form</u>	as condition, there is	consciousness;
(2) with <u>consciousness</u>	as condition, there is	name-and-form; <sup>78</sup>
(3) with <u>name-and-form</u>	as condition, there is	contact;
(4) with <u>contact</u>	as condition, there is	feeling;
(5) with <u>feeling</u>	as condition, there is	craving;
(6) with <u>craving</u>	as condition, there is	clinging;
(7) with <u>clinging</u>	as condition, there is	existence;
(8) with <u>existence</u>	as condition, there is	birth;
(9) with <u>birth</u>	as condition, there arise	decay and death, sorrow, [57] lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

### Birth conditions decay-and-death

4 (1) It is said thus: ‘**With birth as condition, there is decay and death.**’

4.2 Ānanda, how birth conditions *decay-and-death* should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were **no birth** at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere<sup>79</sup>—that is to say,

of <u>devas</u> into	the deva state,
of <u>gandharvas</u> <sup>80</sup> into	the gandharva state,
of <u>yakshas</u> <sup>81</sup> into	the yaksha state,
of <u>non-humans</u> into	the non-human state, <sup>82</sup>
of <u>humans</u> into	the human state,
of <u>quadrupeds</u> into	the quadruped state,
of <u>the winged</u> <sup>83</sup> into	the winged state,
of <u>reptiles</u> <sup>84</sup> into	the reptile state,

<sup>77</sup> This link and the next form a *loop*. They are both defined at §§21+22a.

<sup>78</sup> On the relationship of this line and the preceding, see Intro (3).

<sup>79</sup> *Nābhavissa sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam kassaci kimhici*, alt tr, “If all ... of all kinds whatsoever everywhere were not to be.” *Sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam*, lit “the all with all, the all every way,” which occurs 15 times altogether in this Sutta: §§4-19 (D 15/2:57,6+21+31, 58,11+22, 59,11+25, 60,1+12+22+33, 61,8+17+26, 62,4). On the significance of *sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam*, see **Potaliya S** (M 54,14+25) + SD 43.8 (2.2).

<sup>80</sup> “Gandharvas,” *gandhabba*, in **Mahā Taṇha,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,26), SD 7.10, refers to the “being-to-be-born” or rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi,citta*). Although here, *gandhabba* can refer to class of divine beings, it is more likely that is the intermediate state (*antarā,bhava*). This is a state between rebirths when the being is none of the 5 (deva, human, animal, preta, or hell-being) or 6 (the 5 classes + asura) classes of beings. For discussion, see Harvey 1995:105-108. See “**Is rebirth immediate?**” in SD 2003:2.16.

<sup>81</sup> On yaksha, see SD 21.3 (4.2.5); SD 51.11 (3.1.1.2).

<sup>82</sup> “Non-humans,” *bhūtā*, usu tr as “spirits, demons,” but here I follow Comy and give a broader sense of the term.

<sup>83</sup> “The winged,” *pakkhīna*, here encompasses not only birds, but any animals with wings, such as bats.

each into their own state—

if there were *no birth* whatsoever—

then, Ānanda, in the complete absence of birth, with the cessation of birth, would **decay-and-death** occur?”<sup>85</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for *decay and death*, that is to say, **birth**.”<sup>86</sup>

### Existence conditions birth

5 (2) “It is said thus: ‘**With existence as condition, there is birth.**’

Ānanda, how existence conditions *birth* should be known in this manner:

5.2 If, Ānanda, there were no existence at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere—that is to say, the sense existence, the form existence, the formless existence—

if there were no *existence* whatsoever—

then, in the complete absence of existence, with the cessation of existence, would there be *birth*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

5.3 “Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for *birth*, that is to say, **existence**.”

### Clinging conditions existence

6 (3) “It is said thus: ‘**With clinging as condition, there is existence.**’

Ānanda, how clinging conditions *existence* should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no clinging at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, [58] anywhere—that is to say, *no clinging to* sense-pleasure,

*no clinging to* views,

*no clinging to* rituals and vows,

*no clinging to* the self-doctrine.<sup>87</sup>

if there were no *clinging* whatsoever—

then, in the complete absence of clinging, with the cessation of clinging—would there be *existence*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for *existence*, that is to say, **clinging**.”

<sup>84</sup> “Reptiles,” *sirimsapa* (Skt *sarīsrpa*), lit “crawling, creeping,” ie, snake, reptile (V 1:3, 2:110; D 2:57; M 1:19; S 1:154; A 2:73, 117, 143, 5:15; Sn 52, 964; J 1:93; Pv 3.5,2; Nm 484; VbhA 6).\*

<sup>85</sup> “Would there be decay and death?” *jarā, maraṇaṃ paññāyethā*, lit “would decay-and-death be manifested?”

<sup>86</sup> *Tasmā’ti-h’ānanda es’eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo jarā, maraṇassa, yad idaṃ jāti*. The phrase “this itself is the reason [cause], this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition” (*es’eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo*) occurs 17 times (§§4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22): see Intro (2.1).

<sup>87</sup> The 4 clingings (*upādāna*): to sense-pleasure (*kāmūpādāna*), to views (*diṭṭhūpādāna*), to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, batūpādāna*), and to the self-doctrine (*atta, vādūpādāna*): see **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,34/1:50 f), SD 11.14. On clinging to sense-pleasures, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (2). On clinging to views, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5). On clinging to vows and rituals, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.3). On clinging to self-doctrine, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5.2): self-view. *Attānuvāda*. Cf D 2:58, 3:230; M 1:66; S 2:3; Dhs 212. Regarding *atta, vād’upādāna* (clinging to a self-view), Comy says that those who hold such a view, talk about or cling to the “self” (MA 1:219). On *atta, vāda*, see **Sallekha S** (M 8/1:40).

