SD 65.18

Majjhe Sutta

The Discourse on the Middle | **A 6.61**
Theme: The "middle" is the avoidance of any extreme in spiritual practice
Annotated and translated by Piya Tan 2015, ©2026

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND DHARMA POINTERS

1.1.1 Sutta summary

The Majjhe Sutta (A 6.61) is a record of the versatility of Dharma understanding amongst the early Buddhist practitioners in regard to the "middle way," here termed ***majjhe*** (loc), literally**,** "in the middle." The term is used to refer to the total avoidance of extreme practices of any kind, and not being caught between either (that is, taking the "middle" as an end in itself). Awakening is when we are free from all views, both "middle" and "extreme."

1.1.2 Word and meaning

1.1.2.1 The Dharma at its highest liberating level is a direct personal experience of true reality, like seeing a beautiful sunset or the full moon on a clear night sky. We can say a lot of things about it, or write about it, even measure the experience in some way; but none of these can replace the actual experience of truth and beauty.

When we profoundly experience the truth and joy of awakening, or even our vision of true reality, or even speak of some inspiring personal experience, it is not always easy to communicate that experience except through **words.** Or better, we can affirm our experience by gently and patiently showing our moral virtue, compassion and wisdom—that is, expressing our experience in our actions (body and speech).

The problem with words (*vyañjana*) is, however, that they are neither fully fixed nor are they completely arbitrary or "blank cheques" that can mean anything we want at any moment. Instead, word meaning (*attha*) is a combination of **the semantic range, the context**, and **the intent** of the author (the speaker or writer).

1.1.2.2 By **semantic range** is meant that words don't always have fixed meanings even within the same language. More broadly, we can say that words on their own don't have meaning (no useful meaning anyway) because meaning "emerges" in within a person who interprets them. To complicate matters, especially in an oral tradition, we need to hear **the sound** (*sadda*) of the words—how they are said—in order to have some idea of the intent or purpose (*attha*) of the speaker or writer.

Words do not usually possess a single, rigid sense (as denotation) or usage (as connotation). Instead, words denote and connote a "semantic range"—a cluster of related potential meanings (such as the words "run" or "get" in English). **The Pali suttas** have wide semantic ranges of words and expressions, such as polysemy, metaphor, idiom and slang.

Polysemy refers to words having more than one sense all of which may be applicable at the same time depending on the context. The most polysemic Pali word is ***dhamma***; it has the widest range of meanings, such as: "thing; state (of a thing or of mind); reality; nature; principle; quality; concept; rule; social code; duty; value; justice; teaching; practice; true teaching."

Another polysemic Pali word is ***sīla***, which means (1) nature, characteristic, habit, conduct; (2) moral practice, conduct, or moral precept or practice, such as *pañca,sīla,* "the 5 precepts"; (3) ritual as in *sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa,* "attachment to rituals and vows" (one of the 3 fetters preventing the attaining the path). However, the old form, *sīla,vata,* "keeping to moral conduct," still retains a wholesome sense (Tha 12; Sn 212, 782; Nm 66).

The Majjhe Sutta (A 6.61) is named after its theme, that is, *majjhe,* a polysemous word, which can mean either "the middle way" [2.2.1], which is liberating, or "in the middle," in the sense of being caught in an extreme view [2.2.2]. In other words, even the Dharma can be taken to extremes when we do not really understand it or only take it on a word level.

1.1.2.3 The Buddha and the early teachers often use **metaphors and similes.** They are both figures of speech that compare two different things: while a simile compares two different things using the words "like" or "as" (the Buddha's teaching is *like* a lion's roar), a metaphor states that one thing *is* another thing without using "like" or "as" (for example, the Buddha's lion-roar may be challenged or rejected but cannot be debunked). In English the computer "mouse" is a metaphor; while saying "he was quiet like a mouse" is a simile. This is all part of the Pali idiom.

The Pali **idiom** is the way words are used and imply in the context of the narrative, and carry implications in the context. Phrases like "It's raining cats and dogs" show how words can have an emphatic sense depending on the context. The Buddha uses a common Pali idiom when he "dismisses" (*uyyojeti*) his audience at the close of the teaching or meeting, along with the expression "It is time, (you may) go," (*gacchatha … kālo ti*).[1]

Slang in the modern sense is not found in Pali since Pali is a textual language (*Kunstsprache*), specially used to preserve and transmit the Buddha's teachings. However, everyday idioms are often used in Pali, such as *taṁ kiṁ maññatha?* ("What do you think about that?") and *Kiṁ pana tvaṁ āvuso … ?* ("But what do you think, avuso?").

