

SD 62.18d

Knowledge, Language and Reality

A brief survey of early Buddhist epistemology

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This essay was originally part of the [introduction](#) to SD 62.18abc. Since it grew into a self-contained essay, it is given its own SD number, SD 16.8d.

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2 Everything is teaching us

2.1 WHAT IS THE DHARMA?

2.1.1 Definitions of *dhamma*

2.1.1.1 The term **Dharma** is the anglicized form of the Sanskrit or Buddhist Sanskrit, *dharma*, which has a wide range of senses, such as follows: “that which is established; usage, custom, duty; the law, justice; virtue, religion, religious merit, good works” (SED, summarized). The Pali form, ***dhamma***, has potentially the same senses of the Sanskrit form but also has other senses unique to early Buddhism; thus, says DP, it:

denotes (an interpretation of) the essential nature and reality of existence and experience, the way things are: it is descriptive and prescriptive; it denotes also an essential attribute of humans or animals; a quality or characteristic. (DP 2:461-476 *dhamma*)

In Buddhism, especially the early Buddhist texts, the term ***dhamma***¹ (and *dharma* in later Buddhism), covers *the broadest range of senses and usages*, since it broadly refers to the reality the Buddha discovered, the truths that he teaches, their practices and their benefits, besides other usages.

2.1.1.2 The Dictionary of Pali (DP 2:461-476) has over 15 A4 (20.8 x 29.7 cm) pages of definitions, usages and references on *dhamma*. Only 3 main definitions are listed here along with canonical references:

1 experience of reality

- (i) how the world of experience works, the processes by which it works and is explained (especially as formulated in *cattāri ariyasaccāni* and *paṭiccasamuppāda*), and the possibility and way of transcending it as understood by the Buddha and taught by him (so that knowledge and understanding of it might bring awakening, arhathood, to others);²
- (ii) the (stages to) freedom from the world of experience, culminating in nibbāna;³
- (iii) (sg) the behaviour, conduct, practice required to realise and understand the way the world of experience works; the way to arhathood;⁴
- (iv) (pl) a quality or element of behaviour or practice according to the Buddha’s *dhamma*; a constituent of prescribed practice; an element of the teaching; a doctrine; appropriate and beneficial practice;⁵
- (v) the substance of the teaching of the Buddha; the teaching as collected in the canon; the texts;⁶
- (vi) a constituent of experience; an aspect or quality of existence; physical sensation; a mental state or quality (good or bad);⁷ (sometimes merely) thing, phenomenon, matter; the non-independent,

¹ *Dhamma* derives from √DHR, “to hold”; thus, lit, “that which bears” (or supports truth, reality, good).

² V 1:2,3*; D 1:62,24 f, 2:55,14; M 1:37,20; S 1:23,19; A 2:20,30; Khp 6.4 = Sn 225; Sn 368.

³ D 1:156,10; M 1:203,28; S 1:71,21*, 2:280,31*; A 3:433,16 f; Sn 1053; Thī 97.

⁴ V 3:12,9, 19,35; D 3:39, 119,18, 195,6 f, 245,12; M 1:135,23; S 1:214,33*; It 98,19.

⁵ D 2:119,30, 123,7* f; M 1:60,7; S 1:86,29, 5:11,25, 227,19 f; A 2:34,19 f; Dh 273; U 36,6; Pv 36.62; Tha 179; Pm 1:88,6 f, 2:166,1; Vbh 250,1.

⁶ V 1:139,8, 196,34, 2:108,22, 285,4 f, 289,37, 4:14,30, 15,9+27, 21,18 5:163,7; D 3:272,9*; S 1:156,3, 198,33, 2:269,23, 3:96,7; A 1:185,10, 249,2, 2:185,8; Dh 82; Sn 326.

⁷ Khp 6.10/5,2-4 *tayas su -ā jahitā bhavanti sakkaya,diṭṭhi vicikicchitañ ca sīla-b,bataṃ va pi yad atthi kiñci*, “He becomes one to have abandoned all these 3 things: self-view, doubt, and rituals and vows.”

conditioned constituent of processes and events, progressively more and more minutely analysed into fundamental types of events or fundamental regularities;⁸

- (vii) mental construct, concept, idea, what is to be cognized by the mind, that which is the object of mental activity;⁹
- (viii) for the sangha: a rule; the offence against that rule; the punishment or reparation for that offence; a procedure;¹⁰
 - especially the special requirements (*garudhamma*) imposed on bhikkhūṇīs; V 4:52,15 f.

2 sectarian ideas

an interpretation of reality in the views of other religious teachers or philosophers; their teachings; a non-Buddhist doctrine; a theory.¹¹

3 the way of things: natural and social

- (i) the way things are; a natural law, custom, tradition; the essential nature, the way, of [humans] or animals;¹²
 - see also *diṭṭhe (va) dhamme*: in this existence; in this world of experience;¹³
- (ii) the way things ought to be; the way one should act (depending on who one is); right, appropriate conduct; duty; what is right; law, justice;¹⁴
- (iii) good practice; a good quality or characteristic or attainment;¹⁵
- (iv) a quality or characteristic; any element of behaviour or practice or attainment;¹⁶
 - esp *methuno dhammo*, sexual intercourse.¹⁷

2.1.1.3 In summary, **the key definitions** of *dhamma* as used in the texts are:

- (1) nature: reality and experience
thing, the nature of things, norm; quality, mind-object (*āyatana*), phenomenon;
- (2) teachings: as theory, interpretation, worldly views and sectarian ideas;
- (3) the world: its nature and society
law (Latin, *jus*), justice, righteousness; custom, tradition, human or animal nature.

This summary closely reflects the 4 definitions of ***dhamma*** as given in the Commentary to **the Brahma-jāla Sutta** (D 1/1:12), that is, as:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| (1) <i>guṇa</i> | quality, (moral) virtue; | |
| (2) <i>desanā</i> | teaching, instruction; | |
| (3) <i>pariyatti</i> | accomplishment; text(s); theory; and | |
| (4) <i>nissattā</i> | non-being state; nonself. | (DA 1:99) |

⁸ V 8,29*, 3:4,7; D 1:70,11; M 1:91,15, 228,14, 267,4. 292,30, 296,9, 3:230,29; S 1:70,25, 4:76,25; A 1:27,9, 3:421,-20, 5:144,6; Dh 1; It 120,15*; Pm 2:150,11 f, 234,25; Dhs p1,4; Vbh 293,24 f; Kvu 339,27.

⁹ V 1:34,26; D 2:281,19; M 1:112,9+13; S 1:116,4; 3:26,22 f, 4:129,21, 195,30; A 5:30,20.

¹⁰ V 1:317,2, 3:109,21, 187,1; A 2:241,22 f.

¹¹ V 1:101,6; D 1:189,26, 3:119,4; M 1:64,18 f, 164,3; S 1:133,34*; U 67,24; Sn 94.

¹² S 1:18,26*; Dh 5; Tha 552.

¹³ D 1:51,19, 3:97,21; M 1:47,24, 62,36; Sn 141; Tha 1263; Pm 1:161,20.

¹⁴ D 1:51,19, 3:97,21; M 1:47,24, 62,36; Sn 141; Tha 1263; Pm 1:161,20.

¹⁵ V 2:248,18, 251,3; S 4:337,18; A 4:140,6; Dh 384; U 5,8*.

¹⁶ V 1:93,27, 103,9. 2:237,16 f, 3:3,15, 9,31; D 1:244,23, 2:75,27, 3:90,17, 266,27; M 1:95,19, 2:199,4, 242,23.

¹⁷ V 1:96,17 f, 3:19,2, 21,24, 113,15+33; M 3:125,8; S 1:36,1*; Sn 291.

In this Thera,gāthā, *dhmma* means “**quality**” (*guṇa*):

<i>na hi dhammo adhammo ca</i>	For Dharma and non-Dharma
<i>ubho sama,vipākino</i>	lead not to the same results.
<i>adhammo nirayaṃ neti</i>	Non-dharma [Unrighteousness] leads to hell;
<i>dhammo pāpeti suggatin ti</i>	Dharma [Righteousness] brings one to heaven. (Tha 304) ¹⁸

In the passage, “I will teach you Dharma, bhikshus, good in the beginning, ... ” and so on, it means “**the teaching**” [the Dharma]” (*desanā*).

In the passage, “Herein, a monk masters the Dharma—the suttas, geyyas, ... ” and so on, it means “**the texts**” (*pariyatti*).

And in the passage, “At that time, there are dharmas, there are aggregates, ... ” and so on (Dhs §121/25), it means the “**no-being state(s)**” (*nissatta*). (DA 1:99,3-11)

The word *nissatta*¹⁹ is not found in the canon, but common in the Commentaries. *Nis-satta*, “without essence; without being,” means “empty” (*suññat’attho*, VbhA 55). “Emptiness” is “said to show that the conscious body of the earth elements, etc, is empty” (*pathavī,dhatu,ādayo saviññāṇaka,kāyaṃ suññato nissattato dassetuṃ vuttā*, MA 4:104).

2.1.1.4 The Buddha Dharma (*buddha,dhamma*) is a record and testimony of the Buddha’s struggle for awakening and a systematization of the contents of his awakening, that is, the true reality that he discovered. Hence, we have the person (**the Buddha**) who discovered that Dharma; hence, it is **the Dharma** (*buddha,dhamma*), and the path (*maggā*) leading to that very same awakening as the Buddha’s; and by attaining that path of awakening, we become **the noble sangha** (*ariya,sangha*).

These form **the 3 refuges** (*ti,saraṇa*) or “3 jewels” (*ti,ratana*) to which we go for refuge. This means that we take the Buddha as our ideal of human awakening to emulate by learning and practising the Buddha Dharma, so that we gain the path of awakening that is the noble sangha.

For us as practitioners of Buddha Dharma, then, it comprises 3 vital parts that is the “good Dharma” (*saddhamma*):²⁰

(1) the Dharma as truth or theory;	<i>pariyatti,dhamma,</i>
(2) the Dharma as practice or experience, and	<i>paṭipatti,dhamma,</i>
(3) the Dharma as realization .	<i>paṭivedha,dhamma.</i>

“**Truth**” (*pariyatti*) refers to the teachings pertaining to reality, to manifestations of truth, to true reality, and to the laws and processes of true reality. “**Practice**” (*paṭipatti*) refers to our training or conduct in striving to properly live in keeping with the Buddha Dharma so that we benefit from it, in a practical way, even here and now. “**Realization**” (*paṭivedha*) is our understanding of the laws of nature, and realization of true reality, so that we gain the path of awakening in this life itself. This is the teaching found, for example, in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).²¹

¹⁸ See Tha:N 179 n304.

¹⁹ BDict has “*nijjivatta* (soullessness)” instead of *nissattata* in its def of “dhamma” (Nyanatiloka, 4th ed, 1980:57).

²⁰ VA 225; AA 5:33. See SD 62.15 (3.3.2.3); **The levels of training**, SD 40a.4 (6.2.1); **Notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (3.4.2).

²¹ See SD 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7 (1.4.2)), or any of the other 9 suttas of **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25.2-10/3:225-228).

2.1.2 This conscious body: the 6 senses and the 5 aggregates

2.1.2.0 In the rest of this introduction we will explore how the 6 senses and the 5 aggregates interact and the results of such interactions. A few interesting questions that may arise include the following, whose answers may or may not be clear from our study. However, these answers will clarify themselves over time, again and again, as we put together what we have learned here (and elsewhere).

Why are feelings of ease and dis-ease classified as feelings (*vedanā*), while the subsequent factors of liking and disliking are classified as mental formations (*saṅkhāra*)?

Why are perception (*saññā*; recollection) and mindfulness (*sati*; memory) classified into separate aggregates (*sati* is included among the mental formations, *saṅkhāra*)?

Why is wisdom (*paññā*), which, similar to perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), is a form of knowledge, classified as a mental formation (*saṅkhāra*)?

2.1.2.1 The only way to see true reality is by practising Dharma. The best way to begin with this, to lay a good strong foundation for realizing true reality, is to know ourself. The most basic thing we can and must know about ourself is that we are made up of body and mind. **Our body** is *physical* in the sense that it comprises—according to the early Buddhist texts—the 4 elements, that is:

- (1) “earth” element, the solid aspects, such as skin, flesh and bones;
- (2) “water” element, blood, urine, sweat and various body fluids;
- (3) “fire” element, body heat, oxidation, digestion, decay; and
- (4) “wind” element, the breath, bodily gases and movement.

In the Pali texts, these are collectively called “**form**” (*rūpa*); so called because we are vexed by it, by these elements reacting to the vicissitudes of the weather, by posture, and by physical impact; we are vexed because these bodily elements break down and decay.²²

Our body cannot exist in itself, since it is made of the very same elements that are everything around us: *the earth, water, fire and air [wind]*. The 4 “great elements of form” (*mahā.bhūta,rūpa*) also exist in “space” (*ākāsa*), the 5th element. The fact that I am able to write this means that my body is also *conscious*: **consciousness** or the mind is the 6th element.²³ We are thus, *in toto*, made up of these 6 elements: *earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness*.

The 6-element model is thus helpful for our understanding of what we really are physically, that is, as a **body-based-model** of our existence; hence, it is an “existential model.” Despite the universality of the elements and these elements making up what we really are *physically*, this is not the only way of knowing and seeing our being.

There is also a **mind-based model**, one that explains our being, a kind of “psychological model.” I have used the word “psychological” for its convenience, since this model also covers *the ontological* and *the epistemological* aspects, that is, what we *are* and how we *know* what we are. This is what we will now briefly examine.

2.1.2.2 The body-based model [2.1.2.1] shows that we exist in very similar ways as all that exists, animate or inanimate, that is, made up of the very same elements as everything around us, in terms of

²² *Ruppatī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā rūpan ti vuccati. Kena ruppati? Sītena,pi ruppati, uñhena,pi ruppati, jighacchāya,pi ruppati, pipāsāya,pi ruppati, daṁsa,makasa,vātātapa,sarīsapa,samphassena,pi* [Ce Ee ... *sirimsapa,samphassena,pi*] *ruppati. Ruppatī ti kho, bhikkhave, tasmā rūpan ti vuccati.* (S 3:86 qu at Vbh 4; AA 1:21, ItA 1:19; cf SA 2:290, 3:68)

²³ **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3:61,6), SD 6.8; a person’s make-up: **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,7+14-19), SD 4.17.

other people, beings and nature itself. On the other hand, **the mind-based model** for our *being*²⁴ shows how we experience these “elements” of reality, and how we create our own virtual world out of these experiences.

The “**mind-based**” model refers to the mind as the key factor in “sensing” the world in and around us. Here, the mind (consciousness) is dependent on the 5 physical senses (*pañc’indriya*)²⁵—the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body—empowering the person with the faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching.

Seeing or sight, for example, arises in this manner: *with the meeting of eye-faculty, eye-consciousness and visual object, there is contact*. In this fundamental process of our existence:

the “eye-faculty” is the functioning organ or “the internal base” (*ajjhaticca āyatana*);

the visual object is the sense-object or “the external base” (*bahira āyatana*);

the eye-consciousness is the mind working through the eye, that is, “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*).²⁶

This perceptual process is explained in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), thus:

EYE-BASED PROLIFERATION

Avuso, dependent on **the eye and form**, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the 3²⁷ is contact.²⁸

With contact as condition, there is feeling.

What one feels, one **[112]** perceives.

What one perceives, one thinks about.²⁹

What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates.

With what is thus mentally proliferated as the source,³⁰

proliferation of conception and perception³¹ assails a person

regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through *the eye*.³² consciousness *viññāṇa*
(M 18,16/1:111 f), SD 6.14

The 5 aggregates

form *rūpa*

feeling *vedanā*

perception *saññā*

formations *saṅkhārā*

consciousness *viññāṇa*
(M 18,16/1:111 f), SD 6.14

Table 2.1.2.2a Mental proliferation and the aggregates

²⁴ According to the early Buddhist teaching on nonself (*anattā*), in terms of reality, there is no “being” (*satta*)—hence *nissatta* [SD 60.1e (8.7.5)]—only “becoming” (*bhava*). I have resorted to using “being” and “becoming” as they are familiar words in common parlance (*vohāra*).

²⁵ Note that the term *pañc’indriya*, “the 5 faculties,” also refers to the 5 spiritual faculties (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom): **Pañc’indriya**, SD 10.4. The term’s sense depends on the context.

²⁶ A parallel process works for each of the other 4 sense-faculties and the mind: **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16/1:111 f), SD 6.14.

²⁷ On the “triangle of feeling,” see SD 1.1 (App 4) diagram; **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16) + SD 6.14 (4); **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28,27-38), SD 6.16; SD 56.22 (2.4.1.2 passim); SD 60.1d (1.1.1.3).

²⁸ *Tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso*. In **Cha Chakka S** (M 148), this phrase is part of the sequence on any sense-based reflection (**M 148**, 7-9/3:281 f + 28-39/3:284 f), SD 26.6. For a discussion on this phrase and passage, see Bucknell, “Conditioned arising evolves,” JIABS 22,2 1999:320 f. See prec n.