## Craving conditions clinging

**7** (4) “It is said thus: ‘**With craving as condition, there is clinging.**’

Ānanda, how craving conditions clinging should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no craving at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere—that is to say,  
*no craving for visible forms,*  
*no craving for sounds,*  
*no craving for smells,*  
*no craving for tastes,*  
*no craving for touches,*  
*no craving for thoughts [mind-objects];*

if there were no craving whatsoever—

then, in the complete absence of craving, with the cessation of craving—would there be clinging?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for clinging, that is to say, **craving**.”

## Feeling conditions craving

**8** (5) “It is said thus: ‘**With feeling as condition, there is craving.**’

Ānanda, how feeling conditions craving should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no feeling at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere —that is to say,  
*no feeling born of eye-contact,*  
*no feeling born of ear-contact,*  
*no feeling born of nose-contact,*  
*no feeling born of tongue-contact,*  
*no feeling born of body-contact,*  
*no feeling born of mind-contact;*

if there were no feeling whatsoever—

then, in the complete absence of feeling, with the cessation of feeling—would there be craving?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for craving, that is to say, **feeling**.”

## Dependent arising of social problems: The 10 roots

**9** Thus, Ānanda,<sup>88</sup>

- |                                   |                        |   |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| (1) dependent upon <u>feeling</u> | ( <i>vedanā</i> ),     | there is <b>craving</b> ;                 |
| (2) dependent upon <u>craving</u> | ( <i>taṇhā</i> ),      | there is <b>seeking</b> ;                 |
| (3) dependent upon <u>seeking</u> | ( <i>pariyesanā</i> ), | there is <b>gain</b> ;                    |
| (4) dependent upon <u>gain</u>    | ( <i>lābha</i> ),      | there is <b>judgement</b> ; <sup>89</sup> |

<sup>88</sup> **The 9 states rooted in craving**—these decad without the 1<sup>st</sup> link, feeling—as *the dependent arising of social disorder*, forms a short sutta of its own, **Taṇhā,mūlaka S** (A 9.23/4:400 f), SD 59.12; the teaching 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 “obsessional 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).

<sup>89</sup> “Judgement,” *vinicchaya*, “decision, deliberation, examination, investigation, judgement.”

- (5) dependent upon judgement (*vinicchaya*), there is **desire and lust**;<sup>90</sup>  
 (6) dependent upon desire and lust (*chanda,rāga*), there is **attachment**;  
 (7) dependent upon attachment (*ajjhosāna*), there is **possessiveness**;  
 (8) dependent upon possessiveness (*pariggaha*), there is **avarice**; [59]  
 (9) dependent upon avarice (*macchariya*), there is **safe-guarding**;  
 (10) dependent upon safe-guarding (*ārakkha*), there arise the taking up of the rod, taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], false speech, numerous bad unwholesome things.<sup>91</sup>

**10** (1) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon safe-guarding, there arise *the taking up of the rod, the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes, strife, slander, false speech, numerous bad unwholesome states.***’

Ānanda, how safe-guarding conditions *the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes, false speech, numerous bad unwholesome states* should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no safe-guarding at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere,<sup>92</sup> then, in the complete absence of safe-guarding, with the cessation of safe-guarding,

would there be *the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes, strife, slander, false speech, numerous bad unwholesome states?*”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes, strife, slander, false speech, numerous bad unwholesome states, that is to say, safe-guarding.*

**11** (2) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon avarice, there is safe-guarding.**’

Ānanda, how avarice conditions safe-guarding should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no avarice at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere, then, in the complete absence of avarice, with the cessation of avarice,

would there be safe-guarding?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for safe-guarding, that is to say, avarice.*

**12** (3) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon possessiveness, there is avarice.**’

Ānanda, how possessiveness conditions avarice should be known in this manner: [60]

If, Ānanda, there were no possessiveness at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere, then, in the complete absence of possessiveness, with the cessation of possessiveness,

would there be avarice?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for avarice, that is to say, possessiveness.*

**13** (4) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon attachment, there is possessiveness.**’

Ānanda, how attachment conditions possessiveness should be known in this manner:

<sup>90</sup> “Desire and lust,” *chanda,rāga*, here treated as dvandva: “desire and passion” (D:RD ad loc). Comy says that here, *chanda* is said to be “weak desire” (*dubbala,rāga*) while *rāga* is “strong lust” (*balava,rāga*) (DA 2:499,30 f; AA 4:190,1-3). Elsewhere treated as karmadharaya: “lustful desire” (D:W ad loc). Cf the term in **Taṇha,mūlaka S** (A 9.23,2 (5)), SD 59.12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ārakkhā’dhikaraṇaṃ daṇḍ’ādāna,satth’ādāna,kalaha,viggaha,vivāda,tuvaṃtuva,pesuñña,musāvādā aneke pāpakā akusalā dhammā sambhavanti.* As in **Taṇha,mūlaka S** (A 9.23,2 (9)), SD 59.12.

<sup>92</sup> *Sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam:* see §4.2 n.

If, Ānanda, there were no attachment at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere , then, in the complete absence of *attachment*, with the cessation of *attachment*, would there be *possessiveness*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for possessiveness, that is to say, attachment.*

**14** (5) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon desire and lust, there is attachment.**’

Ānanda, how desire and lust condition attachment should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were neither desire nor lust at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere , then, in the complete absence of *desire and lust*, with the cessation of *desire and lust*, would there be *attachment*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for attachment, that is to say, desire and lust.*

**15** (6) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon judgement, there is desire and lust.**’

Ānanda, how judgement conditions desire and lust should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no judgement at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere , then, in the complete absence of *judgement*, with the cessation of *judgement*, would there be *desire and lust*?” [61]

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for desire and lust, that is to say, judgement.*

**16** (7) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon gain, there is judgement.**’

Ānanda, how gain conditions judgement should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no gain at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere , then, in the complete absence of *gain*, with the cessation of *gain*, would there be *judgement*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for judgement, that is to say, gain.*

**17** (8) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon seeking, there is gain.**’

Ānanda, how seeking conditions gain should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no seeking at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere , then, in the complete absence of seeking, with the cessation of *seeking*, would there be *gain*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for gain, that is to say, seeking.*