²⁹ “One thinks about,” *vitakketi*. On how when thinking stops, desires do not arise, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.2/-2:277).

³⁰ *Yaṃ papañceti tato, nidānam*. This shows that the mental proliferation itself acts on our minds in an unconscious manner. Cf M 18,17 (1) etc (SD 6.14).

³¹ Or, “perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation,” *papañca, saññā, saṅkhā*. See SD 6.14 (3).

³² This important passage is the earliest statement on the Buddhist theory of perception: SD 6.14 (4).

A parallel process works for each of the other 4 sense-faculties and for the mind, as shown in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18).³³ The triads of (internal) eye-faculty, (external) sense-object, and their respective consciousnesses are called “**the 18 elements**” (*aṭṭhārasa dhātu*),³⁴ which are as follows:

<u>sense-faculties (internal)</u>	<u>sense-objects (external)</u>	<u>consciousnesses</u>
(1) eye-element	(6) form-element	(11) eye-consciousness-element
(2) ear-element	(7) sound-element	(12) ear-consciousness-element
(3) nose-element	(8) smell-element	(13) nose-consciousness-element
(4) tongue-element	(9) taste-element	(14) tongue-consciousness-element
(5) body-element	(10) touch-element	(15) body-consciousness-element
(16) mind-element	(17) mind-object [object-element]	(18) mind-consciousness-element

Table 2.1.2.2b The 18 elements of perception³⁵

2.1.2.3 The passage on “eye-based proliferation” from **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** [2.1.2.2] gives us a very good idea on:

- (1) how our conscious body (comprising the 6 senses) as **form** (*rūpa*) experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) visual objects.
- (2) As a result, we **feel** (*vedeti*) the emotional texture of the experience as *pleasant* or *unpleasant*, depending on our memory of a similar past experience.
- (3) Reacting to the feeling, we **perceive** (*sañjānāti*) it as likeable or desirable (felt as pleasant), or unlikeable or undesirable (felt as unpleasant), or we *ignore* it (when we have no feeling for it).
- (4) Once we emotionally react to that experience in this manner, we **form** “something” (*kiñcana*)—a karmic object—of it. This “something” proliferates into *many things* for us excited by our greed, hatred and delusion. Hence, this is called “volitional formations” or “karma-formations.”
- (5) We become **conscious** of such a vision (or it may be a sound, smell, taste, touch or thought) which “floods” (*papañceti*) our mind and lives.

Generally speaking, most people do not directly engage with any of these aggregates, which make up our lives and function without our giving it a thought. Even if we are aware of any of these as physical processes, we often do not give them much or any thought. In respect to the body, for example, the major physical organs function, as a rule, without our knowledge of them or we often do not care to know about them. We may only take an interest in these functions when there arises some abnormality or impairment. This is similarly the case regarding the mental processes mentioned.

2.1.2.4 It is useful to know how the 5 aggregates work to give us meaning and purpose in life. From our various sense-experiences, we imaginatively project and selectively “see” others and the world. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are likely to see that *our life has some kind of significance or importance*, which shapes our daily habits and how we react (or not react) to circumstances.

For most of us, life has **meaning**, which is often defined by or learned from our family, community, school, environment or religion. We are often also influenced or habituated by certain profound events in our lives. Usually, the meaning we see in our lives is based on how we see ourselves as a member or actor of some kind of group, whether we regard them as “us” or as “others.” This means that we learn

³³ M 18,16/1:111 f (SD 6.14).

³⁴ The term *dhātu*, “element,” is here a common denominator to show how these components work together.

³⁵ On the 18 elements, see also SD 17.13 (3.3.3). On “skills in the elements,” see also **Vimutti,magga** (Vimm 11.40 f; Vimm:Ñ 609-612).

to see meaning in our lives by how we engage with others at different levels: with the family, significant others, the community, the nation, and perhaps the world.

As we see meaning at these different levels in our life, we also develop a sense of **values**. Basically, this is how we see or measure ourselves against others, such as towards parents, siblings, partners, relatives, friends, acquaintances, employers, and so on.

Ideally speaking, or simply *ideally* (unconsciously), we all value **life**, our own and those of our significant others (which often include non-humans or inanimate things). We value **having** things, acquiring them, sharing them, even just knowing them. We value especially **love** (friendship, relationship, and intimacy) as well as freedom (which includes *doing* what we like, or not doing what we don't like; or *being* in some kind of mental state, having some sense of control over it).

We value **truth**, which basically means “what we see is what we get,” “I deserve rewards for my work and for what I am promised,” and so on. The 5th value is rare, and this is what defines *true learners and leaders* amongst us—that is valuing **the mind**: the ability and freedom to think or feel, and to do or create with our ideas or feelings for the best in humanity.

2.1.2.4 This last value leads to our living all these values—life, property, love, truth and mind—which give our lives **purpose**, what we do with our lives.³⁶ Our value for **life** tends to be expressed by ways of keeping ourselves healthy and looking well. Our value of “property” or **having** is often socially defined for us as “work,” “salary,” “dues” and “gifts.” Some of us may include “duty,” but this is more likely to be from the value of **love**, which ideally is a deep sense of putting oneself in another's place or seeing oneself as a living part of a bigger “other.” Often this love overlaps with self-love (even narcissism), defined by a pleasure of feeling desired by others in some way, usually because of what we are, what we have, what we say, what we do, what we want.

Our value of **truth**—how we see truth in a positive way—as a rule evolves with how we see *causes and effects* work for us and for others. How we use this view of reality often defines what we *are*. When we see only our personal advantage, we would be *selfish*; when we truly want to benefit others, we would be *altruistic*; when we act for the good of both, it would be *magnanimous*; or when we benefit neither, it would be *self-defeating*.

What defines a “good society,” then, is a preponderance of those who value **the mind** even more than their bodies. Simply put, there are those who are willing and able to rise above their sensual comfort zone to engage their minds in thought and creativity that will bring life, health, joy, strength, and wonder to the many. This is when the human mind is able to extend itself beyond the mere senses, beyond our person, to be able to experience the superhuman or that which is simply pleasurable to the spirit so that **we seem to forget and to have risen above all the shortcomings of our humanity**.

2.1.3 Knowing and doing: Learning from the senses

2.1.3.1 One of the benefits of learning and understanding **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*)—*form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness* [2.1.2.3]—is to be able to skillfully engage with our world. In fact, the aggregates are an amazing set of mental tools that create our world, a private, virtual world. As our understanding of the 5 aggregates deepens and widens, we align and transform our virtual world of false realities and private views closer to the real world. The more we are able to do this, the more awakened and free we become.

³⁶ I don't think most of us, in our daily lives, distinguish what we see as “instrumental” purpose (like waiting at a bus-stop or a train station heading for work) or “intrinsic” (what is my life about?). However, we are more likely to be driven by our needs and desires; our purposes tend to be *instrumental*. Otherwise, we are likely to do things habitually, without any purpose.

2.1.3.2 Before we can upgrade or refine our private inner world, we must know how our mind works and how we tend to behave, so that we truly know better what we really *are* and what we are really *doing*. That is just it: we need to understand how we know and how we act. Based on what we have learned so far—regarding the 6 senses and the 5 aggregates [2.1.2]—we can see our conscious being as the engagement or relationship between 2 systems: the perceptual (experiencing) [2.1.3.3] and the behavioural [2.1.3.4]. Both these systems make use of “**sense-doors**” (*dvāra*) to engage with the world, and function as the tools or sources of knowing [2.2.3.2].

2.1.3.3 The perceptual system describes how we know and see³⁷ the world by way of the 6 sense-doors, that is, “**sense-contacts**” (*phassa, dvāra*) by way of *the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind*. These sense doors “cognize” or experience (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) the various properties and attributes of the world, namely, the 6 sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*): *forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches [tangible objects], and mind-objects* [Table 2.1.2.2].

In the context of active engagement in daily life, the term *dvāra* (“sense doors”) in the perceptual system is most often referred to in the early texts by the term **āyatana**, which means “perceptual sphere” or “path of experience.” In this connection, we will retain the use of *āyatana*, instead of *dvāra*, in this analysis.³⁸

2.1.3.4 Our personal and group **behaviours** are basically reactions to the way we see the world relying on the 3 doors of action (*kamma, dvāra*)—the body (*kāya, dvāra*), speech (*vacī, dvāra*), and mind (*mano, dvāra*)—resulting in physical actions (*kāya, kamma*), verbal actions (*vacī, kamma*), and mental actions (*mano, kamma*).

In **the behavioural system**, the entire engagement here pertains to the 4th aggregate—the aggregate of volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*). These are our formations of karma by our numerous acts rooted in greed, hatred or delusion, or their opposites, non-greed, non-hatred or non-delusion.³⁹ The countless volitional formations, classified as *wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral*, arise and function when we *intentionally* choose, induce or allow certain conduct by way of *body, speech and mind*, resulting in bodily deeds, speech, and thoughts.

In this context, volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*) [2.2.1] are reclassified in 3 ways:

- (1) according to the intention (whether rooted wholesomely or unwholesomely);
- (2) according to the door (mind, speech or body) by which the act is expressed; and
- (3) according to the specific action performed (how the deed is executed).

2.1.4 Making sense of the world

2.1.4.1 In this section, we will examine how we know the world and ourselves through our **6 senses** (*saḷ-āyatana*): the 5 physical senses and the mind, that is, the 6 sense-doors: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.⁴⁰ **Saḷ** is a prefix here meaning “six” (from Skt *ṣad*; P *cha*). The term **āyatana** literally means “base” (as a sense), “sphere” (as a realm) or “link” (in a perceptual process). In this context, it refers to “perceptual link,” “sphere of perception,” “source of awareness,” or “door of perception.”⁴¹ They are called “**doors**” (*dvāra*) because we know and see the world through them. These 6 senses are our perceptual links to the external world.

³⁷ “Know” here broadly means to feed or shape our awareness regarding the world and ourselves; “see” broadly refers to what we make of the world by way of perception, feeling and formations. [2.1.4.1, 2.1.4.3]

³⁸ Here I have followed Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, 2021:38.

³⁹ In every wholesome situation, these wholesome roots are those of *charity, love and wisdom*.

⁴⁰ On comy analysis of the sense-spheres, see Payutto 2021: Appendix 2.

⁴¹ On the usage of “cognition,” “affect,” “conation” and “perception”: see SD 56.22 (2.2.2.1).

Yet the world, as it were, reveals only limited parts of itself in our perception; then again, what is perceived by us is often limited⁴² or distorted by natural or unnatural phenomena⁴³ so that we do not see the full or real situation. Such limitations are due to the way our human faculties operate or to the limited powers of our instruments of perception that, after all, depends on the 6 senses.

As humans, we have 5 notable limitations: physical, social, environmental, intellectual and psychological. Daily, moment to moment, we strive to overcome these limitations, the roots of suffering *dukkha*). Recognizing and managing these limitations are key to sustainable living. Learning about the world despite these limitations frees us from them, from space, time and consciousness.

2.1.4.2 To better understand how we experience the world, we pair each one of the 6 senses (the internal bases, *ajjhatika āyatana*) with a specific “object of awareness” in the external world (*bahiddha āyatana*). These objects of awareness are also called *āyatana*, because they too act as a perceptual link, a source of awareness, the bases for knowledge. Yet, as opposed to the 6 internal senses (internal *āyatana*), these objects exist in the external world (external *āyatana*).⁴⁴

For convenience, these 6 external sense objects—visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches (tangible objects), and mental objects—are referred to by the Abhidhamma term *ārammaṇa*, which literally means “support (for experience), hold (for our attention), starting-point (for consideration and meditation).” Simply, *ārammaṇa* are “objects of attention.”

When an internal sense-base (*āyatana*; “sphere of perception”) comes into contact with an (external) object of attention (*ārammaṇa*), an awareness specific to that sense-sphere arises.⁴⁵

- When the functional **eye** comes into contact with forms, the awareness of “seeing” arises [2.1.2.2];
 - when **the ear** contacts sounds, the awareness of “hearing” arises;
 - when **the nose** contacts smells, the awareness of “smelling” arises;
 - when **the tongue** contacts tastes, the awareness of “tasting” arises; and
 - when **the body** (the skin) contacts touches, the awareness of “touching” [feeling] arises.
- This pervasive awareness is called “**consciousness**” (*viññāṇa*): the awareness of sense-objects.

2.1.4.3 There are thus **6 kinds of consciousness**, corresponding to the 6 sense-faculties, the 6 sense-objects, and 6 consciousnesses, constituting the “18 bases” (*atthārāsa āyatana*) of experience,⁴⁶ thus:

<u>sense-faculty</u>		<u>the sphere for cognizing</u>		<u>giving rise to</u>	
1. eye	<i>cakkhu</i>	form	<i>rūpa</i>	seeing	<i>cakkhu, viññāṇa</i> .
2. ear	<i>sota</i>	sound	<i>sadda</i>	hearing	<i>sota, viññāṇa</i> .
3. nose	<i>ghāṇa</i>	smells	<i>gandha</i>	smelling	<i>ghāṇa, viññāṇa</i> .
4. tongue	<i>jivhā</i>	tastes	<i>rasa</i>	tasting	<i>jivhā, viññāṇa</i> .
5. body	<i>kāya</i>	touches	<i>phoṭṭhabba</i>	tactile awareness [feeling]	<i>kāya, viññāṇa</i> .
6. mind	<i>mano</i>	mind-objects	<i>dhamm’(ārammaṇa)</i>	mind-consciousness	<i>mano, viññāṇa</i> .

Table 2.1.4.3 The 18 bases of experience⁴⁷

⁴² We only see a small spectrum of light, hear a limited range of frequencies, detect a fraction of smells and tastes.

⁴³ Eg, a desert mirage; we see it but it is not really “there.”

⁴⁴ Eg, even when I close my eyes or after I have fallen asleep, my work-desk is still there.

⁴⁵ In Abhidhamma, the term *dvāra*, “(sense-)door,” is paired with the term, *ārammaṇa*, “sense-object,” and the term “internal sense-base” (*ajjhatika āyatana*) is paired with “external sense-base” (*bahira āyatana*). In our study, we will refer to the internal sense-spheres as *āyatana*, and the external sense-objects as *ārammaṇa*. [2.1.3.3]

⁴⁶ D 33,2.2(1-3)/3:243.

⁴⁷ D 33,2.2(1-3)/3:243.

Although the arising of consciousness is dependent on the contact between a sense-base and its respective sense-object,⁴⁸ the fact that a sense-object arises to a sense-base does not always result in consciousness. Other accompanying factors, such as receptivity, determination, and interest must also be present.⁴⁹

For example, while a person is asleep, agitated, absentminded, focused on an activity, or deeply concentrated, various visual forms and sounds within range of potential awareness are not “sensed.” Similarly, when one is focused on writing a letter or a book, one may not be aware of the contact between one’s body and the chair, or between one’s fingers and the pen or keyboard. In such cases, when sense-bases and sense-objects are in contact, but without the arising of consciousness, “perception”⁵⁰ is not yet said to have occurred.

2.1.4.4 Perception arises when all 3 bases are present: a sense-base (*āyatana*), a sense-object (*ārammaṇa*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The union of these 3 factors is called “**contact**” (*phassa* or, in compounds, *samphassa*) [2.1.2.2]. In the texts, “contact,” refers specifically to the “coming together” of these 3 bases, which marks the start of a perceptual process. In this context, *phassa* is of 6 kinds, according to the specific sense-sphere involved, that is, eye-contact (*cakkhu,samphassa*), ear-contact (*sota,samphassa*), nose-contact (*ghāṇa,samphassa*), tongue-contact (*jivhā,samphassa*), body-contact (*kāya,samphassa*), and mind-contact (*mano,samphassa*).⁵¹

Technically speaking, contact (*phassa*) is neither a cause nor a condition⁵² for “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), because consciousness is only one of the factors involved for the arising of contact. For this reason, the suttas do not say that *phassa* is the cause for the arising of the consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇa-k-khandha*). Rather, they state that the 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*) are the cause for the arising of contact.

In common parlance, we can still say that “sense-contact is the source of all knowledge,” since the term “source” only refers to the conditions from which knowledge arises. The contact itself does not “cause” knowledge, but examining the contact in the context of other conditions can bring some level of knowledge or wisdom.

The perceptual process up to this point can be outlined as follows:

perceptual path	+	conscious object	+	consciousness	=	contact	→	feeling	
<i>āyatana</i>		+	<i>ārammaṇa</i>	+	<i>viññāṇa</i>	=	<i>phassa</i>	→	<i>vedanā</i>

Table 2.1.4.5 The perceptual process (simplified)

⁴⁸ **M 38**,6/1:258 f (SD 7.10).

⁴⁹ **M 28**,27/1:190 (SD 40a.5).

⁵⁰ I have in such contexts used “perception” (*saññā*) rather than the broad term “cognition,” which can broadly refer to a number of mental processes or all of them. On the usage of “cognition,” “affect,” “conation” and “perception”: see SD 56.22 (2.2.2.1).

⁵¹ **D 33**,2.2(4)/3:243.