**18** (9) It is said: ‘**Dependent upon craving, there is seeking.**’

Ānanda, how craving conditions *seeking* should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no craving at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere — that is, no craving for sense-pleasure, craving for existence or craving for non-existence— then, in the complete absence of *craving*, with the cessation of *craving*, would there be *seeking*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for seeking, that is to say, **craving**. Thus, Ānanda, these 2 states [dharmas],<sup>93</sup> being a duality, converge into a unity in feeling. [62]

## Feeling

**19** (10) It is said: ‘**With contact as condition, there is feeling.**’

Ānanda, how contact conditions feeling should be known in this manner:

If, Ānanda, there were no contact at all, of any kind whatsoever, in anyone, anywhere<sup>94</sup>—

that is to say, there were no eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact or mind-contact—

then, in the complete absence of *contact*, with the cessation of *contact*, would there be *feeling*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for feeling, that is to say, **contact**.

## Contact [7]

**20** It is said: ‘**With name-and-form as condition, there is contact.**’ [§3]

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

(1) Ānanda, these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators*<sup>95</sup> by which there is a description [definition] (*paññatī*) of the mental body [mind-group]<sup>96</sup>—

if these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators*<sup>97</sup> by which there is a description of the mental body

<sup>93</sup> Comy: These 2 dharmas (or phenomena) (*ime dve dhammā*) are the two aspects of craving, that is, craving as the root of the rounds of rebirths (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and craving as obsession (*samudācāra, taṇhā*), ie, obsessive craving (DA 2:500). In the Chinese texts, only one **Dirgh’āgama** reading (T60c.13) mentions the 3 forms of *taṇhā*, but both **Dirgh’āgama** and **Madhyam’āgama** list “these 2 dharmas” as *kāma, taṇhā* and *bhava, taṇhā* (T243a19-20 = T579b22 = T845a8-9). Bucknell concludes, “It is likely, therefore, that [the Dīgha version] formerly listed just the two kinds, despite Buddhaghosa’s suggestion that the phrase refers to a different 2 kinds of *taṇhā* [DA 500].” (1999:317 n21).

<sup>94</sup> *Sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam*: see §4.2 n ad loc.

<sup>95</sup> *Yehi ākārehi yehi lingehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi*. Comy: The mutually dissimilar nature of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, are called “qualities” (*ākāra*). They are also called “traits” (*liṅga*) because, when carefully examined, they betray the hidden meanings (of their base) (*līnam-attha*). They are also called “signs” (*nimitta*) because they are the causes of perceiving (*sañjānana, hetuto*); and they are also called “indicators” (*uddesa*) because they are to be indicated (“pointed out”) (*uddisitabbo*) [through these, the meaning is signalled or inferred]. (DA 2:500 f; DAṬ within square brackets). For further explanation, see SD 18.3(1.1).

<sup>96</sup> *Nāma, kāya*, the “mind-group” comprises the 4 formless groups of existence (*arūpino khandhā*): feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). It is distinguished from *rūpa, kāya*, the body-group, comprising form (*rūpa*), ie, the 4 elements (*dhātu, mahā, bhūta*) [see SD 17.1 & 2]. We have here the 1<sup>st</sup> canonical occurrence of this term and also at **Pm 1:183** (where it is def as “feeling, perception, intention, contact, attention and naming are the mental body, and also what are called mind-formations, *vedanā saññā cetanā phasso manasikāro nāmañ ca, nāma, kāyo ca, ye ca vuccanti citta, saṅkhārā*) but *nāma, kāya* is mentioned by itself at **Sn 1074**. The twofold grouping (*nāma, kāya* and *rūpa, kāya*) is common in Comys. In **Dhamma, saṅgāṇī**, all phenomena are classified as 3 groups: consciousness (*citta*) (*khandha* 5), mental factors (*cetasika*) (*khandhā* 2-4) and form (*rūpa = khandha* 1).

<sup>97</sup> *Yehi ākārehi yehi lingehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi*. Comy: The mutually dissimilar nature of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, are called “qualities” (*ākāra*). They are also called “traits” (*liṅga*) because, when carefully examined, they betray the hidden meanings (of their base) (*līnam-attha*). They are also called “signs” (*nimitta*) because they are the causes of perceiving (*sañjānana, hetuto*); and they are also called “indicators” (*uddesa*) because they are to be

were all not there—

then, would **naming impression** [conceptualizing]<sup>98</sup> manifest in **the physical body** [form-group]?<sup>99</sup>  
“Certainly not, bhante.”

(2) “If, Ānanda, these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of **the physical body** [form-group]—

if these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of the physical body  
were all not there—

then, would **sense-impression** [sensing]<sup>100</sup> manifest in the mental body?<sup>101</sup>  
“Certainly not, bhante.”

(3) “If, Ānanda, these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of the mental body and the physical body [the mind-group and the form-group]—

these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of  
the mental body and the physical body [the mind-group and the form-group]  
were all not there—

then, would **naming-impression** or **sense-impression** manifest itself?  
“Certainly not, bhante.”

(4) “If, Ānanda, these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of the name-and-form—

these *qualities, traits, signs and indicators* by which there is a description of the name-and-form  
were all not there—

then, would there be **contact**?  
“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for contact, that is to say, name-and-form.*”

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indicated (“pointed out”) (*uddisitabbo*) [through these, the meaning is signalled or inferred]. (DA 2:500 f; DAṬ within square brackets). For further explanation, see SD 18.3(1.1).

<sup>98</sup> “Naming impression,” *adhivacana, samphassa*, lit, “designation-contact” or “labelling-contacts” [5.3] refers to the conceptualizing by *saññā*. Comy: “Conceptual contact is synonymous with mind-contact, which arises in the mind-door taking the 4 (mental) aggregates as its basis [because it is apprehended by means of designation and description]” (DA 2:501 with Subcomy). U Thittila, in his **Vbh 6** tr, renders it as “analogical contact” (Vbh:T §17/7) with the n, “Mind and mental objects do not impinge but are explained by the analogy (*adhivacana*) of physical states.” On *adhivacana* and *paṭigha*, see Intro (5.2) above. See also SD 62.10d (2.3.1.3).

<sup>99</sup> *Yehi Ānanda ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāma, kāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho rūpa, kāye adhvācāna, samphasso paññāyethā ti.* Here, “the physical body” is simply a convenient term for the “form aggregate” (the 5 physical sense-faculties) as the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind). On *rūpa, kāya* [§20(1) n].

<sup>100</sup> “Sense-impression,” *paṭigha, samphassa*, lit “impingement-contact” or “impact-contact” [5.3], refers to contact through sensory stimulus. Comy: Sense-contact is the contact that arises taking the contact-aggregate of form as basis (*sappaṭigham rūpa-k, khandham vatthum*) (DA 2:501), ie, contact arising through eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact and body-contact (ie, the 5 physical sense-experiences). On *adhivacana* and *paṭigha*, see (5.2) above.

<sup>101</sup> *Yehi ānanda ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi rūpa, kāyassa ca paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho paṭigha, samphasso paññāyethā ti.*

## The latent vortex<sup>102</sup>

The looped dependent arising [6, 8.2]

### Existential consciousness<sup>103</sup>

**21** It is said: ‘**With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.**’ [§20] [63]

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

If, Ānanda, there were no *consciousness* to descend into a mother’s womb, would *name-and-form* take shape in the mother’s womb?<sup>104</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

21.2 “If, Ānanda, after descending into the mother’s womb,<sup>105</sup> the *consciousness* were to depart, would *name-and-form* be generated in this state of being here?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

21.3 “If, Ānanda, the *consciousness* of a young boy or a young girl were to be cut off, would *name-and-form* grow, develop and mature?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for name-and-form, that is to say, **consciousness**.*

### Cognitive consciousness<sup>106</sup>

**22** It is said: ‘**With name-and-form as condition, there is *consciousness*.**’ [§2 (9); 6.2]

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

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

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, *this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for consciousness, that is to say, **name-and-form**.*

<sup>102</sup> This uroboric cycle or reciprocal conditioning between consciousness and name-and-form is what keeps our samsaric existence going. Called “hidden vortex” in Ñāṇananda, *The Magic of the Mind*, 1974:25-33 (ch V); Bodhi 1984:22-26.

<sup>103</sup> This term (“existential consciousness”) and the next subheading (“cognitive consciousness”) are neologisms. See **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (6) & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1). On the looped dependent cycles, see SD 14.7 (3).

<sup>104</sup> Cf **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61) where the Buddha declares: “Based on the 6 elements, there is descent into the womb; | (On account of) such a descent, there is name-and-form; | With name-and-form as condition, there is contact; | With contact as condition, there is feeling. | Now, it is for one who feels that I make known [the 4 noble truths]” (A 3.61,9/1:176), SD 6.8. This clearly shows that feeling arises with the descent of the gandharva (rebirth consciousness) into the womb. However, this is not a common interpretation of *viññāṇa-nāma,rūpa* dyad, where “*viññāṇa* in this context became the consciousness that descends into the mother’s womb at conception, while *nāma-rūpa* became the body complex that takes shape and, after developing sense-organs (*saḷāyatana*), experiences contact (*phassa*) and so on.” (Bucknell 1999: 339). More commonly, *viññāṇa* is “the consummation of the 6 types of consciousness associated with the sense organs, which makes the version read like an account of the psychological process of sensory perception.” (Bucknell 1999: 327): see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16-18/1:111-113). See discussion on *nāma,rūpa* in the essay **Dependent arising**, SD 5.11 Intro.

<sup>105</sup> See SD 54.8 (5.4.3).

<sup>106</sup> On the 2 forms of consciousnesses, see §21 subheader n. For comy details on this whole section, see Bodhi, 1984:26-34.

## Name-and-form and consciousness

22.2 It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born or decay or die or fall away or re-arise;<sup>107</sup>  
 thus far there is **a pathway for designation** [naming]; *adhivacana, patha*  
 thus far there is a pathway for language; *nirutti, patha*  
 thus far there is a pathway for description; *paññatti, patha*  
 thus far there is a sphere for wisdom [knowing]— *paññā'vacara*  
 thus far there is the samsaric round (of lives) turns [64] for describing this (state of being),  
 that is, when there exist name-and-form together with consciousness.<sup>108</sup>

## II. TALK ON THE ROUNDS (*vaṭṭa, kathā*): SELF-VIEWS

### Descriptions of the self<sup>109</sup> [9]

**23** To what extent, Ānanda, does one, **when describing the self, describe it?**<sup>110</sup>

- (1) Ānanda, one describing the self as having form and being limited, describes it thus,  
 'My self has form and is limited.' *rūpī me paritto attā'ti*  
 (2) Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as having form and being unlimited, describes it thus,  
 'My self has form and is unlimited.' *rūpī me ananto attā'ti*  
 (3) Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as being formless and limited, describes it thus,  
 'My self is formless and limited.' *arūpī me paritto attā'ti*  
 (4) Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as being formless and unlimited, describes it thus,  
 'My self is formless and unlimited.' *arūpī me ananto attā'ti*

**24**

- (1) Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as **having form and limited**  
 either describes such a self *as having form and limited* *now* [existing in the present],<sup>111</sup>  
 or describes such a self *as having form and limited* *will be* [will arise in the future],<sup>112</sup>  
 or one thinks: 'What is *not* so, I will fashion it so that *it is so*.'<sup>113</sup>  
 This being the case, it is right to say that the notion (of a self)  
*as having form and being limited* lies latent in one.

<sup>107</sup> On this section, see (8.2.3).

<sup>108</sup> 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).

<sup>109</sup> Be heading: *Atta, paññati*. For comy details on this section, see Bodhi 1984:108-110, 34-39.