⁵² Philosophically, a **cause** (*hetu*) is what directly leads to or produces a result, often an action or event (ie, an initiating factor that triggers a specific outcome); a **condition** (*paccaya*) is a circumstance or background that enables a cause to have an effect. Take eg a fire: We may say that the striking of a match (the cause) produces the fire (the effect). However, the presence of flammable materials, dryness and oxygen (the conditions) are necessary for the match to ignite and cause the fire. Thus, technically, ignorance is not the cause of suffering, but touching a hot-plate (a condition) not knowing it is hot “causes” pain. However, we know how to heal the burn (a condition), so that the pain is minimal and heals quickly. Hence, a cause as a rule brings a specific or immediate result, whereas a condition does not, and may need other supporting conditions. “Conditionality” (*paccayatā*) is a network of inter-dependent causes and effects.

2.1.4.5 Contact (*phassa*) or sense-contact is a vital stage in the wider perceptual process. Once contact with an object has occurred, other mental and physical dynamics follow in its wake. To begin with, there is a **feeling** (*vedanā*) in response to that object, followed by recognition, associated thinking, and various actions of body, speech, and mind.

The feelings or sensations (*vedanā*) arising immediately following contact with a sense-object are of special significance in an analysis of our interaction with the world. The term ***vedanā*** refers to sense-experience, to experiencing the “flavour” of sense impressions. These sensations are either pleasurable, painful, or neutral.

Following the pathways of perception, there are 6 kinds of feeling, corresponding to the 6 sense-bases: feelings arising from eye-contact, from ear-contact, from nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact and mind-contact.⁵³ Each of the sense-based feeling is a triad, classified according to the affective tone of feeling, that is, they are of **3 kinds**:

1. *sukha* pleasurable, easeful, comfortable, agreeable;
2. *dukkha* painful, uncomfortable;
3. *adukkham-asukha* neither pleasant nor painful; also referred to as *upekkha*,⁵⁴ neutral.

We thus have a total of 6 kinds of feelings, that is, bodily and mental feelings that are either pleasurable, painful or neutral. However, often only **5 kinds of feelings**⁵⁵ are listed, such as in the Abhidhamma:⁵⁶

1. *sukha* physical pleasure;
2. *dukkha* bodily pain;
3. *somanassa* mental pleasure or joy;
4. *domanassa* mental pain or sorrow;
5. *upekkhā* neutral feeling; neither pleasure nor pain.

According to the Abhidhamma, a neutral feeling is always a mental one. All bodily feelings, that is, feelings arising through bodily sensitivity (*kāya-p, pasāda*), are either *pleasant or painful*, and there is no neutral feeling based on bodily sensitivity.⁵⁷ Thus, the Sutta Commentary explains “bodily equanimity” as arising based on any of the other 4 physical senses (eye, ear, nose and tongue) (SA 3:241).⁵⁸

2.1.4.6 The conscious objects (*dhamma* or *ārammaṇa*) are those things in the world that we attend to through our physical senses (*indriya*). We also think about these sense-objects, often seeing them according to our own desires, biases and delusions. On the wholesome side, as we observe these natural objects with knowledge and wisdom, we are able to engage more with the world, and to do so safely, by way of the 6 sense-bases (*saḥ-āyatana*).

Feeling, properly understood and developed, is a vital indicator of what can be beneficial for us and should be sought after, or portend what is potentially unhelpful, even dangerous, and should be avoided.

⁵³ The 6 kinds of feelings are, respectively, *cakkhu, samphassajā vedanā*, *sota, samphassajā vedanā*, *ghāna, samphassajā vedanā*, *jivhā, samphassajā vedanā*, *kāya, samphassajā vedanā*, and *mano, samphassajā vedanā* (**Aṭṭha-sata S**, S 36.22/4:232).

⁵⁴ Note that *upekkhā* in the context of *vedanā* differs from *upekkhā* in the context of volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), eg, *upekkhā, brahma.vihāra*, *upekkhā, sambojjhaṅga*, and so on. The former are simply affective tones, while the latter refers to wholesome spiritual states.

⁵⁵ (**Indriya**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 48.35/3:208 f), SD 17.3(4.4); SD 56.21a.

⁵⁶ **Vedanā**, SD 17.3 (4.4).

⁵⁷ See S:B 1934 n212.

⁵⁸ See **Vedanā**, SD 17.3 (4.4).

Feeling thus safeguards us with a comprehensive strategic understanding of things. This safeguard only works when we stop being slaves to feelings. We do this by turning to a wholesome thought, or even a neutral one. So long as the unwholesome feeling is displaced by a wholesome or neutral one, we have a good chance of freeing ourselves from feeling's grasp.

2.1.5 Enjoying sensual pleasures

2.1.5.1 Since feelings arise from sense-experience, it is vital that we understand how our senses work, and how to restrain them. The habit of **sense-restraint** is the most effective method of pushing away unwholesome feelings that may otherwise bring on negative karmic acts. There are 2 basic things we need to know regarding how the sense-bases work in terms of personal development:

1. They are the doors through which **the world** (that is, worldliness) enter, inform and shape our lives. While we should keep the doors open to learning, we should keep them closed when the sense-data are unhelpful and unwholesome. The senses are also our tools of communication with others, of learning and understanding others, which in turn helps us to better understand ourselves. Thus we need to work with the senses and the mind with skill, prudence and patience, so that we live productively, creatively and above all, *joyfully*.
2. The senses are the channels for **“consuming”** the world, for enjoying it with a right mind (that knows when to *stop*). We can and may enjoy sensual pleasures—of *sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought*—without harming ourselves, others or the environment. Whether or not such enjoyment brings pain, we should always reflect what we can learn from such sense-experiences.

The above 2 characteristics of the senses are interconnected and work together to give us a bigger picture of the world. The first is the basic and necessary function of the senses. The other function is secondary, even “extra,” but which should never leave us “mindless,” that is, intoxicated (*mada*) with *youth, life and health* as we make the best of them.⁵⁹

2.1.5.2 In both cases [2.1.5.1], the sense-bases operate in the same way. The difference lies in the factor of **intention** (*cetanā*), that is, whether we aim for knowledge that frees or for sensation (*vedanā*) that captivates. In the first case, there is learning; in the second, there is only “consuming.” There is, of course, the possibility of learning the *wrong* things; then, the first—our perceptions—becomes the slave of the second, that is, consuming sense-pleasures: being led by the eye, led by the ear, led by the nose, led by the tongue, led by the body, led by thoughts.

Where there is **feeling**, there is craving; where there is **craving**, there is clinging; where there is **clinging**, there is **becoming**—then there is **rebirth**; with rebirth, there are **decay and death**. This is the dependent arising of suffering. What arises must fall away, but it keeps arising *again*, unless we break the cycle, which we must.

When we well understand this—having learned from the experience of sensual pleasures over many lives, and seeing it in this life, too—we should be determined not to fall over the cliff of suffering. We renounce the world for the sake of reaching the path of awakening *in this life itself*. This vision of suffering and of the ending of suffering are what separates the lives of renunciants from the lives of non-renunciants, as stated by the Buddha in **the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta** (A 9.41).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See **Mada S** (A 3.39), SD 42.13; **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38), SD 1.11 (3.2).

⁶⁰ A 9.41/4:438-448 (SD 62.16).

For the mindful laity, there is a way of **enjoying sensual pleasures** (*kāma, bhogī*) without falling over the cliff. While such laity feel the drives of the body, they also mindfully and dexterously know *when to stop the body from overpowering the mind*. Thus, they are mindful and aware of the shortcomings of the body, as well as the potential of their minds. The path of awakening seems much longer for such laity, but, with wisdom, they eventually reach the path.⁶¹

2.1.5.3 How do the disciples **enjoying sensual pleasures** not fall over the cliff of the senses? We need to understand how perception works with the networking of the 5 aggregates, which in turn work the 6 senses, as demonstrated by the Buddha in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18) [2.1.2.2]. The vital tip given by the Sutta is in how to prevent the arising of **proliferative perception** (*papañca, saññā*), that is, reacting to and running after memories, mostly false, of a thousand and one promises.

Hence, **the Adanta Agutta Sutta** (S 35.94), “the discourse on the untamed and unguarded,” records the Buddha as stating thus:

*papañca, saññā itarītarā*⁶² *narā*
*papañcayantā upayanti*⁶³ *saññino*
mano, mayam gehasitañ ca sabbarā
panujja nekkhamma, sitaṃ iriyati

When common people, proliferated with perception
perceive proliferatively, they flow (with them).
Having dispelled all the mind-made that is home life,
one moves on the way of renunciation.

(S 35.94/4:71,17-20)

The Commentary explains the first line of the Sutta verse as meaning, “All beings become ‘**proliferated with perception**’ due to defiled perception (*kilesa, saññāya*)” (SA 2:382,3). **Papañca** is explained by the suttas and Commentaries as arising from craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and views (*diṭṭhi*), and causing mental distortion and obsession.⁶⁴ Thus, to “**perceive proliferatively**” means to misperceive *permanence, pleasure, self and beauty* in what are really *impermanent, suffering, nonself and foul*.⁶⁵ Such perversions are caused by mental proliferation rooted in defilements.

2.1.5.4 Table 2.1.5.4 depicts **the perceptual process** as described in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18) [2.1.2.2], that is, how perception leads on to an explosion (*papañca*) of proliferative perception (*papañca, saññā*) [2.1.5.3]. This process begins with the meeting of **sense-faculty**, **sense-object** and **consciousness**, that is, the “perception triangle,”⁶⁶ technically known as **sense-contact** (*phassa*). From this sense-experience arises **feeling** (*vedanā*) (as pleasing or displeasing) comparing it with some memories of similar experiences with persons and events. We then **perceive** (as liking or disliking) the arisen feeling.

This perception then invites **thoughts** that proliferate (*papañceti*). This thinking and thought proliferation constitute the “formation” (*saṅkhāra*) of karmic thoughts, resulting in more **proliferative perceptions** (*papañca, saññā*).⁶⁷ This involves diverse and complex perceptions—recalling and revelling in memories or the past—leading to a maelstrom of elaborate and imaginative thinking, arousing latent defile-

⁶¹ On laity who enjoy sensual pleasures (*kāma, bhogī*), see **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4; SD 54.9 (4.2).

⁶² Comy glosses *itarītarā narā* as “inferior beings” (*lāma, sattā*, SA 2:382). Subcomy on SA 2:160 on **Santutṭha S** (S 16.1/2:194), SD 69.13, explains that there are 2 kinds of *itarītara*: the ordinary and those perceived as knowledgeable (*pākatikam ñāṇa, saññanītañ cā ti*) (SAṬ:Be 2:154).

⁶³ *Upayanti*, 3 pl of *upayāti*, “1. to go to, approach, reach, enter; 2. To flow, to be in flood, increase” (CPD)

⁶⁴ **A 4.17a**,3(1) n (SD 57.36); **U 5.5**,10 n (SD 59.2b); DA 2:383; MA 2:110 x3; SA 2:270; SD 50.20, Sutta Comy 1-2 (4). As connected with **papañca**: MA 1:25, 2:75, SA 2:308, 3:112; VbhA 508.

⁶⁵ On the “perversions of perception” (*saññā, vipallāsa*), see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11; SD 16.11 (1).

⁶⁶ This is called a “perceptual triangle” for convenience; the actual “perception” actually arises following feeling.

⁶⁷ This term is rare, occurring it seems only in **Adanta, agutta S** (S 4:71).

ments, such as *lust, aversion, possessiveness, and jealousy*.⁶⁸ In other words, *papañca* is rooted in self-centredness: the notions of “mine, me and self,” which are intimately connected with the arising of craving, conceit and view (*taṇhā, māna, diṭṭhi*).⁶⁹

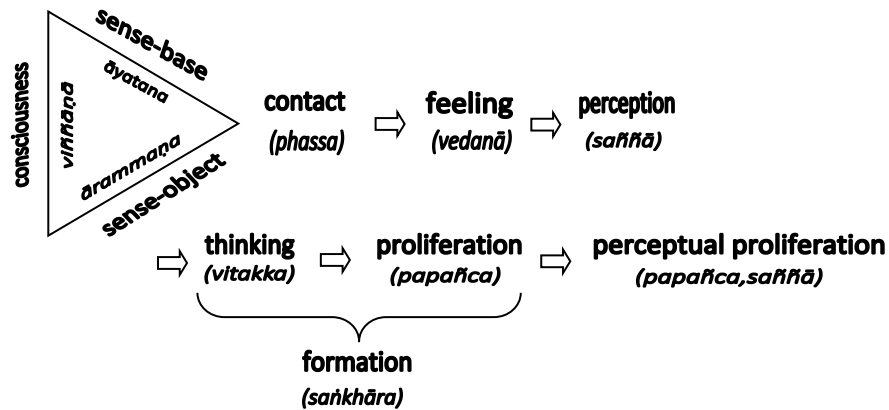


Table 2.1.5.4 The perceptual process [Payutto 2021:48]

2.1.6 Minding thoughts: Perception and *papañca*

2.1.6.1 *Papañca* is a key term in Buddhist psychology, and it is closely related to the perception of an unawakened being. Regarding them, the following points should be noted:

1. The term ***papañca*** refers to an engagement and entanglement with specific sense-objects; it also refers to proliferative thinking driven by the force of craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*), and wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), or thinking that compensates these 3 mental defilements. Here, a person conceives things in terms of “I,” “me” and “mine,” building a sense of self-identity or conceiving of things that are self-centred. These thoughts appear in countless and elaborate ways, leading to an explosion of various perceptions (*papañca, saññā*) associated with these mental proliferations.
2. There are **2 stages of perception** (*saññā*):
 - (1) initial perception, which perceives those objects that arise naturally on their own.
 - (2) proliferative perception (*papañca, saññā*), perception based on mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), which fabricate countless and elaborate images or ideas in relation to sense-objects (as already mentioned).
3. The entire **perceptual process** can be divided into 2 parts:
 - (a) The first part, from the internal sense-bases to feeling, comprises a purely perceptual process; all of the inherent factors arise according to natural causes and conditions. At this stage there is no “being,” “person,” or “self” involved; there are only mental states.

⁶⁸ See **Sakka, pañha S** (D 21,2.2 f/2:277 f), SD 54.8.

⁶⁹ As arising from “me and mine”: MA 2:111,5, 113,1-5, 225,9-13, 5:82,12, 100,24 f; SA 2:363,31-364,11, 372,1 f; AA 4:120,30 f; SnA 1:31,19 f. On *etaṃ mama eso’ham asmi eso me attā ti*, MA 1:27,1 f, 2:111,5; SA 1:190,5 f; AA 3:39,17-19; CA 276 f; NmA 1:89,22 f.

(b) The latter part, from feeling onwards, comprises the process of *consuming* the world or the round of rebirth (*saṃsāra, vaṭṭa*). In fact, feeling can also constitute the initial stage of the process of turning away (*vivaṭṭa*), but here the focus is on the round of rebirth. In this latter process, there are not only natural causes and conditions at work, but there now arises an idea of a “person” or “being.” A dualistic relationship is established between a “consumer” and the “consumed,” between a “thinker” and “thought,” between self and other; duality leads to the notion of “**something**” (*kiñcana*)⁷⁰ and **diversity** or manyness (*nanatta*).⁷¹ This is the kind of thinking that keeps us in the samsaric world, in the cycle of rebirth and redeaths.

4. The process of **consuming the world** illustrated above is only one of several ways to depict this cyclic process. This imagery is concise and corresponds to the conditions involved, that is, the 5 aggregates and the 6 sense-bases. Another description, that of the round of rebirth, is the detailed teaching of dependent arising, which is a comprehensive model.
5. Technically, the factors of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), and perception (*saññā*) are “conascent factors” (*sahajāta, dhammā*): they arise simultaneously. Their linear depiction above [2.1.5.4] is given for the sake of simplicity.

2.1.6.2 As we have noted, the whole perceptual process can be divided into 2 parts [2.1.6.1 (3)]. The 2nd part itself—that of “proliferative perception” (*papañca, saññā*)—can be further divided into the “cyclic rounds” (*saṃsāra, vaṭṭa*) and the “turning away” (*vivaṭṭa*), as illustrated here on **Table 2.1.6.2**:

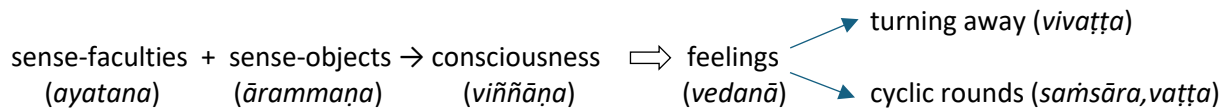


Table 2.1.6.2 Cyclic round and turning away [Based on Payutto 2021:50 Fig. 2.4]

The habitual tendency of “common people” (*itaritarā narā*) is to experience “something” and simply “follow their feelings.” As a result, they go through an explosion of thoughts, views and reactions rooted in *lust, aversion, possessiveness, and jealousy* [2.1.5.4]. And these generate more thoughts, views and reactions. Hence, they are caught in the net of defilements that is the “cyclic rounds” (*saṃsāra, vaṭṭa*). They become creatures of habits caught in an endless, painful uroboric⁷² cycle.