<sup>110</sup> *Kittavatā ca ānanda attānaṃ paññāpento paññāpeti*, lit, "And in what ways, Ānanda, *does* one describing the self, *describe* (it)?" The syntax is significantly purposeful, as the question means: How do we see the self without falling into the false notion that it is something eternal or abiding—and without identifying with it in any way? In other words, how do we actually *not* conceptualize the self, but see it merely as it really is: impermanent, changing and becoming other. [S25 n]

<sup>111</sup> As in the case of a materialist holding an annihilationist view.

<sup>112</sup> *Tattha bhāvim vā so rūpim anantaṃ attānaṃ paññāpento paññāpeti*. For example, in the case of an eternalist or a Creator-God believer.

<sup>113</sup> *Atathaṃ vā pana santaṃ tathattāya upakappessāmi*. Walshe: "Though it is not so now, I shall acquire it there." Ñāṇa-moli & Bodhi: "That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus." One possible interpretation is that, eg, an eternalist thinking that his "soul" is not permanent, hopes for "eternal life" by subscribing to some eternalist belief. For the interpretations of this enigmatic sentence, see Bodhi 1984:38 (Intro).

- (2) Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as **having form and unlimited**  
*either describes such a self as having form and unlimited now,*  
*or one describes such a self as having form and unlimited will be,*  
*or one thinks: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’*  
 This being the case, it is right to say that the notion (of a self)  
 as *having form and being unlimited* lies latent in one.

- (3) Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as **being formless and limited**  
*either describes such a self as being formless and limited now,*  
*or one describes such a self as being formless and limited will be,*  
*or one thinks: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’*  
 This being the case, it is right to say that the notion (of a self)  
 as *being formless and limited* lies latent in one.

- (4) Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as **being formless and unlimited**  
*either describes such a self as being formless and unlimited now,*  
*or one describes such a self as being formless and unlimited will be,*  
*or one thinks: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that [65] it is so.’*  
 This being the case, it is right to say that the notion (of a self)  
 as *being formless and unlimited* lies latent in one.

—Ānanda, it is in these ways that one describing the self describes it.

### Non-description of the self<sup>114</sup>

**25** To what extent, Ānanda, does one, **when not describing the self, not describe it?**<sup>115</sup>

- (1) Here, Ānanda, one *not* describing the self as having form and being limited, does *not* describe it thus,  
 ‘My self has form and is limited.’  
 (2) Or, Ānanda, one *not* describing the self as having form and being unlimited, does *not* describe it thus,  
 ‘My self has form and is unlimited.’  
 (3) Or, Ānanda, one *not* describing the self as being formless and limited, does *not* describe it thus,  
 ‘My self is formless and limited.’  
 (4) Or, Ānanda, one *not* describing the self as being formless and unlimited, does *not* describe it thus,  
 ‘My self is formless and unlimited.’

**26**

- (1) Here, Ānanda, one who does not describe the self as **having form and limited**  
*neither* describes such a self having form and limited (as existing) now,  
*nor* does one describe such a self having form and limited will be [will arise in the future],  
*nor* does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’  
 This being the case, Ānanda,  
 it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as *having form and limited* does not lie latent in one.

<sup>114</sup> *Na atta,paññatti*. For comy details on this section, see Bodhi 1984:110 f, 34-39.

<sup>115</sup> *Kittavatā ca ānanda attānaṃ na paññāpento na paññāpeti* (note the double neg), lit, “How far, Ānanda, does one when *not* describing the self, *not* describe (it)?” Here, we see the self simply as a conventional and convenient construct (as in referring to something and in human communication). Hence, the “self” is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise, and should not be identified in any way. In this way, we do not feed the latent tendencies of lust, ill will and ignorance. [§23]. See Bodhi 1984:34-47.

- (2) Here, Ānanda, one who does *not* describe the self as **having form and unlimited**  
*neither* describes such a self having form and unlimited (as existing) now,  
*nor* does one describe such a self having form and unlimited will be,  
*nor* does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being the case, Ānanda,

it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as *having form and being unlimited* does not lie latent in one.

- (3) Here, Ānanda, one who does *not* describe the self as **formless and limited**  
*neither* describes such a self self formless and limited (as existing) now,  
*nor* does one describe such a self formless and limited formless and limited will be,  
*nor* does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being the case, Ānanda,

it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as *being formless and limited* does not lie latent in one

- (4) Here, Ānanda, one who does *not* describe the self as **formless and unlimited**  
*neither* describes such a self formless and unlimited (as existing) now,  
*nor* does one describe such a self formless and unlimited as one that will be,  
*nor* does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being the case, Ānanda, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as being formless and being unlimited does not lie latent in one.

—Ānanda, it is in these ways that one *not* describing the self does *not* describe it.

## Considerations of self

*Atta, samanupassanā*

### The self is meaningless apart from experiences<sup>116</sup> [9.4]

**27** In what ways, Ānanda, does one, *considering* the (notion of) self, *consider* it?

- (1) Ānanda, one considering **feelings** as the self, either considers it, thus,  
 ‘Feeling is my self.’<sup>117</sup> [§28]
- (2) Or, Ānanda, one considering **feelings** as the self, considers it thus,  
 ‘Feeling is not my self; but my self is *without* experience of feeling.’<sup>118</sup> [§30]
- (3) Or, Ānanda, one considering **feelings** as the self, considers it thus,  
 ‘Feeling is not my self; but my self is not *without* experience of feeling. [§31]  
 My self feels; for myself, by nature, feels.’<sup>119</sup>

Thus, Ananda, does one, *considering* the self, *consider* it.

<sup>116</sup> For comy nn: Bodhi 1984:111f, 39-41. For a discussion on this section, see, Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*, 1982:98-103; also **Self & selves**, SD 26.9 (2.4(3)).

<sup>117</sup> *Vedanā me attā ti*. That is, identifying the “self” with the feeling aggregate (*vedanā-k, khandha*) (DA 2:507 f).

<sup>118</sup> *Na h’eva kho me vedanā attā, appaṭisaṃvedano me attā ti*. That is, identifying the “self” with the body aggregate (*rūpa-k, khandha*). (DA 2:507 f).

<sup>119</sup> “Feeling is *not* my self ... ,” *Na h’eva kho me vedanā attā, no pi appaṭisaṃvedano me attā, attā me vediyati, vedanā, - dhammo hi me attā*. That is, identifying the self with the aggregates of perception (*saññā-k, khandha*), formations (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*) and consciousness (*viññāna-k, khandha*) (DA 2:507 f).

The sentence, *vedanā, dhammo hi me attā*, lit “feeling-nature indeed is my self,” alt tr “my self is subject to feeling.”

## One feeling at a time

**28** (1) In the case, Ānanda, of the one who says, thus: **‘Feeling is my self,’** [§27(1)] he should be asked:

‘Friend, there are these 3 kinds of feeling: *pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling*.

Of these 3 kinds of feeling, which do you consider as the self?’

Ānanda, when one experiences **a pleasant feeling**,

one does not, at the same moment, experience a painful feeling or a neutral feeling.

At that moment, one experiences *only* a pleasant feeling.

Ānanda, when one experiences **a painful feeling**,

one does not, at the same moment, experience a pleasant feeling or a neutral feeling.

At that moment, one experiences *only* a painful feeling.

Ānanda, when one experiences **a neutral feeling**,

one does not, at the same moment, experience a pleasant feeling or a painful feeling.

At that moment, one experiences *only* a neutral feeling.

## Feelings are impermanent, non-self

**29** Ānanda, **a pleasant feeling** is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

Ānanda, **a painful feeling**, too, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, [67] subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

Ānanda, **a neutral feeling**, too, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

29.2 When one experiences <b>a pleasant feeling</b> , one thinks,	‘This is my self,’
then, with the <u>ending</u> of that pleasant feeling, one thinks,	‘My self is gone!’
When one experiences <b>a painful feeling</b> , one thinks,	‘This is my self,’
then, with the <i>ending</i> of that painful feeling, one thinks,	‘My self is gone!’
When one experiences <b>a neutral feeling</b> , one thinks,	‘This is my self,’
then, with the <i>ending</i> of that neutral feeling, one thinks,	‘My self is gone!’

29.3 Thus one who thinks, ‘Feeling is my self’ regards the self as something that, even here and now, is *impermanent*, a mixture of pleasure and pain, subject to arising and passing away.

Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to contemplate thus, ‘Feeling is my self.’

## We are what we feel<sup>120</sup>

**30** (2) Here, Ānanda, of the one who says, thus: **‘Feeling is not my self; my self is without the experience of feeling,’** [§27(2)]

<sup>120</sup> On refutations (2) and (3), Harvey says: “These two refutations show that, for the authors of the early Suttas, a real Self must have self-awareness, having a sense of ‘I am’ or ‘this I am.’ The argument is, though, that the sense of ‘I am’ or ‘this I am’ only arises when feeling exists. As they thus depend on feeling, which is itself not-Self (refutation i), they are themselves not-self [1995: §1.9/p20 f]. The ‘I’ that is Self would thus turn out to be not-Self, which is a contradictory situation. That is, if there can only be a Self under conditions which would make it *not*-Self, then, it is clearly impossible for there to be such a thing as a Self. While the above passage may not be intended to ‘refute’ Self, but only deny certain views on Self, it clearly has the effect of showing that *the concept itself is self-contradictory*.” (1995:31 f). In 2012, Harvey uses “non-self” instead of “not-self”: see **Is there a soul**, SD 2.16 (1.2).

he should be asked:

‘Friend, where there is nothing at all that is felt, could the idea “I am”<sup>121</sup> occur here?’

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to contemplate thus,

‘Feeling is not my self; my self is without the experience of feeling.’

## Feelings change

**31** (3) Here, Ānanda, of the one who says, thus:

**‘Feeling is not my self, but my self is *not* without feeling,’** [§27(3)]

he should be asked:

Friend, if feeling were to utterly end without remainder, then,  
when feeling does not exist at all, with the ending of feeling,  
could (the idea), “I am this,” occur there?’

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to consider, thus, **[68]**

‘Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without the experience of feeling.’

My self feels; for myself, by nature, feels.

## One who clings not to the world

**32** Ānanda, when a monk

- (1) does *not* regard feeling as the self, and
  - (2) does *not* regard the self as without experience of feeling, and
  - (3) does *not* contemplate thus, ‘My self feels; for my self is of the nature to feel’<sup>122</sup>
- then, being without such considerations, he does *not* cling to anything in the world.

Not clinging, he is *not agitated*. Unagitated, he *attains nirvana* for himself.

He understands, ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is (for me) no more of arising in any state of being.’

32.2 Ānanda, if anyone should say of a monk whose mind has been thus freed

- that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata exists after death’ — that would not be proper.
- Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata does not exist after death’ — that would not be proper.
- Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death’ — that would not be proper.
- Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ — that would not be proper.

32.3 What is the reason for this? Because, Ānanda, that monk is freed by **directly knowing** that:

- |                   |                                       |                   |                              |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| thus far there is | <u>designation</u> [naming];          | thus far there is | the way for designation;     |
| thus far there is | <u>language</u> ;                     | thus far there is | the way for language;        |
| thus far there is | <u>defining</u> [description];        | thus far there is | the way for defining;        |
| thus far there is | <u>knowing</u> [wisdom];              | thus far there is | the way for knowing.         |
| thus far there is | <u>the samsaric round</u> (of lives); | thus far there is | the way for samsaric rounds. |

32.4 To say of a monk who is freed by directly knowing this that he holds the view,  
‘One does not know, one does not see’ — that would not be proper.

<sup>121</sup> Be *ayam aham asmi*, “I am this.” The PTS ed *asmi*, “I am,” which is confirmed by Comy. Both eds have *ayam aham asmi* as the reading for the following section.