2.1.7 Other key terms related to the senses

2.1.7.1 Another important term used to refer to the 6 internal sense-bases (*āyatana*) or sense-doors (*dvāra*) is **indriya**, which translates as “faculty” or “governing faculty.” Although we often speak of the “5 (physical) senses” (*pañc’indriya*), when we include the mind, we have the 6 faculties, that is,

the eye-faculty (*cakkhu’ndriya*), the ear-faculty (*soṭ’indriya*), the nose-faculty (*ghāṇ’indriya*), the tongue-faculty (*jivh’indriya*), the body-faculty (*kā’yindriya*), and the mind-faculty (*man’indriya*).

⁷⁰ On “something” (*kiñcana*), see **Go,datta S** (S 41.7) + SD 60.4 (1.2.1.4); SD 12.4 (6.3); SD 40a.10 (1.4(2)); SD 50.2 (1.1.3.3).

⁷¹ On “the perception of diversity” (*nānatta, saññā*), see SD 62.10i (2.0.6.5).

⁷² “Uroboric,” adj of uroboros, a serpent devouring its own tail: SD 23.3 (1); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.3).

Hence, *indriya* is here used as a synonym for *āyatana*; but the term *cha indriya* or *cha-l-indriya* is not often found in the suttas;⁷³ the 6 faculties are, as a rule, referred to as *saḷ-āyatana*, “the 6 sense-bases” [2.1.4.1].

The term *saḷ-āyatana* or *cha indriya* (or *cha-l-indriya*) refers to the predominant or principal agent in a specific action. The eye, for example, is the principal agent in cognizing forms, and the ear is the principal agent in cognizing sounds, and so on. The term *indriya* is generally used when referring to the active engagement of the sense-bases to their operation in everyday life, and in the context of morally virtuous conduct, for example: “restraint of the eye-faculty” (*cakkhu’ndiya saṁvara*) and so on.⁷⁴

The term *āyatana*, on the other hand, is generally used when referring to specific factors within a causal process (VbhA 176, 178), or each of the senses, such as “the eye,” *cakkhu*, occurs, such as: “dependent on the eye and visual forms, eye-consciousness arises,”⁷⁵

or when referring to characteristics of the senses, such as:

“Is the eye permanent or impermanent?” “Impermanent, bhante.”⁷⁶

2.1.7.2 (1) Another term frequently used for the sense-bases when explaining specific factors within a causal process is *phass’āyatana*, which translates as the “base of contact” or the “source of contact.” This term is found, for example, in **the Pañca-t,aya Sutta** (M 102), where the Buddha states that he has awakened to “this noble state of supreme peace,” that is to say, “having understood, as they really are, *the arising, passing away, gratification, and escape* regarding **the 6 bases of contacts**,”⁷⁷ he has awakened to the liberation through non-clinging.⁷⁸

(2) Alternative terms referring to the external sense-bases (*bahiddha āyatana*)—the sense objects (*ārammaṇa*) – include “resort” (*gocara*, “place for gaining sustenance”) and “range” (*visaya*). Although *ārammaṇa* is a post-canonical term, it is here a convenient substitute for “external object” (*bahiddha āyatana*), since it is a more distinct word, especially for contemporary students of Dharma.⁷⁹

(3) Another important term, used only in reference to the first 5 sense-objects, especially in unawakened beings’ “consumption” of the world or being caught in the round of rebirth, is *kāma-guṇa*, translated as “(the 5) cords of sensual pleasure.” This term refers specifically to those *forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches* that are desirable, attractive, and pleasurable.

⁷³ In the suttas, *cha indriya* seems to be found only in 10 suttas of **Cha-l-indriya Vagga** of Mahāvagga of Saṁyutta (S 48.21-30/5:205-207) and **Sekha S** (S 48.53/5:230, where both sets, those of the spiritual faculties and the sense-faculties are mentioned together). The term *cha indriya* also occurs in Abhidhamma, eg, Vbh 125, 405, + *passim* (about 40 occurrences). We must, of course, to take care not to confuse this term with its namesake that means the “5 spiritual faculties” [2.1.2].

⁷⁴ **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2/1:70), SD 8.10; **Subha S** (D 10/1:207), SD 40a.13.

⁷⁵ *Cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhu,viññāṇaṁ* (**Dvaya S 2**, S 35.93/4:68).

⁷⁶ *Cakkhu niccaṁ vā aniccaṁ vā ti. aniccaṁ bhante* (**Nandak’ovāda S**, M 146,6/3:271). Cf *cakkhvāyatanaṁ ... aniccaṁ* (Peṭk 80).

⁷⁷ Ie, the experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. On *āyatana*, see (3.12.2).

⁷⁸ *Channa phass’āyatanānaṁ samudayañ ca atthaṅgamañ ca assādañ ca ādīnavañ ca nissaraṇaṁ ca yathā, -bhūtaṁ veditvā anupādā, vimokkha ti* (**Pañcattaya S**, M 102/2:237), SD 40a.12. On the bases of contact, see SD 40a.17 (3.12.2).

⁷⁹ On *ārammaṇa* in contrast to *dvāra* (“door,” sense-impression), see Vism 481,24, 482,16,32 f, 529,1, 608,23; DhSA 262,1, 264,10-11; VbhA 137,17. In contrast to *vatthu* and *dvāra*, see Vism 482,16, 484,14, 546,32, 595,20; DhSA 263,19; VbhA 404,12-13; PmA 84,1; SA 2:328,4. For a summary of *ārammaṇas* (also spelt *ālambana*) as concomitants of consciousness, viz the 5 sense-objects and the object of perception or “cognition,” see Abhs 3.16-19, also 13,25-14,18.

2.2 KNOWING AND LIVING

2.2.1 Formation, intention, karma: The forest and the tree

2.2.1.1 We started this study of the 5 senses and the 5 aggregates by examining the conscious body [2.1.2]. We then surveyed how **the senses** work with the mind [2.1.3]. These 2 sections constitute the aggregate **form** (*rūpa*). Following that, we studied how **feeling** (*vedanā*) arises and works [2.1.4], and then how **perception** (*saññā*) [2.1.5-2.1.6] fits in. These are the first 3 aggregates in the perspective of the 6 senses. We are now ready to explore the aggregate that is **mental formations** (*saṅkhārā*).

Technically, *saṅkhāra* (a masculine noun), is used in 2 important ways, as follows:

- (1) ***saṅkhārā*** (masc pl), “formations,” refers to all (*sabba*)—as in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), SD 7.1—*that we are and that there is*; every existent, physical (things, something) or non-physical (non-state, nothing, ideas). Nirvana, however, is not included here since it is unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), so has no attributes. Philosophically, nirvana is the real *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity), without regard for time or space; the one and only real truth.⁸⁰
- (2) ***saṅkhāra*** (masc sg), “formation,” refers to both the factors determining the quality of the mind (the “creators” of the mind), with intention (*cetanā*) as chief, and the actual volitional process in which these factors are selected and combined in order to mould and shape one’s thoughts, words, and deeds, resulting in physical, verbal, and mental karma, that is, *abhisāṅkhāra*, the builder of samsara.

2.2.1.2 In any case, the traditional analysis of the 5 aggregates focuses on the components of reality, rather than focusing on the various *dynamics* in nature that affect human life. For this reason, the description of **mental formations** (*saṅkhāra*) in this context normally only lists these determining factors, along with their attributes. These factors reveal themselves in the conditioned processes of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), which demonstrate precisely and fully how these factors affect human lives.

In the teaching of **dependent arising**, mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) are defined in the context of practical application or operative function, comprising bodily intentional activity (*kāya,saṅkhāra*) or bodily volition; verbal intentional activity (*vacī,saṅkhāra*) or verbal volition; and mental intentional activity (*citta,saṅkhāra*) or mental volition.

This differs from the analysis of mental formations as part of the 5 aggregates, in which various determining factors are simply presented as a list, such as faith (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*paññā*), greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), intention (*cetanā*), and concentration (*samādhi*). If one compares these analyses to a musical piece, the analysis of the 5 aggregates is like the orchestra and conductor *themselves* playing the piece itself along with the acoustics and space; the analysis of dependent arising is like the audience listening to that same performance. They are both parts of the same creative process.

2.2.1.3 Of all the determining factors of the mind, **intention** (*cetanā*) is leader or chief. No matter how many mental formations are operative at any one time, intention always leads and shapes the process and its result. For this reason, the term ***cetanā*** is sometimes used alone to represent all of the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*). *Saṅkhāra* in this context can thus be seen as “intention (*cetanā*), along with associated factors” (*sampayutta,dhamma*, “connected factors”), which shape the mind as good, bad, or neutral, which in turn determines thoughts, speech, and physical actions, arising as mental, verbal, and physical karma, respectively.

⁸⁰ SD 26.8 (1.1.3, 2.2.5); SD 50.13 (2.3.2.1).

These 3 terms—*saṅkhāra*, *cetanā*, and *kamma*—all overlap each other. Payutto gives the analogy of Venerable Mani, the abbot of Majjhima Monastery, who is receiving an offering of the printed Tipiṭaka. At the presentation gathering, the honoured guest may mention the recipient as “Venerable Mani,” or “the abbot of Majjhima Monastery,” or simply “Majjhima Monastery”—all three terms express the same desired meaning (2021:16).

2.2.1.4 Further, we should also reflect on **the intention** behind *the words* of the Buddha’s teaching. Take this famous Dhammapada verse as an example:

<i>vanam chindatha mā rukkham</i>	Cut down the forest, not the tree.
<i>vanato jayatī bhayaṃ</i>	From the forest springs fear.
<i>chettvā vanam ca vanatham ca</i>	Having cut the forest and undergrowth,
<i>nibbana hotha bhikkhavo</i>	O monks, be forest-free!
(Dh 283)	

The Buddha spoke this verse to some newly ordained elderly monks. Their first impression was that the Buddha *literally* meant that they should clear the forest with an axe (perhaps to set up forest lodgings). Reading their minds, the Buddha then explained that he meant the “**forest**” (*vana*) of defilements of sensual lust and so on, and “**undergrowth**” (*vanatha*, “standing in the forest”) are the attending lesser defilements or faults. Literally, the former are the large trees that had started growing first; then, the smaller trees, creepers and underbrush followed.⁸¹

Monastics should train to cut down their own “mental forests” that are their defilements. Cleared of these forest and undergrowth, they will gain arhathood by attaining **nirvana** (*nibbāna*), the “forest-free” (*ni-vana*), as highlighted in these lines from **the Nāga Sutta** (A 6.43):

<i>sabba,samyojan’ātītaṃ</i>	One has crossed over all fetters [the fetters of the all],
<i>vanā nibbanam⁸² āgataṃ</i>	and emerged from the forest to the clearing.
	(A 6.43/3:346,16)

Clearly, both Dh 283 and the A 6.43 pada (2 lines) should be read for their **intentional sense** (*attha*) for the Dharma teaching. The *word* of the text has to be read in the spirit; the sense has to be “teased out” (*neyy’attha*).⁸³ This “rule of intention” or intentional reading rule applies to all Pali texts for their proper and beneficial study.

To extend the metaphor, **the forest** (*vana*) refers to a secluded dwelling conducive for meditation: “a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.”⁸⁴ We can see **the tree** (*rukkha*) as the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat for his awakening. The tree that a monastic sits under and awakens is *his* or *her* bodhi tree.

2.2.1.5 Besides the central role that intention plays in all our conscious actions, it also reveals the special and distinctive properties of **mental formations** (*saṅkhārā*) or simply formations, which set this aggregate apart from the others. As an aggregate, *saṅkhārā* is in the plural since it encompasses the senses of *formation*, *intention*, and *karma* [2.2.1.3]. Again, here we must be aware of the context of our

⁸¹ DhA 20.8/3:421-425. For tr comy, see Carter & Paliawadana (tr) *The Dhammapada*, Oxford, 1987:314-316.

⁸² Be Se so; Ce Ee *nibbana*. Be Se are supported by Chin tr T26.1.608c2: 於林離林去 *yú lín lí lín qù* “from the woods he has left the woods.”

⁸³ See **Neyy’attha Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.5 f), SD 2.6b.

⁸⁴ Oldest refs: **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26,17), SD 1.11; (**Deva**) **Saṅgārava S** (M 100,13), SD 10.9; **Pacālā S** (A 7.58,-10.6), SD 4.11. For lists of suitable places & refs: **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39,12) n, SD 10.13; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,67), SD 8.10.

usage of *saṅkhāra*, whether we are referring to our conception/s of existents (things in the universe), that is, “formations.” Or, we are referring to the motive behind an action, that is, “intention.” Or we are referring to the moral significance of an action (that is, as karma).

Cetanā may be translated as “intention,” “volition,” “purpose,” or “deliberation.” The special attribute differentiating mental formation (*saṅkhāra*) from the other mental aggregates is that they can arise spontaneously. The other mental aggregates—those of *feeling*, *perception*, and *consciousness*—on the other hand, operate with sense-impressions (*phassa*) that are immediately present in the mind. Intentions are associated with and attend to these sense-impressions, and they rely on the reception of them in order to function. Mental formations, however, both deliberate over sense-impressions and act in response to them.⁸⁵

2.2.2 How we know and act

2.2.2.1 According to suttas, “**contact**” (*phassa*) is the source of knowledge: all forms of understanding arise at the point of contact or beginning with sense-contact [2.1.3].⁸⁶ That is, knowledge is dependent on perception, whereby data passes through the 6 bases (*āyatana*) or doorways (*dvāra*) of perception: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. If we consider the 6 sense-spheres as the starting points of perception, we can classify knowledge into 2 kinds: sense-based knowledge [2.2.2.2] and mind-based knowledge [2.2.2.3].

2.2.2.2 Sense-based knowledge arises by way of the 5 sense-doors (*pañca, dvāra*): *the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body*. This refers to basic forms of knowledge, that is, knowing visual forms (including colours and shapes), sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Knowledge here is what we perceive of the states of the 4 primary elements, that is, earth (*paṭhavī*) (solidity, including hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness), water (*āpo*) (fluidity, wetness, cohesiveness), fire (heat, combustion, digestion, respiration, oxidation, decay), and wind (gaseousness, movement).

Sense-based knowledge—centering on **the sense-faculties**, *the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body*—is, as a rule, the focus for certain professions. The medical profession in modern medicine has specialists in practically every faculty and special parts of each faculty. Specialists are also found in mental health.

The subject of **the eye**, that is, the seen or visual imagination, include artists, sculptors, graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, curators, art historians, and art therapists. We may also include architects, animators, commercial artists, set designers, and art editors.

The ear here refers to *sounds*, especially the voice, which needs to be specially trained for singing and the opera and stage performers. Beautiful and expressive *sounds and voice* are the specialty of actors, singers, composers, musicians and poets. Professions in speech and sounds include those of the linguists, speech therapists and artistic animators.

Sweet **smells** are central to the profession of perfumers, fragrance evaluators, food scientists, aromachologists, and sensory analysts. We may also include dog-trainers of canine sniffers.

Specialists in **tastes** include food tasters, flavourists, sommeliers, chefs, even food critics. In modern times, we also have food technologists, pharmacists, medical industrialists and health food scientists.

Knowledge of **the body**, especially in its strength and movement, are necessary for dancers (such as in traditional dances and ballet) and acting (performers and actors). Where the body involves physical

⁸⁵ In the 3 life-cycle (*ti, vaṭṭa*) teaching in relation to dependent arising, *vedanā*, *saññā*, and *viññāṇa* are classified as “karmic fruits” (*vipāka*), whereas *saṅkhāra* is classified as *kamma* itself. This classification of *saṅkhāra* as *kamma* refers exclusively to those times when intention (*cetanā*) is operative. The various mental determinants (within the round of rebirth, *saṃsāra, vaṭṭa*) are classified as mental impurities (*kilesa*).

⁸⁶ See, eg, S 3:59 f, 63 f; S 4:68 f; A 3:413; A 4:385; Pm 1:57.

interaction or a heightened or healing sense of touch, we have massage therapists, textile designers, and those in health care (such as physiotherapists).

2.2.2.3 Mind-based knowledge arises by way of the mind-door (*mano, dvāra*),⁸⁷ that is, knowing mind-objects (*dharmārammaṇa*, or *dharmā*, for short). Within a century of the Buddha's passing Buddhist philosophers had already come up with an impressive classification of knowledge into mind (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*), material form (*rūpa*) and nirvana (*nibbāna*).⁸⁸ This is the foundation of **Abhidhamma** or scholastic Buddhism.

Although some learned scholars proclaim the necessity of Abhidhamma for a perfect understanding of the Dharma, only a handful of specialists are able to master these late teachings, which only very few common people can understand, and which seem to have little use for them. However, it is possible that with the rise of modern psychologists' interest in Buddhist mind teachings, they may be able to promote a more practical understanding of and uses for Abhidhamma.

Then, there is **philosophical knowledge** which attempts to encompass or investigate all of those things known and thought about by the mind. In academic circles and for certain individuals, philosophical speculation is an important part of our learning process. While academic philosophy tends to seek problems in thinking and to create further problems to their solutions, Buddhist **spiritual philosophy** teaches us to think and meditate (be free of those thoughts) so that we end suffering and live happily: *we examine life so that it is worth living and living well*.