<sup>122</sup> *Attā me vediyati, vedanā, dhammo hi me attā’ti.*

### III. TALK ON THE ENDING OF THE ROUNDS (*vivaṭṭa,kathā*)

#### The 7 stations for consciousness [Table 10]

**33** Ānanda, there are these **7 stations for the consciousness**,<sup>123</sup> and there are **the 2 bases**.<sup>124</sup>  
What are the seven?

(1) There are, Ānanda, beings who are **different [69] in body and different in perception**, that is to say, human beings, some devas and some beings in the lower realms.

This is the 1<sup>st</sup> station for the consciousness.

(2) There are, Ānanda, beings who are **different in body but same in perception**, that is to say, the devas of the brahma world who have arisen in the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana.

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> station for the consciousness.

(3) There are, Ānanda, beings who are **the same in body but different in perception**, that is to say, the devas of streaming radiance.

*abha-s,sara*

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> station for the consciousness.

(4) There are, Ānanda, beings who are **the same in body and same in perception**, that is to say, the devas of radiant glory.

*subha,kiṇṇa*

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> station for the consciousness.

(5) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the perception of physical form, with the passing away of perceptions of impingement, and non-attention to the perception of diversity,

(contemplating,) ‘Space is infinite,’ arrive at **the base of infinite space**.

*ākāsānañcāyatana*

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> station for the consciousness.

(6) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the base of infinite space, (contemplating,) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ arrive at **the base of infinite consciousness**.

*viññāṇañcāyatana*

This is the 6<sup>th</sup> station for the consciousness.

(7) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the base of infinite consciousness, (contemplating,) ‘There is nothing,’ arrive at **the base of nothingness**.

*ākīñcaññāyatana*

This is the 7<sup>th</sup> station for the consciousness.

**33.2** And there is **the base of non-percipient beings** with **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception** as the second.<sup>125</sup>  
(These are the 2 bases.)

*asañña,sayyāyatana*  
*n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana*

<sup>123</sup> “The 7 stations for the consciousness,” *satta viññāṇa-t,thītiyo*. For diag, see Table 10. It is interesting to note that the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*), are not listed as “stations for consciousness” (*viññāṇa-t,thīti*) [Table 10 n ad loc].

<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere these are called “the 9 abodes of beings” (*nava,satt’āvāsa*) (D 33,3.2(3)/3:263, 33.2.2(3)/3:288; A 9.24/-4:401). Here *āyatana* is rendered as “sphere,” referring to a realm or level of meditation; where it refers to the senses, it is tr as “base.” *Avacara* (lit “down-wandering”) is tr as “realm,” but “sphere” is often used here, too. See Table 10 for a full list of the various stations and spheres.

<sup>125</sup> For a diagram of these 7 stations of consciousness and the 2 bases, see Table 10.

## The true nature of the 7 stations for consciousness

**34** (1) Ānanda, when one understands **the 1<sup>st</sup> station for consciousness**, whose beings are ***different in body and different in perception***, that is to say, human beings, some devas and some beings in the lower realms— whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—  
is it proper for him to delight in it?" [70]  
"Certainly not, bhante."

(2) "Ānanda, when one understands **the 2<sup>nd</sup> station for consciousness**, whose beings are ***different in body but same in perception***, that is to say, the devas of the brahma world who have arisen in the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana— *brahmā*  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers and the escape from it—*  
*is it proper for him to delight in it?"*  
"Certainly not, bhante."

(3) "Ānanda, when one understands **the 3<sup>rd</sup> station for consciousness**, whose beings are ***same in body but different in perception***, that is to say, the devas of streaming radiance— *ābhassara*  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers and the escape from it—*  
*is it proper for him to delight in it?"*  
"Certainly not, bhante."

(4) "Ānanda, when one understands **the 4<sup>th</sup> station for consciousness**, whose beings are ***same in body and same in perception***, that is to say, the devas of radiant glory— *subha,kiṇṇā*  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers and the escape from it—*  
*is it proper for him to delight in it?"*  
"Certainly not, bhante."

(5) "Ānanda, when one understands **the 5<sup>th</sup> station for consciousness**, there are beings, through having ***utterly transcended the perception of physical form***, the passing away of perceptions of impingement, and non-attention to the perception of diversity, (contemplating,) 'Space is infinite,' arrive at the base of infinite space— *ākāsānañcāyatana*  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers and the escape from it*  
*—is it proper for him to delight in it?"*  
"Certainly not, bhante."

(6) "Ānanda, when one understands **the 6<sup>th</sup> station for consciousness**, there are beings, through having ***utterly transcended the base of infinite space***, (contemplating,) 'Consciousness is infinite,' arrive at the base of infinite consciousness— *viññāṇaṇāñcāyatana*  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—*

*is it proper for him to delight in it?"*

"Certainly not, bhante."

(7) Ānanda, when one understands **the 7<sup>th</sup> station for consciousness**, there are beings, through having **utterly transcended the base of infinite consciousness**, (contemplating,) 'There is nothing,' arrive at the base of nothingness—  
*whoever, Ānanda, understands it, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers and the escape from it—*

*ākiñcaññāyatana*

*is it proper for him to delight in it?"*

"Certainly not, bhante."

"Ānanda, when a monk—having understood as they really are, their arising, their passing away, their satisfaction, their dangers, and the escape concerning these 7 stations for the consciousness and concerning the 2 bases [§33.2]— is freed through non-clinging, then, he is called a monk **freed by wisdom**.

*paññā, vimutta*

## The 8 liberations [10]

**35** Ānanda, there are these **8 liberations**.<sup>126</sup> What are the eight?

(1) One with physical form sees physical forms.<sup>127</sup>

This is the 1<sup>st</sup> liberation.

(2) One does not perceive physical form internally but **sees physical forms externally**.<sup>128</sup>

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> liberation. [71]

(3) One is focused only on (the idea of) **the beautiful**.<sup>129</sup>

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> liberation.