Mind-based knowledge is especially advancing today through **the psychological profession** and mental health specialists and carers. Buddhist meditation and Buddhist psychology are special areas of interest especially for the psychology researchers. Beginning in the 20th century, various aspects of Buddhist meditation have been freely incorporated into psychology as part of the mental health diagnosis and healing. This development alone may have profoundly significant effects on how Buddhism is viewed and practised in modern times; perhaps this may open traditional teachers and practitioners to modern avenues and perspectives of seeing and presenting Buddhism and its practices.

2.2.2.4 There is a very special and pervasive kind of knowledge that combines both the sense-based and the mind-based, that is, **aesthetic knowledge** or simply aesthetics. Apparently, this is a topic that has not been covered in detail by anyone. The idea of the beautiful (*sobhana*) in the wholesome sense is found throughout the early Buddhist texts. The suttas famously declare that the Dhamma is "beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, beautiful in the end" (*ādi, kalyāṇa majjhe kalyāṇa pariyosāna, kalyāṇa*).⁸⁹

The Dharma is "beautiful in the beginning" since **moral virtue** is the basis of the spiritual life. The Buddhist moral life should be expressed in the joy of life, that is, respecting life because it can be joyful despite the pains; indeed, because of the pains. There is the joy of respect and love in the lives of others and other beings. A beautiful body is one well restrained in the physical senses, and expresses oneself in a beautiful voice of truth, unity, pleasantness and beneficence.

Beauty is joy, and joy beauty. For the truly happy lay person, there are **the 4 joys** (*sukha*): the joy of work (or having), of using wealth, of being debt-free, and of blamelessness.⁹⁰ As qualities of right livelihood, the 4 joys form part of the features of practical Buddhist moral conduct and virtue for the laity.

Meditation practice and experiences are greatly helped and enhanced by the beauty of moral conduct by freeing us from guilt, fear and concern over moral issues, thus allowing the body to easily feel

⁸⁷ Knowledge obtained by "mind-contact" (*mano, samphassa*).

⁸⁸ For further classification of the known according to Abhidhamma, see Vbh 71 f; Dhs 169; Vism 483 f.

⁸⁹ **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,40.2), SD 8.10.

⁹⁰ **Anaṇa S** (A 4.62), SD 2.2.

inner joy and peace which helps in attaining concentration, leading to dhyana. In fact, one of the key developments in the bodhisattva Siddhattha's struggle for awakening is the realization that dhyana is a joy worth cultivating, a joy not to be feared.⁹¹

Finally, **the greatest beauty** is clearly that found in being free from ignorance, craving and suffering. Nirvana is the highest joy and mental beauty since nirvana is free "from all feeling" and beyond time and space. Being free from all feeling, nirvana is suffering-free; being beyond time and space, nirvana is the death-free. In any case, nirvana is unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), which makes it naturally and truly *sub specie aeternitatis* [2.2.1.1].

2.2.2.5 The suttas and canonical texts, however, prefer a simple **fourfold typology of knowledge** gained through the sense-doors, that is:⁹²

1. **the seen** (*diṭṭha*), that is, all visible objects (*rūp'ārammaṇa*) and knowledge obtained by way of seeing and observing;
2. **the heard** (*suta*), sounds and knowledge gained by way of hearing;
3. **the sensed** (*muta*), "the experienced," that is, smells, tastes, and touches, or what is perceived by way of the nose, tongue, and body.
4. **the known** (*viññāta*), that is, mind objects (*dhamm'ārammaṇa*): whatever is known by way of the mind.

The first 3 are knowledges⁹³ by way of the 5 senses. This threefold division is made because seeing and hearing are critical sources of knowledge and involve an extensive range of activity; these two factors are thus distinguished from the rest. The 3 remaining factors, pertaining to *the nose, tongue, and body*, share a common attribute, that is, perception is accomplished when the sense-objects—smells, tastes, and touches—literally make *contact* with the respective sense-bases. This differs from the eye and the ear, which perceive objects that do not "touch" the sense-base (visual objects rely on light and sounds rely on energy waves as the means of conveying information).⁹⁴

2.2.2.6 Technically, the knowledge obtained by way of the 5 senses is very limited. However, they serve as the main modes of informing and communicating amongst most ordinary people. In this context, however, this knowledge is defined in a broad, general sense:

Diṭṭha refers both to that which is seen and to all knowledge dependent on the eye and on seeing, including the mind's interpretation of visual data. Yet this interpretation of data still remains on a direct and basic level, without any embellishment.

Suta refers to that which is heard and to all knowledge derived from hearing. This includes speech, language, and sounds (such as music, animal sounds, vibrations) which the mind "reads" or interprets on a basic level, but which has not yet undergone additional conceptualization.

⁹¹ **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31-32/1:246 f) + SD 49.4; SD 41.4 (2.2.3).

⁹² The set *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is found frequently in the suttas and texts, eg, S 4:73,4-11; Vbh 429 f; Nm 55,-22-24. See also D 3:135,9 = A 2:23,30, 2:25,2 + *passim* = It 121 f; M 1:135 f, 3:261; S 3:202,13, 204,17; A 5:318, 321 f, 353-358. As compounds: M 2:231 f; Sn 209 f; Nm 9, 50 f, 53 f, 133 f, 189 f, 203 f, 227, 245, 247, 333 f; Nc 16. As a threefold classification of *diṭṭhi*, *suta* and *muta*: S 1:202 f; Sn 155, 175 f; Nm 95 f, 106, 110 f, 315; Nc 28.

⁹³ Early Buddhism often speaks of different kinds of knowledge. It facilitates understanding their special functions when we see them as actually separate form of "knowledges." This is living English in the study of Buddhism.

⁹⁴ The eye (*cakkhu*) and the ear (*sota*) perceive objects that have "not reached (the sense-bases)": *appatta,visaya-g,gāhika/appatta,gāhika*. The nose (*ghāna*), tongue (*jivhā*), and body (*kāya*) perceive objects that "reach (the sense-bases)," *sampatta,visaya-g,gāhika/sampatta,gāhika*. See Abhs 6.6-8; VismT:Be 2:86-112.

Muta, too, should be understood in this way. The smelt covers whatever is experienced by way of smell or aroma. Those skilled in this include wine tasters, perfumers, food critics, and even certain animals like dogs. Those who know through taste include individuals with a heightened sensitivity to taste, particularly bitterness. They have a more intense perception of flavours, including bitter tastes, and may have more taste buds or more sensitive taste buds.

Of the various ways we know things or experience the world, the most common must be that of touch or sensitivity to bodily feeling. Between people and significant others, physical touch often enhances emotional closeness and comfort, even joy. That's because physical touch often induces the release of oxytocin, the love hormone, which can help reduce stress and promote feelings of happiness and relaxation.

Technically, this knowledge pertaining to the 5 senses—*diṭṭha*, *suta*, and *muta*—depends on “perception by way of the 5 senses” (*pañca, dvārika, saññā*). All knowledge beyond that is included in the term *viññāta*: knowledge arising through the mind-door.

2.2.3 Perception and knowledge

2.2.3.1 The knowledge that brings wisdom or that which is needed for developing wisdom is referred to as “**dharma to be cultivated**” (*bhāvetabba, dhamma*). Since consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is a form of knowledge simply “to be understood” (*pariññeyya, dhamma*), it is not included as a factor for promoting wisdom. In other words, when we are conscious of any of the sense-objects or even a mind-object (a thought), we merely “know” it, and perhaps do things with it, without learning anything new from it.

Only when we learn something from it, or that learning makes us a more wholesome person, who brings goodness to others, too, then, that knowing is **wisdom**. We have *cultivated* that knowledge and that knowledge has cultivated *us*. We not only know what has arisen through our sense-doors, but that knowledge makes us *see impermanence, suffering or nonself* as the true nature of that experience.

2.2.3.2 Psychologically, **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*) [2.1.3.3] are the tools or means of knowledge. The most basic kinds of knowledge occur at almost every conscious moment in **2 ways**: as body (*rūpa*) and mind (*nāma*). **Body** is the form aggregate (that is, the primary elements, earth, water, fire and wind) which refers to whatever external material form that we perceive through our sense-faculties.

These senses are only the “doors” through which data enters **the mind** which then processes it into “objects” (*dhamma*) or “something” (*kiñcana*). Our most common form of knowledge, then, is “**name-and-form**” (*nāma, rūpa*) by which we know the world and ourselves. This knowledge is thus that of *mentality projected onto materiality*: we have minded the world.

Based on this understanding, we can now ramify knowledge into **5 kinds**, corresponding to each of the 5 aggregates. In this classification, knowledge is a mental state (*nāma, dhamma*), with aspects of knowledge found in 3 of the “mental aggregates” (*nāma-k, khandha*), namely, the perception aggregate (*saññā-k, khandha*), the formation aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*), and the consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇa-k, khandha*). Technically, these are perceptual knowledge, conative knowledge and cognitive knowledge.

2.2.3.3 Early Buddhism does not directly regard **feeling** (*vedanā*) as knowledge in the conventional sense. It is however seen as a crucial aspect of experience and a component of knowledge. We see what we know as being pleasant or unpleasant, and thus as desirable or undesirable. Thus, for most of us, feeling or hedonic tone only colours our knowledge with emotion, but adds nothing new (nothing useful anyway) to our store of knowledge.

Thus, in Buddhist psychology, we do *not* properly speak of “affective knowledge” but of **affective experience**. The following passage on the Buddha’s teaching on feelings from **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15) is instructive:

Ānanda, when one feels [experiences] **a pleasant feeling**,
 one does not, at the same moment, feel a painful feeling or a neutral feeling.
 At that moment, one feels *only* a pleasant feeling.
 Ānanda, when one feels **a painful feeling**,
 one does not, at the same moment, feel 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. (D 15,28/2:66), SD 5.17

The Buddha then states that each of these feelings—the pleasant, the painful and the neutral—is “*impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to ending*.” Hence, none of these feelings—no feeling—can be regarded as “(my) self.” Thus, we have no knowledge of “feeling” (as a noun) except “feeling pleasurable,” “feeling painful,” or “feeling neither (neutral)” —all these feelings are really *verbs* (that is, actions or conditions).

Provisionally, we may speak of “the pleasant or beautiful” (*sobhana*); we may even compare feelings. But strictly speaking, we are comparing only our memories (perceptions) of feelings. In other words, we are speaking of **beauty**, that is, our conception and philosophy of beauty or **aesthetics**, which brings us to a totally new field of Buddhist studies in its own right.⁹⁵

2.2.3.4 On the positive side, we thus have **3 kinds of knowledge** for cultivating wisdom: *the perceptual, the conative and the cognitive*. In the order of their cultivation, or of their potency of making us know and see reality, they create the following: perception, view and direct knowledge.

1. Perception (*saññā*). This is knowledge derived from perceiving, remembering, and identifying the attributes and significance of that experience. This knowledge is basically our experience of things as “name-and-form” (*nāma, rūpa*); this is what is stored in our minds. On the positive side, it acts as the tool for thinking and reasoning, as a model for comparing of what we know, and for further understanding of new situations.

Perception as knowledge can be divided into 2 kinds—knowledge of the physical (*rūpa*) and of the mental (*nāma*)—as mentioned above [2.2.3.2]. The perception arising in the normal cognitive process—both basic perception and the perception attending to the growth of understanding and wisdom—is simply a matter of either knowing or not knowing. This is true even at the various levels of perception, say, from indistinct to lucid perception, from partial to complete perception, or from false to correct perception. This matter thus pertains directly to knowledge and the cultivation of knowledge. This is in direct contrast to the “wild” perception known as “proliferative perception” (*papañca, saññā*) or “defiled perception” (*kilesa, saññā*), which invariably obstructs and distorts wholesome or true knowledge [2.1.5.4].

2. View (*ditṭhi*). This is any kind of reasoned understanding of worldly knowledge, reality on the level of conceptualization; truth mixed with cherished thoughts and opinions. Here, we draw conclusions of some kind which we hold as our own viewpoints. This knowledge may arise from an external

⁹⁵ On Buddhist aesthetics, see SD 46.5 (2.4.2), SD 59.14ab (1.2.3); on Early Buddhist aesthetics of feeling, SD 60.12 (4). See also SD 50.16 (1.1); SD 60.1c (9.8.2 (6)).

source, but it has passed through our mind's screening process so that we see it as our own ("I, me, mine"), regardless of how illogical or unreasonable this knowledge may be.

The most serious cases of wrong views include eternalism (*sassata, diṭṭhi*; the view of some kind of imaginable eternal being or state); annihilationism (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*; that this is our only life and our life ends with it); and the view of non-causality (*ahetuka, diṭṭhi*; a fatalistic view that things happen on account of luck or predetermination).⁹⁶

3. Direct knowledge (*ñāṇa*):⁹⁷ gnosis (Skt, *jñāna*), direct insight into reality; it refers to a pure and lucid knowledge that arises spontaneously in the mind and discerns a particular quality as it really is. It is called "direct" because one experiences the true reality for oneself, and one is able to understand the whole picture of existence.

The term *ñāṇa* is a synonym of *paññā* (wisdom), but the sense of *ñāṇa* here tends to be more restricted; that is, it refers to specific functions and fruits of wisdom, for example:⁹⁸ *kammasa.katā, ñāṇa* (the insight into how beings are the owners of their karma);⁹⁹ *atītaṃsa, ñāṇa* (psychic knowledge of the past)¹⁰⁰ (D 3:273); *saccānulomika, ñāṇa* (knowledge conforming with the truth); *thānāthāna, ñāṇa* (knowledge of the possible and the impossible);¹⁰¹ and *adhimuttika, ñāṇa* (knowledge of the disposition, traits, and beliefs of various beings).¹⁰²

Although there are many levels of *ñāṇa*, including mistaken knowledge or incomplete knowledge, they can all be referred to as "pure" or "genuine" forms of knowledge, because they are not adulterated by self-identity or self-notion. Occasionally, *ñāṇa* arises as a consequence of reasoned thought, but this knowledge exists independent of such thought, because it connects with some aspect of reality that truly exists. This is one distinction between *ñāṇa* and *diṭṭhi* (view). "View-knowledge" or simply "a view" is that which relies on personal beliefs and logical reasoning, whereas *ñāṇa* evinces external aspects of true reality. The point is clear: knowledge needs to be sought or cultivated.

2.2.3.5 We will here examine a few related quotes from the suttas and Commentaries related to perception (*saññā*) and knowledge (*ñāṇa*).

The Cūḷa Viyūha Sutta (Sn 4.12) records the Buddha as stating how views arise from perception:

*na h'eva saccāni bahūni nānā
aññatra saññāya niccāni loke*

There are surely not many or diverse truths,
except by way of perceiving permanence in the world.

*takkañ ca diṭṭhīsu pakappayitvā
saccaṃ musā ti dvaya, dhammaṃ āhu*

Having devised reasoning, they have views,
they speak two things: the true and the false.

(Sn 886/173)

The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (D 9) records the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda's question on which arises first: consciousness (*saññā*) or knowledge (*ñāṇa*)? In this context, *saññā* overlaps with the broader sense of consciousness, especially functioning in thinking and meditation. Thus the Buddha answers:

⁹⁶ For such views, see eg **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,3), SD 1.1; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,19), SD 8.10

⁹⁷ On *ñāṇa* as "direct knowledge," see SD 60.1e (11.4).

⁹⁸ For a list of best known direct knowledges with refs, see SD 60.1e (11.4.2).

⁹⁹ *Kammasa.katā, ñāṇa* and *kammasa.katā, ñāṇa* are said to be mundane right view (MA 1:196).

¹⁰⁰ One of the 3 knowledges in time; the other 2 being those of the future (*anāgat'arisa ñāṇa*), and the present (*paccupann'arisa ñāṇa*): **D 34, 1.4(8)/3:275.-**

¹⁰¹ *Thānāthāna, ñāṇa* is said to be the 1st of the Buddha's 10 powers (Nett 94).

¹⁰² *Adhimuttika, ñāṇa* is one of the Buddha's powers (DA 1:49).

Consciousness (*saññā*)¹⁰³ arises first, Potṭhapāda, then knowledge (*ñāṇa*); from the arising of consciousness comes the arising of knowledge.¹⁰⁴ (D 9,20/1:185), SD 7.14

This is one of those interesting passages which reminds us of the rules of contextuality and of polysemy in the Pali texts. We simply need to “think Pali” here: *saññā* is a form of “consciousness” (such as in the term *n’eva,saññā,nāsaññ’āyatana*, “the base of neither perception nor non-perception”).¹⁰⁵

2.2.3.6 In an everyday situation, **perception** (*saññā*) is the basis (or “raw material”) for all thinking and subsequent knowledge. For this reason, both view (*diṭṭhi*) and direct knowledge (*ñāṇa*) rely on perception. It is fairly obvious how view arises from perception. The very perception or discernment of something leads one on to have an opinion about it. The main thing wrong with having such views is that we are stuck with them; we have stopped learning; we grow old without growing up.

Dh 152 A person of little learning [who hears little] ages like a yoked ox;
His flesh grows, his wisdom grows not.

Although perceiving the state or features of things is useful in everyday life, perception is selective and often acts to conceal or eclipse other features of these objects. If people fail to examine these dynamics, they may be deceived by perception or allow it to obstruct wisdom. This is, in fact, the case for most people. The causes for wrong views include false perceptions and a wrong application of perception.

The Param’atthaka Sutta (Sn 4.5) describes the arhat who is a silent sage (*muni*) as follows:

Sn 802

<i>tass’idha diṭṭhe va sute n’atthi</i>	There is for him <u>not even a tiny notion</u>	<i>b</i>
<i>pakappitā n’atthi aṇū pi saññā</i>	<u>formed regarding the seen, heard or sensed here.</u>	<i>a</i>
<i>taṁ brāhmaṇaṁ diṭṭhim anādiyānaṁ</i>	How could anyone here in this world categorize him,	<i>d</i>
<i>ken’idha lokasmiṁ vikappayeyya</i>	that brahmin who clings not to any view?	<i>c</i>

Commenting on **Sn 802**, the canonical commentary, **Mahā Niddesa**, says:

For an arhat whose influxes are destroyed, there is no view arising from perception, with perception as forerunner, with perception as dominant (*saññā’dhipateyyatā*), by way of perception, what is thought up, imagined, fashioned, established by perception—[a view] about the seen or purity through the seen, about the heard or purity through the heard, about the sensed or purity through the sensed. These do not exist ... they have been burnt up by the fire of knowledge.¹⁰⁶ (Nm 110,30-111,7 on Sn 802/157)

From the following **Magandiya Sutta** verse (Sn 841) and its **Mahā,niddesa** commentary we are told that from perception arises both views as well as wisdom:

¹⁰³ In the Sutta, the wanderer Potṭhapāda apparently takes *saññā* as broadly referring to “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*). As I have stated, *saññā* overlaps with the broader sense of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), esp functioning in thinking and meditation. See D 9,20.2 n (SD 7.14)

¹⁰⁴ *Saññ’uppadā ca pana ñāṇ’uppadō hoti.*

¹⁰⁵ In Abhidhamma, *citta* is the usual term for “consciousness” and “the mind.” See eg Abhs.

¹⁰⁶ Cf UA 373, which states: “*Saññā* is the *nimitta* (“sign,” “point of arising”) of proliferative view (*diṭṭhi,papañca*).”

Sn 841 *diṭṭhiñ ca nissāya anupucchamāno
māgandiyā ti bhagavā
samuggahītesu pamoham āgā
ito ca nāḍakkhi aṇum pi saññam
tasmā tuvaṃ momuhato dahāsi*

Dependent upon view¹⁰⁷ you are inquiring,
Māgandiyā, said the Blessed One.
you are infatuated in what has been tightly grasped;
but you've not an iota of perception (of inner peace).¹⁰⁸
Hence you regard it as simply confusing [silly].

The **Mahā, niddesa** explains the verse thus:

Then, rejecting his questions based on that view, the Blessed One spoke on the verse:

“Magandiyā, **asking** again and again, **dependent upon a view—you are infatuated**—over these speculative views that you have **tightly grasped**. But from this inner peace spoken of by me, of the Dharma teaching, **you've not the slightest notion**, a correct perception. For that reason, you regard this Dharma as **simply confusing**.”

You are infatuated in what has been tightly grasped: “You are deluded, confused by that same view that you grasp, seize, adhere to, cling to, resolve on.

But you've not the slightest notion: From this inner peace, or from this practice, or from this teaching of the Dharma, you have not gained a correct perception, an accurate perception, a perception of the characteristics, a perception of causes, a perception of possibilities. How then comes knowledge?¹⁰⁹ Thus from this, **you've not an iota of perception**.”

Alternatively:¹¹⁰ “You've not gained even an iota of impermanence or conformity with the perception of impermanence, or of suffering or conformity with the perception of suffering, or of nonself or conformity with the perception of nonself, or of even as much as just the arising of perception or a perception-sign.¹¹¹ How then comes knowledge? Thus from this, **you've not an iota of perception**.”

Hence you regard it as simply confusing. For that reason you consider it an utterly confused teaching, a foolish teaching, a deluded teaching, an ignorant teaching, an evasive teaching”
(Nm 1:193,6-194,8 on Sn 841)

2.2.4 Useful knowledge

2.2.4.1 The Buddhist texts speak of the nun Paṭācārā,¹¹² who, by mindfully observing how, while washing her feet, the water ran off into the ground. She cultivated **insight knowledge** (*vipassanā*), and

¹⁰⁷ **Sn 841a** reads *diṭṭhiñ ca* (sg) while **Nm** lemma has *diṭṭhīsu* (pl); both senses are applicable, ie, with *diṭṭhiṃ* as a collective n, “view.”

¹⁰⁸ Based on *ito ajjhata, santito paṭipattito vā dhamma, desanato vā* (Nm 1:193,21 f). Though the sentence is ablative, a genitive reading “of this” fits English idiom better, as Jayawickrama has done: “of this (inward tranquillity) you have not gained the minutest perception” (Sn:J 841, p330).

¹⁰⁹ “[Y]ou have not gained” (*saññā* terms): *yutta, saññam vā patta, saññam vā lakkhaṇa, saññam vā karaṇa, saññam vā ṭhāna, saññā vā na paṭilabhasi. kuto ñāṇam. evam pi ito nāḍakkhi aṇum pi saññam*. (Nm 1:193,22-25)

¹¹⁰ From here + the whole quote: “Alternatively, ‘You have not gained’ etc (*saññā* terms): *athavā aniccaṃ vā anicca, saññā’nulomaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā dukkha, saññā’nulomaṃ vā anattaṃ vā anatta, saññā’nulomaṃ vā saññā’uppāda, mattaṃ vā saññā, nimittaṃ vā na paṭilbhāsi. kuto ñāṇam. evam pi ito nāḍakkhi aṇum pi saññam*. (Nm 1:193,26-194,2)

¹¹¹ Apparently, this key line—*saññā’uppāda, mattaṃ vā saññā, nimittaṃ vā* (Nm 1:193,29)—is not tr in Sn:B 1112.

¹¹² See **Sikkha-t, taya S 2** (A 3.89) and Tha 396 (SD 47.17 (2.3.3)). The pair of terms is used in death reflection, but can also be applied cosmologically to mean “as on earth so in heaven”; since impermanence is true in all the world, it is so in heaven, too. Whatever exists must cease; impermanence is universal.

later in her dwelling, putting out her oil-lamp, she gained arhathood.¹¹³ One could well be watching falling leaves and develop insight knowledge and discern impermanence. Such knowledge arises as a result of numerous perceptions, for example: perceptions of life in general and how things exist; perceptions of aging and decay; perceptions of bodily and mental deterioration, death, and the break-up of things; and perceptions of “above” (*uddham*) and “below” (*adho*).¹¹⁴

The ability to see the relationship between these various perceptions can give rise to wholesome knowledge, that is, wisdom. We may also take an example of worldly knowledge (*lokiya, ñāṇa*): although no apple actually fell on **Isaac Newton**’s head, it was said that in 1665 or 1666 Newton, while having tea in his garden on a warm day, *saw an apple drop from a tree* and wondered why that apple should always descend perpendicularly to the ground.¹¹⁵

Understandably, Newton then developed insight into gravity. His insight relied on numerous perceptions, such as perceptions of “falling,” of convergence, of space and force; and perceptions of attraction, mobility, release, suspension, linearity, trajectory, etc. The ability to relate these various perceptions gave rise to his insight into gravity.

2.2.4.2 Knowledge (*ñāṇa*) may also give rise to wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), but better views tend to arise on account of previous knowledge and present mindfulness. The suttas illustrate this with the story of the brahma **Baka**, who was able to recall the birth of beings apparently infinitely into the past. He observed the countless births and deaths of other beings, while he himself seemed to have remained the same. He thus developed the view that the brahma heaven is permanent and eternal, and that he (Brahma) is the creator of all things.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Newton, after his discovery of gravity, used this insight to further observe natural phenomena, but his vision and understanding was not only not comprehensive but he was bent on proving that a God existed behind all the science and numbers in the universe. Since gravitation was a theory, it could and must be disproved (falsifiability, ironically, is mark of good science).

Then came **Albert Einstein** and his general theory of relativity, which simply states that *gravity bends light*. To bend light and actually see it bend, an object would have to be more massive than earth and light sources with known relative positions opposite to where the observers are. In fact, Einstein used general relativity to predict those conditions would be met in the 6-minute-51-second eclipse on 29 May 1919.¹¹⁷ If Einstein were right, a star known to be blocked by the sun would be visible during the eclipse because its light would bend in the sun’s gravitational field.¹¹⁸

Not only did this confirm general relativity, but it also upset Newton’s applecart. Well, actually, Einstein did not take away Newton’s apples; rather, Einstein provided a more comprehensive framework for explaining gravity. But since science must always measure the universe, in every generation we are likely to get those who will make better calculations based on the genius of the past.

While science *measures* the universe, Buddhism sees the universe as being immeasurable. **Suffering** is real but immeasurable; what is immeasurable is unfalsifiable. We would not say that Buddhism is “bad science,” but rather Buddhism is *not* science. But like science, Buddhism uses the senses to see the true nature of the world, but unlike science, Buddhism wants us to examine our tools and go beyond numbers

¹¹³ On the nun Paṭācārā, see Thī 115 f; DhA 8.12/2:269 (SD 43.3).

¹¹⁴ “As above, so below” (*uddham adho*) is part of reflection on perception in meditation; see (**Iddih, pāda**) **Vi-bhaṅga S** (S 51.20, 17/5:277 f), SD 28.14.

¹¹⁵ [Isaac Newton: Who He Was, Why Apples Are Falling \(nationalgeographic.org\)](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/isaac-newton-who-he-was-why-apples-are-falling/).

¹¹⁶ See **Brahmā Baka S** (S 6.4/1:142 f), SD 11.6; **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49/1:326-329), SD 11.7; SD 57.10 (1.4.2.5) n.

¹¹⁷ <https://eclipsewise.com/solar/SEprime/1901-2000/SE1919May29Tprime.html>. 3 May 2025.

¹¹⁸ John J **Dvorak**, *Mask of the Sun: the science, history, and forgotten lore of eclipses*. New York (N.Y.): Pegasus Books, 2017. Ron **Cowen**, *Gravity’s Century*, Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard Univ Press. 2019:2 f.

(*saṅkhyā*). Perhaps we may say that science is taking a very long journey in seeing the universe as it is; the Buddha has already seen it for himself. However, since I'm no scientist, surely, I would be proven *scientifically* wrong. I have no reason to disagree.

2.2.5 Types of knowledge

2.2.5.1 The most significant difference between knowledge and insight, between truth and reality, is that we are susceptible to attachment to knowledge; they then become “views” (*diṭṭhi*). Insight and reality, on the other hand, simply inspire us to “let go” of the world, to let go of that almighty “some thing” we want or want to prove. Insight into reality brings us inner peace, seeing harmony in all things, even in suffering. More than just sight and vision, this awakening brings us insight and wisdom.

Hence, *views are always troubling*, and the fact is that we rarely know this until it is very late or too late. The most common reason for this oversight is that we are “viewing” reality like the blind men and the elephant in the famous parable of **the Nanā Tittthiyā Sutta** (U 6.4):¹¹⁹ *we tend to see a part we favour as the whole that we are blind to*. A good and kind teacher would perhaps tell us that the blind men went on to bring one another to “see” one another’s elephant parts. Then they discover or imagine what an amazing animal is an elephant. Views, then, should invite us to find out more about where they came from and what the bigger picture is. Examining views in that way leads to the arising of knowledge (*ñāṇa*).

In fact, many views arise from investigation and contemplation, and can be highly logical and deeply reasonable. Then they become established as beliefs in the minds of intelligent persons and thinkers. On the other hand, if one is not attached to these views for some reason, but is willing and able to listen to others and to apply wise reflection, there is a good chance that a deeper, even higher, knowledge will arise, removing obstacles in the path of wisdom and paving the way to spiritual progress and awakening.

2.2.5.2 Whether there is a view (*diṭṭhi*) or there is direct knowledge (*ñāṇa*), **perceptions** (*saññā*) arise, and they can act as the basis for further contemplation and understanding. The difference here is that views tend to create *wrong conclusions* or *wrong perceptions*, whereas direct knowledge helps to give correct and accurate perceptions and to dispel misperceptions. This is when it benefits us to know how perception changes or evolves into knowledge.

We have already studied at length the nature of perception (*saññā*), view (*diṭṭhi*) and knowledge (*ñāṇa*) [2.2.3.3]. Now each of them can in turn be cultivated into their own kind of wisdom (*paññā*). They grow into **the 3 kinds of wisdom** in this manner:¹²⁰

		<u>arising from</u>
1. philosophical wisdom	<i>cintā.maya,paññā</i>	one’s own reflection and reasoning;
2. intellectual wisdom	<i>suta.maya,paññā</i>	learning or knowledge transmission from others;
3. spiritual wisdom	<i>bhāvanā.maya,paññā</i>	spiritual cultivation or personal realization.

Besides these 3 main methods of gaining wisdom, there are numerous other ways for cultivating wisdom. To gain the 3rd kind of wisdom, the spiritual, the numerous methods include:

listening (*savana*); inquiry and review (*paripucchā*); conversation, discussion, and debate (*sācakchā*); observing and watching (*passana*); scrutiny (*nijjhāna*); wise reflection (*yoniso,manasikāra*; *yoniso,upa-parikkhā*); evaluation (*tulanā*); examination, investigation, and analysis (*vīmaṃsā*); experimentation and selection (*vijaya*); repetition (*āsevana*); cultivation (*bhāvanā*); and sustained practice (*bahulī,karaṇa*).

¹¹⁹ **Nānā Tittthiyā S** (U 6.4,10-19) + SD 40a.14 (1.1).

¹²⁰ **D 33**,1.10(43)/3:219 f; Vbh 324 f.

Reflecting or thinking (*cintā*), learning (*suta*), and training (*bhāvanā*) help to generate, improve, and refine perception (*saññā*), view (*diṭṭhi*), and knowledge (*ñāṇa*).¹²¹

2.2.5.3 Wherever we may be, we often notice that people gather information or knowledge by **hearing** (*suta*) from others. In modern times, we can add that knowledge also often comes from **the seen** (*diṭṭha*), that is, through *reading* the printed word or illustrations whether on paper (eg books), the screen (computers) or the mass media (the radio, TV, the phone and so on).

Modern knowledge, as in ancient times, still arises familiarly by way of **thinking** (*vitakka*) and **reflections** (*cintā*). Even after being informed by the various sources mentioned above, we still generate our own views regarding them.

Wisdom (*paññā*)—good or useful knowledge—arises from personal cultivation or practical application (*bhāvanā*); it arises through self-learning or is inherent in certain individuals. The distinct and concrete forms of knowledge arising in a person’s mind, however, are the 3 kinds of knowledge, that is to say, perception (*saññā*), view (*diṭṭhi*), and knowledge (*ñāṇa*). These 3 are the end-results of learning, thinking, and personal cultivation (practical training).

Perception, view, and direct knowledge, when developed and expressed, can have a powerful impact on the lives of others. **Perception** is highly influential in the cognitive process, in discerning and comprehending the world, and in generating other forms of knowledge. **View**, especially from religious beliefs and various ideologies, including personal values, acts as the guideline for much of people’s thinking, conduct and lifestyle.

Knowledge, especially direct knowledge, is the most pristine and profound form of knowledge; it is the fruit of the highest wisdom attainable by us. It is able to calm our minds, purify and stabilize our emotions, strengthen our character, and create or change our worldview (*loka, dassana*) and outlook on life (*jīva, dassana*). Its effects on our views and conduct are more definite and lasting than the effects of views (*diṭṭhi*).

Let us now briefly examine how these 3 kinds of knowledge socialize us as humans.

2.2.6 Knowledge as a socializing factor

2.2.6.1 Individuals may know things by and for themselves—just as you are reading this paper. Further, with what we know we often communicate with others, and others do the same with us. Thus knowledge not only builds us intellectually, skillfully and in other ways, but also socializes us. It brings us together or it keeps us apart from others by influencing the way we think, act or live.

Knowledge, in short, plays an important role in human **social affairs**, such as in communication, sharing information, research, symbolism, social rituals, gestures of respect, social affiliations, and the transmission of social heritage. It keeps people together or lets them live, work and enjoy leisure together creatively, and to advance as a community, a culture or a nation.

The knowledge that promotes socializing is of **3 kinds**, based on its source; that is, by the seen, the heard and the known. By “**the seen**” is meant whatever we learn from reading and the social media (such as the Internet, the news, and advertisements); by “**the heard**,” we learn through hearsay, schooling, religion, public information and mass media; and by “**the known**” is meant what we learn from our own experiences, education, researches and understanding. All these 3 forms of knowledge work together, influencing one another, so that our views often change or are modified by circumstances.