(4) Through the utter transcending of the perception of physical form, with the passing away of the perception of sensory impingement, with non-attention to the perception of diversity, (perceiving,) 'Space is infinite,' one enters and dwells in **the base of infinite space**.

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> liberation.<sup>130</sup>

(5) Through the utter transcending of infinite space, (perceiving,) 'Consciousness is infinite,' one enters and dwells in **the base of infinite consciousness**.

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> liberation.

<sup>126</sup> The "**8 liberations**," *aṭṭha vimokkhā* [10] are fully listed at: D 16,3.33/2:111 f (SD 9), 33,3.1(11)/3:262, 34,2.1(10)/3:288; **Saṅkhār'upapatti S** (M 120,37/3:103), SD 3.4; **Saḷāyatana S** (M 137,26/3:222), SD 29.5; (**Aṭṭhaka**) **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306 (SD 55.13). Comy details at Vism ch 4+5. These 8 also constitute "mental liberation" (*ceto, vimutti*): see **Jhānābhiññā S** (S 16.9,29 n), SD 50.7.

<sup>127</sup> *Rūpī rūpāni passati*. Perceiving form on one's own body, one sees forms externally. This is said in connection with *kaṣiṇa* meditation. This is one of the 8 "spheres of sovereignty" or stages of mastery (*abhibhāyatana*) over the senses through dhyana (*jhāna*); see D 16,3.24-32/2:110; M 77/2:13; A 8.65/4:305, 10.29/6:61. See Intro (10).

<sup>128</sup> *Ajjhattam arūpa, saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*. Not perceiving forms on one's own body, one see forms externally. See Intro (10).

<sup>129</sup> *'Subhan't'eva adhimutto hoti*. This consists of concentrating the mind on perfectly pure and bright colours as *kaṣiṇa*-object. See Intro (10).

<sup>130</sup> On these 4 formless dhyanas and cessation, see also **Cūḷa Go,siṅga S** (M 31,13-18), SD 44.11.

- (6) Through the utter transcending of the base of infinite consciousness,  
(perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ one enters and dwells in **the base of nothingness**.  
This is the 6<sup>th</sup> liberation.
- (7) Through the utter transcending of the base of nothingness,  
one enters and dwells in **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**.  
This is the 7<sup>th</sup> liberation.
- (8) Through the utter transcending of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,  
one enters and dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling**.  
This is the 8<sup>th</sup> liberation.<sup>131</sup>

These, Ānanda, are the 8 liberations.

### The arhat freed both ways

**36** Ānanda, when a monk attains these 8 liberations in a forward order,  
or in a reverse order, or in both forward and reverse order,  
when he attains to them and emerges from them, wherever he wishes, in whatever way he wishes,  
for as long as he wishes,  
36.2 and by realizing for himself through **direct knowledge**, right here and now,  
with the destruction of the influxes,<sup>132</sup>  
attain and dwell in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom<sup>133</sup>—

<sup>131</sup> This last stage requires both concentration and insight, and can be attained only by non-returners and arhats who have mastered the formless attainments. See Bodhi, 1984:47-51.

<sup>132</sup> *Āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ paññā, vimuttiṃ diṭṭhe va dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*. This is stock, found throughout the 4 Nikāyas. *Āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie, either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 influxes: of (1) sense-desire (*kāmaśava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence or becoming (*bhavāśava*), (3) views (*diṭṭhāśava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāśava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*oghā*) and “yokes” (*yogā*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influxes of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these influxes is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

<sup>133</sup> “Freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom,” respectively: *ceto, vimutti* (or, freedom by concentration, ie, through the destruction of the mental hindrances) and *paññā, vimutti* (freedom through insight). One who is *freed by wisdom* “may not have reached the 8 liberations (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70,16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly freed in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into 2 types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 liberations** (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called *freed both ways*, ie, freed from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Arhats like Sāriputta and Moggallāna are “freed both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the 2 types of freedom are given in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 2:70 f), **Kīṭāgiri S** (M 1:477 f), and esp **Jhānābhiññā S** (S 16.9,29 n), SD 50.7.

**Ānguttara** mentions the 2 states that partake of spiritual knowledge (*dve vijjā, bhāgiyā*) as, namely, calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*). The cultivation of calm leads to the destruction of passion and the cultivation of insight to the destruction of ignorance (A 2.4.10/1:61). The distinction between the two is expressed by “freedom of mind” (*ceto, vimutti*) and “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*) respectively. “However, these two expressions are not simply equivalent in value relative to realization. While ‘freedom by wisdom’ (*paññā, vimutti*) refers to the realization of *Nibbāna*, ‘freedom of the mind’ (*ceto, vimutti*), unless further specified as ‘unshakeable’ (*akuppa*), does not imply the same. ‘Freedom of the mind’ can also connote temporary experiences of mental freedom, such as the attainment of the 4 absorptions, or the development of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) [eg M 1:296]. Thus this passage is not presenting two different approaches to realization but two aspects of the meditative path, one of which is not sufficient by itself to bring realization” (Analayo,

then, he is called a monk who is **freed both ways** [dual-freed].<sup>134</sup>

36.3 Ānanda, there is no other “freedom both ways” than this, and there is none more sublime than this.”

36.4 The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, the venerable Ānanda rejoiced<sup>135</sup> in the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

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*Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization*, 2003:89 f). See Lily de Silva, “Cetovimutti, paññāvimutti and ubhatobhāgavimutti,” *Pāli Buddhist Review* 3,3 1978:118-145.

<sup>134</sup> “One freed both ways,” *ubhato, bhāga vimutta*. In simple terms, “freedom of mind” (*ceto, vimutti*), encompasses what the later Mahāyāna regard as the destruction of “the afflictive obstructions” (*kles’āvaraṇa*), ie, sense-based defilements, and “freedom by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutti*) encompasses the Mahāyāna notion of the destruction of “noetic obstructions” (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), or simply ignorance. On types of saints, see (10).

<sup>135</sup> “Joyfully approved,” *attamanā ... abhinandum*.

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