The suttas mention these 3 forms of knowledge, for example, in **the Magandiya Sutta** (Sn 4.9) and **the Nanda Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.8) from the Sutta, nipāta, perhaps the oldest text of the Pali canon:

¹²¹ These supplementary factors are found *passim* throughout the texts. In **Caṅkī S** (M 95), they form part of the “12-step training” leading to realizing the truth (M 95,20-33/2:174-176), SD 21.15.

<p>Sn 840 <i>no ce kira diṭṭhiyā na sutiya na ñāṇena</i> <i>iti magandiyo</i> <i>silab-b, batenā, pi visuddhim āha</i> <i>adiṭṭhiyā assutiya aññāṇā</i> <i>asīlatā abbatā no pi tena</i> <i>maññe-m-ahaṃ momuham eva dhammaṃ</i> <i>diṭṭhiyā eke paccenti suddhim</i></p>	<p>If one says that purity is not by <u>view</u>, by <u>hearing</u> [learning], by knowledge, (said Magandiya,) nor by moral conduct and vows; nor by lack of view, of learning, of knowledge, of moral conduct and vows; not by that, too; I think this doctrine is utterly confused. Some fall back on purity by means of view.</p>
<p>Sn 1078 <i>na diṭṭhiyā na sutiya na ñāṇena</i> <i>mun'idha nanda kusalā vadanti</i> <i>viseni, katvā anighā nirāsā</i> <i>caranti ye te munayo ti brūmi</i></p>	<p>Not by <u>view</u>, nor by <u>hearing</u>, nor by <u>knowledge</u>,¹²² Nanda, do the skilled speak of a muni here. They are munis, I say, who live remote, <i>d</i> untroubled, without wishes. <i>c</i></p>

2.2.6.2 These 3 kinds of **social types of knowledge**—the kinds of knowledge that the public are often subject to—can be described as follows as *suta*, *diṭṭhi* and *ñāṇa*:¹²³

1. Suta (or *suti*): knowledge that is heard, learned, or transmitted from others. This is the most common way in which the history, traditions, teachings, information, beliefs and mythology of a community or society are handed down over time.

It can be subdivided further into 2 kinds:

A. Knowledge communicated among humans. Buddhism considers this knowledge and learning to be of vital importance. In the context of wisdom cultivation, it is called “instruction by others” (*parato, ghosa*; literally, the “voice of others”).¹²⁴ Ideally, this is an active part of spiritual friendship, a fellowship of learning and positive emotions.¹²⁵

Wholesome instruction is given “great emphasis in the teachings, as a basis and condition for right view (*sammā, diṭṭhi*).”¹²⁶ This knowledge (*suta*) includes formal schooling, information from the media, printed texts, and recorded history. Even the texts of the suttas in the Tipiṭaka are regarded as *suta*; for example, most of the suttas open with phrase, “Thus have I heard” (*evam me sutam*).

B. The knowledge that some religions proclaim to have been revealed and disclosed by a supreme deity (used by a religion as a means of social control). The brahmins, for example, taught that the Vedas were directly transmitted by their supreme God, Brahmā. Interestingly, when Brahmā was converted by the Buddha, the brahmins seemed to turn to new Supreme deities, such as Viṣṇu and Śiva.

In Pali, this form of knowledge is usually referred to as *suti* (“the heard”) corresponding to the Sanskrit *śruti*. In Buddhism, however, this knowledge is not considered to have any unique distinction

¹²² Comy: “Knowledge” (*ñāṇa*), ie, of the 8 attainments (*aṭṭha samāpatti*) or the 5 superknowledges (*pañcābhiññā*) or wrong knowledge (*micchā, ñāṇa*). “The skilled” (*kusala*) are those well versed in various Dharma teachings, esp the path, fruits and nirvana (Nc:Be 113).

¹²³ This classification is based on reading **Sn 840/164 f**, **1078/207 f**; and explained at Nm 187 f and Nc 26. These refs are in verse, and the 3 kinds of knowledge are listed in the order of *diṭṭhi*, *suti* and *ñāṇa*. They have been rearranged according to the sequence we have used earlier [eg 2.2.5.2].

¹²⁴ **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,13), SD 35.1; **Āsā Vagga**, A 2.11.7; **Yoniso Manasikāra Sampadā S** (S 45.55) + SD 34.12 (2); **Vicikicchā**, SD 12.8 (2.1.2)

¹²⁵ **Upaḍḍha S** (S 45.2) & SD 34.9 (2.1.3).

¹²⁶ See Payutto 2021: ch 13, on the preliminary stage of spiritual training (1st factor: spiritual friendship).

and is thus included in the term *suta*. In the light of wisdom, it is not attributed to any special value; the difference lies purely in its content.

2. *Diṭṭhi*: views, opinions; doctrines, beliefs; theories. They refer to conclusions that one draws about an event, situation or state, real or imagined. This understanding is associated with personal bias, conditioning, affinities and attachments. When systematically propagated, it has the potential of projecting a meme¹²⁷ or sense of “being apart” from others. Socially, such knowledge tends to create exclusive or elitist groups, even the idea of a superior race allegedly favoured by some Deity or deity. When personal beliefs extend outwards, and people declare, proclaim or impose their views on others, others may adopt these beliefs, giving rise to factionalism and the creation of classes, institutions, religious sects and, with that, the alienated and the marginalized.

There are many Pali synonyms for the word *diṭṭhi* (Sanskrit: *drṣṭi*). The most important ones are: *khanti* (“preference,” “preferred view”); *ruci* (“liking,” “pleasing principle”); and *laddhi* (“acquired idea,” “dogma,” “tenet,” “religious belief”).¹²⁸

3. *Ñāṇa*: gnosis; direct knowledge; insight; pure knowledge; knowledge in accord with truth; wisdom resulting in a specific truth; comprehensive knowledge of a particular matter. *Ñāṇa* is the highest form of human knowledge that is of vital importance, personally, socially and spiritually. Both in its mundane and transcendent forms, *ñāṇa* is the driving force for the cultivation and development of “noble qualities” (*ariya, dhamma*). The highest *ñāṇa* is referred to as *bodhi* or *bodhi, ñāṇa*, “awakening knowledge.” The Buddha realized “supreme self-awakening” (*sammā, sambodhi, ñāṇa*), giving rise to Buddha-Dhamma as the knowledge of spiritual liberation.

2.2.6.3 The early Buddhist texts also give other, miscellaneous terms for various forms of knowledge which are regarded as a set or as related. For example, there is this group of 5 kinds of knowledge that are often used as means of social control or attributing charisma to a leader or a teacher:¹²⁹

1. oral communication (*anussava itiha iti, kirā paramparā*): knowledge handed down as traditional oral information, hearsay, lineage; including news reports, listening, schooling, and oral transmission.¹³⁰
2. textual authority (*piṭaka, sampadā*): textual knowledge or scriptural authority, especially when taught as school curricula, a teaching syllabus, religious catechism or scripture.
3. rationalization (*takka naya ākāra, parivitakka*): knowledge derived through reasoning, including applied logic (*takka*), deductive thinking (*anumāna*), and reasoned reflection (*ākāra, parivitakka*).¹³¹

¹²⁷ A “meme” is “an element of a culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means, esp- [ecially] imitation” (OED). See **Memes**, SD 26.3.

¹²⁸ Eg: Nm 64 f, 105, 162, 169 f, 310 f. The most frequent grouping of these terms is that of *diṭṭhi*, *khanti* and *ruci*, eg: V 1:69 f; it occurs often in Nm. These 3 terms are sometimes accompanied by the terms *ajjhāsaya* (“preference”) and *adhippāya* (“purpose, opinion”), eg: Nm 64 f; Nc 43, 50. The largest collection of these synonyms incl: *diṭṭhi*, *khanti*, *ruci*, *ādāya* (“accepted belief”), *dhamma, vinaya* (“doctrine and discipline”), *pāvacana* (“fundamental teaching”), *brahma, cariya* (“the holy life”), and *satthu, sāsana* (“the teacher’s teaching”), eg: Nm 40, 156; Nc 9, 20; Vbh 245 f (in these cases ref is to Buddhism).

¹²⁹ This set of 5 knowledges is listed in foll suttas (not necessarily in the same order): **Sandaka S** (M 76/1:520), SD 35.7.

¹³⁰ M 1:520. Rejected by the Buddha: **S** (A 1:189,8) *mā anussavena mā paramparāya mā iti, kirāya*. Nm 360,21 *mā itih’itihaṃ na iti, kirāya na paramparāya*; UA 356.

¹³¹ *Ākāra, parivitakka* (“consideration of causes”) is the 4th of the 5 ways some recluses and brahmins make their claims over some absolute views about self and the world (**M 102,15/2:234,8, 234,30**), SD 40a.12 ≈ S 2:115,24-117,-

4. persuasive communication (*diṭṭhi, nijjhāna-k, khanti*): knowledge considered compatible with one's views or which one endorses as part of one's personal beliefs or as the tenets of a group or sectarian confession.¹³²
5. personal authority (*sayam abhiññā* or *sakkhi, dhamma*): knowledge arising from personal realization (*atta, paccakkha*); knowledge derived from discerning the truth, from insight formulated into truth. This is knowledge that has been reflected upon with wise judgement, clarified and presented as public teaching.¹³³

The following kinds of knowledge and their usage occurs in every human communication. They should be properly used to communicate facts and information for the deliberation of listener or audience, so that they test them for themselves by their own experience and verification.

2.2.6.4 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (popularly known as the Kālāma Sutta) (A 3.65) gives the following as sources of knowledge that are, at least in themselves, unreliable, that is to say:

“Come, Kālāmas:¹³⁴

4 PROPOSITIONS BASED ON TRADITION:

- (1) Do not go¹³⁵ by **tradition** [aural revelation].¹³⁶
- (2) Do not go by **lineage** [received wisdom].
- (3) Do not go by **hearsay**.
- (4) Do not go by **scriptural authority**.

*mā anussavena
mā paramparāya
mā iti, kirāya
mā piṭaka, sampadānena*

4 TYPES OF REASONING:

- (5) Do not go by **pure reason** [by logic].
- (6) Do not go by **inference** (and deduction).
- (7) Do not go by **reasoned thought** [by specious reasoning].
- (8) Do not go by acceptance of [being **convinced** of] a view after **pondering** on it.

*mā takka, hetu[, gāhena]
mā naya, hetu[, gāhena]
mā ākāra, parivitakkena*

mā diṭṭhi, nijjhāna-k, khantiyā

2 TYPES OF PERSONAL AUTHORITY:

- (9) Do not go by (another's) **seeming ability** [charisma].
- (10) Do not go by the thought, ‘This recluse [holy man] is **our teacher**.’ [‘This recluse is respected by us.’]

mā bhavya, rūpatāya

mā samaṇo garū ti

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas,

‘These things are unwholesome. These things are blamable. These things are censured by the wise. These things, fully undertaken, bring about harm and suffering.’

—Then, Kālāmas, you should abandon them.”

(A 3.65, 3/1:189, *passim*), SD 35.4a (2)

The Buddha then lays down the criteria for the choice of wholesome knowledge thus:

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas, thus:

12 (SA 2:122,25) ≈ 4:138,32 (SA 2:403,21), cf 3:208,23; M 2:170,28 = 218,17; A 1:189,10 (AA 2:305,25) = 2:191,3, 192,1, 193,7; Nm 360,22, 400,14, 482,13; Nc 108,21 (NmA 1:388,7); CA 31,23.

¹³² On *diṭṭhi, nijjhāna-k, khanti*, see M 2:170,28, 171,19+10, 218,21; S 2:115,16+23+27, 4:139,23+30. For similar refs, see prec n.

¹³³ On *sayam abhiññā*: D 1:12,21, 2:71,23, 92,13 f, 153,7, 251 f, 3:55,27, 56,7, 57,10, 76,12, 77,2, 78,25, 102,16, 107,27, 108,17. Numerous occurrences in the 5 Nikāyas: CSCD, using search tag: “saya* abhiññā”.

¹³⁴ For comy details on the foll points and keywords, see SD 35.4a (3).

¹³⁵ Comy interprets as *mā gaṇhiṭṭha*, “Do not take hold of (a notion)” throughout (AA 2:305,20-30).

¹³⁶ Here, “tradition” includes revelations, prophecies and so on.

“These things are unwholesome. These things are blamable. These things are censured by the wise. These things, fully undertaken, bring about harm and suffering.’

—Then, Kālāmas, you should abandon them.

When you know for yourselves, Kālāmas, thus:

‘These things are wholesome.

These things are not blamable.

These things are praised by the wise.

These things, fully undertaken, **bring good and happiness.**’

—Then, Kālāmas, you should live cultivating them.” (A 3.65,9.2/1:19), SD 35.4a (2)

The Buddha then teaches that we should cultivate **the 4 divine abodes**, that is, the 4 social emotions.

- By cultivating **lovingkindness** (*mettā*), we accept ourselves positively just as we are and, in the same spirit, we accept others.
- By cultivating **compassion** (*karuṇā*), we express lovingkindness in our kind actions and wholesome speech, even when the listeners seem not to deserve it. They are in pain (even if they seem not to show it).
- By cultivating **gladness** (*muditā*), we rejoice in the goodness and success of others, especially since they deserve happiness and friendship.
- By cultivating **equanimity** (*upekkhā*), we look on with a calm and clear heart even when others do not seem to appreciate our efforts; or our efforts in lovingkindness, compassion and gladness still leave so much to be done. Karma works in its own way and we should be at peace that we have done our best.

(A 3.65,15/1:192), SD 35,4a (2)]

The Kesa,puttiya Sutta closes with the Buddha’s guarantee that *whether we believe in rebirth and karma or not, so long as our “mind is without enmity thus, without ill will thus, uncorrupted thus, purified thus,”* we would enjoy **4 self-assurances** or spiritual solaces (*assāsa*), as follows:

(1) if karma and rebirth are true	we will have a good rebirth;
(2) if karma and rebirth are false	we will still be happy right here;
(3) if good and bad exist	we face no bad karmic result;
(4) if there is neither good nor bad	we remain pure and unaffected anyway.

Table 2.2.6.4 The 4 self-assurances [A 3.65,16, SD 35.4a (7)]

With or without any God-idea, good is still good.

With the God-idea, believers righteously harm others;

they do the worst evils in God’s name and seek his forgiveness.

Good demands neither faith nor belief, but that we act wisely with love.

No greater love have we than this that we give up the self for the love of all.

Even when good is not returned with good, we already have good in our hearts.

2.3 KNOWLEDGE THAT FREES

2.3.1 Truth, good and reality

2.3.1.1 What we have explored thus far may be regarded as **Buddhist epistemology** or theory of knowledge. This is a very extensive subject, but we seek to see the practical aspects of knowledge and action. We will close by briefly examining true knowledge and false or unhelpful knowledge, and how knowledge frees us from ignorance and suffering.

2.3.1.2 Anyone who seeks to know **truth** (*sacca*) should begin with knowing what is *not* truth. Philosophically, truth is neither good nor bad; it simply refers to whether what we think accords with the “facts.” It depends on who defines these facts or what the facts are really about. A robber chief, for example, may tell his minions that they are robbing the rich and powerful because they have a lot of things. So when they have robbed the rich and powerful, the robber chief praises his minions, “You have done the right thing!”

However, if we consider that everyone has the right *to earn a living, to work or to run a business, to make and save money, and to enjoy it*, then we must also accept that robbing others is wrong. We also know and accept that such an act is **bad or unwholesome** (*akusala*) because the intention is rooted in *greed, hatred or delusion*. Any one of these 3 unwholesome roots is bad for the simple reason that when someone else robs us (for example), he or she will also do so with a mind of *greed, hatred or delusion*.¹³⁷

2.3.1.3 A simple and natural way of arguing why we need **good** (*kusala*) is to begin with understanding that the word *kusala* also means “skillful” (such as being good as a student or at a craft, or being kind to another). The idea of “**skill**” is vital for each of us individually so that we, with our skill or ability, contribute to the wellbeing and prosperity of our family, community, even society and nation.

The idea of **wholesomeness** goes a little deeper: the qualities of *non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion*—or positively, *charity, love and wisdom*—are vital in motivating us to have some skill or live skillfully. To live “**skillfully**” also means that we should *at least not harm others, nor take what is not ours, nor commit sexual misconduct, nor lie, nor mess up our mind*. The reason for this is simple too: we do not want to be killed or harmed by anyone, or lose what we have, or have someone take liberties with our body, or lie to us, or we would rather not mess up our own minds.

What I have outlined here is the nature of **Buddhist morality** (*sīla*) which is the basis for a good society, and the foundation for true individuality by way of mental development that brings concentration and wisdom. Thus, we need a wholesome society so that we can evolve as wholesome individuals; and we need to be wholesome individuals so that we can have a wholesome society. Society, after all, is made up of individuals.

2.3.1.4 From our discussion on good and wholesomeness [2.3.1.2], we may conclude that being good or wholesome (skillful in body, speech and mind) benefits everyone in a society, and we cannot live without society. The fact that I am writing this and you are reading it reflects a very basic characteristic of good society: we communicate with one another, and we learn in the process of communicating.

And what we learn is **true**, which means that we are talking about what **really** is happening, what is making the good society and the true individual possible. We have come quite a long way to understand

¹³⁷ For the sake of argument, we may ask what if someone robs or kills without greed or hatred. This is not an easy question to answer. Just for this essay, let us settle this by saying that it would be delusional to do something *bad* either way.

the nature of truth and reality, and it is all worth our effort. For, this will bring us happiness and creativity, both of which are good for a wholesome society—and for ourselves individually.

2.3.2 Two levels of truth

2.3.2.1 It seems that I have given an oversimplistic explanation of what is *good*, what is *true*, what is *real*. This is just to start us thinking about those important ideas and what early Buddhism has to teach us about them. Good, truth and reality are no easy topics to think about, much less discuss. This is a good place to begin, and in this essay we have gone quite some way in doing so.

The question we may ask now is: How true are those explanations we have given? Let us think about this question and perhaps some clear answers will come to us. I will provide what I think are germane clues and hints from the sutta teachings and their relevant commentaries. We will begin by looking at a very short sutta that gives a profoundly significant teaching.

This is what **the Neyy’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5)¹³⁸ says

5 Bhikshus, there are these 2 who misrepresent the Tathagata. What are the two?

(1) Those who explain a sutta **whose sense is drawn out** (*nīt’attha*) as *to be drawn out* [whose sense is direct as indirect].

(2) Those who explain a sutta whose **sense is to be drawn out** (*neyy’attha*) as *drawn out* [whose sense is indirect as direct].

These, bhikshus, are the 2 who misrepresent the Tathagata.

The Nīt’attha Sutta (A 2.3.6) (using a parallel sutta structure) defines the proper way of reading or explaining the suttas, that is,

“a sutta whose sense is drawn out	as drawn out	[whose sense is direct];
a sutta whose sense is to be drawn out	as to be drawn out	[whose sense is indirect].”

(A 2.3.5 f/1:60), SD 2.6b

The Suttas’ commentaries explain the key terms—*neyy’attha* and *nīt’attha*—as follows (paraphrased):

“**Whose sense is to be drawn out**” (*neyy’attha*) is spoken of as a “person” (*puggala*) or as “persons” (*puggalā*), since “in the ultimate sense” (*param’atthato*) there are *no* “persons,” the sense of “persons” is to be drawn out. The terms used are *implicit* and need to be explained *explicitly*. (AA 2:118,7-21)

“**Whose sense is drawn out**” (*nīt’attha*) speaks of the sense (*attha*) as impermanence, suffering, non-self, and so on. In other words, the teachings are explained in terms of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness), and so on. Here the terms used are *explicit*, directly referring to true reality, that is, the impermanent, and so on. (AA 2:118,22-27)

2.3.2.2 The Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Suttas (A 2.3.5 f) [2.3.2.1] refers to the 2 levels of truth—the implicit (whose sense needs to be drawn out) and the explicit (whose sense has been drawn out—which are better known as “conventional truth” (implicit Dharma terms) and “ultimate or absolute truth” (explicit Dharma terms). Apparently, the teachings of the 2 truths only go as far as **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Suttas**, without going into technical details.

The concept of **the 2 levels of truth** began to take definite shape in **the Kathāvatthu** (Kvu) (the 3rd book of the canonical Abhidhamma) but this text still does not yet give a clear distinction of the 2 terms.

¹³⁸ They are actually 2 suttas—**Neyy’attha S** (A 2.3.5) and **Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.6)—which I have combined since the teachings go together.

The term *sammuti,sacca*¹³⁹ is mentioned at Kvu 311,2, whereas the terms *sacchik'attha,param'attha* ("real and ultimate") and *param'attha* ("the ultimate sense") occur often (Kvu 1-69). The term *sammuti,-sacca*, "conventional truth," is explained in its Commentary,¹⁴⁰ and also in other Commentaries.¹⁴¹

Let us look a bit more closely at **conventional truth** [2.3.3]. In other words, we will examine how we know and convey what we know; that is, what are "**concepts**," "**name**" and "**meaning**." Then, we will close this essay with a summary on ultimate truth [2.3.4].

2.3.3 Name and meaning

2.3.3.1 Conventional truth (*sammuti,sacca*)

Another word for *sammuti,sacca* ("conventional truth") is *vohāra,sacca*, "vernacular truth," that is, consensual truth: truths that have been formulated by common designations or mutually agreed upon. These designations are used as means of communication, for the sake of convenience and general benefit in everyday life. Examples include the designations: "person," "human," "animal," "good person," "bad person," "house," and "book," and the common words like "tree," "water" and "salt." In Abhidhamma, these are called "**concepts**" (*paññatti*).

Of concepts, the *Abhidhamm'attha,saṅgaha* (Abhs)¹⁴² says:

Therein, the material states (*rūpa*) are just **the form aggregate**. Consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*), which comprise the 4 immaterial aggregates and nirvana are the immaterial 5 also called "**name**" (*nāma*). What remains are **concepts**, which are twofold: concept as *that which is made known*, and concept as *that which makes known*.

(Abhs 8.29)¹⁴³

Although concepts are about conventional reality, not about ultimate reality, **the Puggala,paññatti** (the 4th book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka) still includes them in the Abhidhamma. In order to understand ultimate reality, we must begin with an understanding of conventional reality.

¹³⁹ While Payutto (*Dict of Buddhism*, 1972-75, 1978, Thai ed) prefers *sammāti-sacca*, *sammāti-desanā*, etc, I have here foll **PED** which uses *sammuti,sacca*, but lists *sammāta* as past part, without mentioning *sammāti*. **SED** 1116c only gives "1. *saṁvṛit*" foll by *saṁvṛita*, "covered, shut up ... " (a sense common in Mahāyāna texts); also *saṁ-mata*, "thinking together ... agreed," which is cognate with P *sammāta* (SED 1180a). **BHSD** 541b gives both *saṁvṛita* and *saṁvṛiti* (cognate with P *saṁvuta*, "restrained, controlled") = *saṁvara*). See Payutto 2021:72 n41, translator's n.

¹⁴⁰ Kvu 310,32-311,31 *sammuti.ñāṇa,kathā*; explained in its Comys: KvuA 84,5-16; PañcA: Be 187,5-14 *sammuti,-ñāṇa,katha vaṇṇanā*, Se 241,11-242,2 *sammāti,ñāṇa,katha vaṇṇanā*.

¹⁴¹ Eg, MA 1:217 = SA 2:13; DhA 3:403; DhsMūlT 165, 280; DhsAnuT 328]; VismT:Be 9.5/1:377; UA 396; ItA 1:162. For details, see Abhs 8.29-32 (tr Abhs:BRS 325-328).

¹⁴² **Abhs** was compiled by Anuruddha, a monk from Kañcīpura (S India), around the turn of the 11th cent. Its Comys are: **Abhidhamm'attha,saṅgaha Tīkā** or Porāṇa Tīkā, "the Old (Sub)Commentary" (Navavimalabuddhi of Sri Lanka. 12th cent); **Abhidhamm'attha Vibhāvinī Tīkā** (Sumangalasami, 12th cent), the most widely used comy; **Saṅkhepa Vaṇṇanā** by Saddhamma Jotipāla (Chapada) of Burma (15th cent); Ledi Sayadaw's **Paramattha,dīpani Tīkā** (1897), which criticizes the *Vibhāvinī Tīkā* on 325 points. **Aṅkura Tīkā** (Vimala Sayadaw) defends *Vibhāvinī* against Ledi's criticisms. **Navanīta Tīkā** by Indian scholar Dhammananda Kosambi, 1933 (called "The Butter Commentary" because it explains Abhs in a smooth and simple manner, without philosophical controversy. Modern Abhs trs incl: "**A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma**" (Abhs:BRS) (Narada [*Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1956]; Bodhi and U Rewata Dhamma, with tables by U Silananda; 1993, 2nd ed 1999), "guides" based on both *Vibhāvinī Tīkā* and *Paramattha,dīpani Tīkā*, on their convergences and complementary points; and on Visuddhi,magga; R P Wijeratne & R Gethin, **Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma** + *Vibhāvinī* tr (Abhs:WG), PTS 2002. See Abhs:BRS 17 f. The Abhs **Pali** text is found in [Journal of the Pali Text Society](http://journalofthepalitextsociety.org) 1884:16-48. 5 May 2025.

¹⁴³ Abhs:BRS 325 f; Abhs:WG 319 f.

2.3.3.2 Guide to Abhs 8.29

[They] are also called “name.” The 4 immaterial aggregates are called “name” (*nāma*), in the sense of “bending” (*namana*), that is, “habitual or inducing,” because they bend towards the object in the act of cognizing it. They are also called *nāma* in the sense of causing to bend (*nāmana*) since they cause one another to bend on to the object. Nirvana is called *nāma* only in the sense of causing to bend. For the idea of nirvana inspires faultless states—that is, the supramundane cittas and cetasikas—to bend on to themselves by acting as an objective predominance condition.¹⁴⁴

What remains are concepts, of which there are 2 kinds:

concepts-as-meanings,	<i>attha paññatti</i> ;	that which is made known;	“reference” ¹⁴⁵
concepts-as-names,	<i>nāma paññatti</i> ;	that which makes known.	“referent”

The former are the meanings conveyed by the concepts, the latter the names, designations or symbols which convey that meaning. For example, the notion of a “fixed twinkling light in the night sky” with certain physical features and traits is **the concept-as-meaning** of the term “star”; the designation and idea “star” is the corresponding **concept-as-name**. The meaning-concept is what is *made known* (reference); the name-concept is that which *makes known* (referent).

2.3.3.3 Concept as what is made known (*paññāpiyattā paññatti*)

The Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha continues:

There are such terms as “land,” “hill,” and the like, so designated on account of the mode of transformation of the respective elements;
 such terms as “house,” “chariot,” “cart,” and the like, so named on account of the mode of assembly of matter (and materials);
 such terms as “person,” “individual,” and the like, so named on account of the 5 aggregates;
 such terms as “direction,” “time,” and the like, named according to the revolution of the sun, the moon and so forth;
 such terms as “well,” “cave,” and the like, so named on account of the mode of not being touched by the various groups of materiality and so forth;
 such terms as kasiṇa signs and the like, so named on account of respective elements and different modes of mental development.

All such different things, though they do not exist in *the ultimate sense*, become objects of consciousness in the form of “shadows” or reflections (*chāyā*) of (ultimate) things.

They are called **concepts** because they are thought of, reckoned, understood, expressed, and made known on account of, in consideration of, with respect to, this or that mode. This kind of concept is so called because **it is made known**. (Abhs 8.30)¹⁴⁶

2.3.3.4 Comments on Abhs 8.30

“**Concept as what is made known**” is the same as meaning-concept (*attha,paññatti*). Some examples of meaning-concept follow. The examples named are described: they have “references.”

¹⁴⁴ DhsA 392; DhsA:M 501. There is a word-play here on *nāma*, “name” or “mind,” derived from *√NAM*, “to bend.” We need to bear in mind this flexibility and versatility to cultivate our “Pali sense,” ie, to understand and appreciate the Pali idiom, which is difficult to convey in a translation.

¹⁴⁵ The terms in this column are not equivalents to any linguistic terms, but are merely convenient terms for a better understanding of the Pali concepts.

¹⁴⁶ See Abhs:BRS 326; Abhs:WG 320 f.

“Land, hill,” etc, are “formal concepts” (*saṅṭhāna,paññatti*) since they correspond to the form or configuration of things; or they are “continuity concepts” (*santāna,paññatti*), since they are cases of things that exist in continuity.

“House, chariot, village,” etc, are “collective concepts” (*samūha,paññatti*), since they correspond to an assembly or group of things.

East, west, etc, are “local concepts” (*disā,paññatti*), since they correspond to a locality, quarter or direction.

Morning, noon, week, month, etc, are “temporal concepts” (*kāla,paññatti*), since they correspond to periods or units of time.

Well, cave, etc, are “spatial concepts” (*ākāsa,paññatti*), since they correspond to spaces void of perceptible matter.

The kasina signs are “sign concepts” (*nimitta,paññatti*), since they correspond to mental signs gained by meditative cultivation.

2.3.3.5 Concept as what makes known (*paññāpanato paññatti*)

Then, since it makes known, it is called **concept**. It is described as name, nomenclature, etc.

There are 6 kinds of concepts:

(1) a (direct) concept of the real;	<i>vijjamāna,paññatti</i>
(2) a (direct) concept of the unreal;	<i>avijjamāna,paññatti</i>
(3) a concept of the unreal by means of the real;	<i>vijjamānena avijjamāna,paññatti</i>
(4) a concept of the real by means of the unreal;	<i>avijjamānena vijjamānena,paññatti</i>
(5) a concept of the real by means of the real; and	<i>vijjamānena vijjamānena,paññatti</i>
(6) a concept of the unreal by means of the unreal.	<i>avijjamānena avijjamānena,paññatti</i>

As, for instance, when it makes known what really exists in the ultimate sense by a term such as “matter,” “feeling,” and so forth, it is called a (direct) concept of the real.

When it makes known what does not really exist in the ultimate sense by a term, such as “land,” “mountain,” and so forth, it is called a (direct) concept of the unreal.

The rest should be respectively understood by combining both as, for instance, “possessor of sixfold direct knowledge,” “woman’s voice,” “eye-consciousness,” and “king’s son.” (Abhs 8.31)

2.3.3.6 Comments on Abhs 8.31

“**Concept as what makes known**” is the same as name-concept (*nāma,paññatti*). The examples given above [2.3.3.4] are cases of names (*nāma*) or referents given to various concepts.

A (direct) concept of the real. Matter, feeling, etc, are ultimate realities; therefore, the concepts that designate them are *direct* concepts of the real.

A (direct) concept of the unreal. “Land” and “mountain,” etc, are not ultimate realities but conventional entities established conceptually through mental construction. Though these concepts are based on ultimate entities, the meanings they convey are not things that are themselves ultimate entities since they do not correspond to things that really exist by way of their own intrinsic nature (*sabhāvato*), for example, by one of the 4 elements or the 5 aggregates.

The rest should be respectively understood. Here, “possessor of sixfold direct knowledge” is a concept of the unreal by means of the real, since the direct knowledges are ultimately real but the “possessor” is a mental construction.

“Woman’s voice” is a concept of the real by means of the unreal, since the sound of the voice ultimately exists (as “sound”) but not the woman.

“Eye-consciousness” is a concept of the real by means of the real, since both eye-sensitivity and the consciousness dependent on it exist in an ultimate sense.

“King’s son” is a concept of the unreal by way of the unreal, since neither the king nor the son ultimately exists.¹⁴⁷

2.3.3.7 Summary of the study on concepts (Abhs 8.32)

*vacī,ghosānusārena sota,viññāṇa,vīthiyā
pavattānantar’uppannā mano,dvārassa gocarā
atthā yassānusārena viññāyanti tato param
sāyaṃ paññatti viññeyyā loka,saṅketa,nimmitā ti*

(Abhs:8.32)

By following the sound of speech through the path of the conscious ear,
a concept at once arises at the mind-door process.
Following this, meanings are then understood.
Such a concept should be understood as created by worldly convention.

2.3.4 Ultimate truth (*param’attha,sacca*)

2.3.4.1 Examples of **ultimate truths** include: mental states (*nāma,dhamma*), corporeality (*rūpa,-dhamma*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the mind (*citta*), mental concomitants (*cetasika*), material form (*rūpa*), nirvana (*nibbāna*), contact (*phassa*), intention (*cetanā*), one-pointed attention (*ekaggatā*), the life-faculty (*jīvit’indriya*), etc. These are words that connect the wise directly to the Dharma, that is, true reality.

2.3.4.2 A comparison to modern science is the analysis of water or salt. For scientists, the terms “water” and “salt” may be deemed inadequate, ambiguous, even misleading. For greater accuracy, they thus define water as dihydrogen oxide (H²O) and common salt as sodium chloride (NaCl). This is not to say that scientific language is about ultimate reality. A research scientist would probably tell us that the accuracy of scientific language facilitates scientific study, research, discovery of important scientific principles, and facilitates communication of such learning amongst scientists.

2.3.4.3 Similarly, conventional language helps propagate Buddhism amongst the masses, but as practitioners deepen their Dharma practice and experiential understanding, they will naturally apply and better understand the nature of the language of ultimate truth. However, when it comes to the actual awakening experience, one may not find the right words for it, since it is beyond the realm of language. Those who see words and language as **a raft** for crossing troubled waters will by personal effort free the Dharma from the words. They will taste the true freedom from words and thought.

2.3.4.4 The wholesome truth can still be expressed in words and ideas with the intention of fully comprehending things as they really are. The true purpose in communicating Dharma then is to give rise to the highest benefit of penetrating **ultimate reality** (*sacca,dhamma*), a wisdom which removes all attachments, delusions, and defilements, so that we are free from suffering, and gain true purity, peace and awakening. With that, we will be able to relate to people, beings and the world—with our words, deeds and mind—in a naturally happy and realistic manner for the benefit of the many.

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¹⁴⁷ Further on the developed theory of concepts in Abhidhamma, see Nyanamoli’s note at Vism:Ñ 256: n11.