1.1.2.4 Words are how we use them; this is **context** or attribution. Out of context, a word has a static, dictionary-like baseline. In actual speech or writing, we get to know the author's intent with the help of the surrounding sentence or sentences, grammar, and social situation which snap the word into a specific, active meaning. Hence, as philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and modern linguistics suggest, the meaning of a word is largely tied to its **use** in a social situation. If people stop using a word a certain way—or start applying it to a new situation—the meaning adapts to that practice.

However, we cannot simply use a word to mean *anything* and expect to be understood. Communication works because speakers stay within a community's shared semantic and cultural boundaries. Context narrows down which part of a word's established range is active, guiding us rather than inventing a brand-new definition from scratch.

1.1.2.5 In important ways, words are traditions; they bear some kind of basic or "original" sense. This is not easy to trace in modern English especially when our interest is in the current meaning or context of the words. In Pali, however, the "original" intent or meaning behind the words used makes us aware and accept that many, if not most, words change over time.

Etymology is the special study or discipline of how words change over time, so that we need to know how the words originate; we seek to know the "root" (*mūla*) of specific words. Only when we understand the root or literal sense can we then use the word in metaphors, similes, puns[2] and wordplay.[3]

---

[1] See **Nandak'ovāda S** (M 146,14+27) + SD 66.12 (3.2.2).

[2] On Pali puns, see SD 54.3b (2.1.1.4).

[3] On wordplay (*silesa;* Skt *śleṣa*), see **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,35.5), SD 2.22; SD 10.6 (8.7); SD 54.2a (3.2.2); SD 24.10b (2.1.6.4) App 2.1.7; SD 55.9 (1.3.2.6B).

Words do not have rigid, fixed or permanent mathematical definitions; but they have some kind of root meaning, what we usually speak of as "**literal**" sense. Based on this literal root, words are traditionally used by a community over time, eventually altering their literal sense and core definitions (as seen when comparing Old English or Middle English to modern English).

1.1.2.6 The term **intent** here is the key concept if our interest is to understand early Buddhism and benefit from it spiritually. Pāli and its idioms provide direct, unmediated access to the earliest strata of Buddhist thought, helping us bypass the limitations, ambiguities, and cultural distortions of modern translations and teachings.

While it may be interesting to know the depth and style of certain modern writers of Buddhism, the ultimate goal of knowing Buddhism—specifically early Buddhism (the life and teachings of the Buddha and the early arhats)—is to understand, practise and realize the meaning and purpose of the Buddha's teachings. Interestingly, the 2 English words, "meaning" and "purpose," are encapsulated by the polysemy of the Pali word, *attha* (which also means "benefit").

"**Meaning**" means simply "what is Buddhism or life about?"; "**purpose**" means "what is it for or what do we do about it?" These vital ideas and attitudes are expressed in the Buddha's famous words, "Both before and now what I teach is suffering and the ending of suffering" as recorded in **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86). Thus the **"**meaning" of life is about suffering and its arising (craving), the first 2 noble truths; the "purpose" of life is about the path and ending of suffering (nirvana). [1.2.2]

Simply put then, when studying Dharma and seeking liberation, we should always be in motion—seeing things as they arise and pass away. It is the fixedness of the mind which is the problem, not the space between itself; we should always be in motion enjoying the spaces between the two extremes (rising and falling). To "enjoy" means to experience the joy of living and knowing; to see the liberating space in everything.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 Metteyya's question

The Majjhe Sutta discusses the key ideas of **Metteyya,pañha**, "Metteyya's Question," which is **Sn 1042**, from **the Tissa Metteyya Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.3/1041*-1042*) [2.1]. The Sutta records the views of 6 elder monks in response to the question regarding the Metteyya,pañha: "What, avusos, is the first extreme? What is the other extreme? What is in the middle? And what is the seamstress?" [§1.4]. The Sutta closes with the Buddha approving of the various answers of the elders [§9.2], and also gives his own reply [§12], echoing that of the 1st elder [§2].

1.2.2 The middle of the middle way

The Sutta illustrates how the wise understand the Dharma each in their own way in terms of words. The common vital fact is that they have all left behind craving ("the seamstress") which holds beings back in samsara. Our task as practitioners is to know exactly where we are now—the present state of suffering and the future state of liberation. Hence, the Buddha remarks succinctly in **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86):

> As before and even so now, **I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering!**[4]
>
> (S 22.86,21.2), SD 21.13[5]

[4] *Pubbe câhaṁ anurādha etarahi ca | dukkhañ c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan ti.* This last remark is explained in **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,37/3:112), SD 21.12. See SD 21.13 (2) & SD 53.40 (2.1.1).

[5] See also SD 40a.1 (11.1.1).

2 The Buddha's teachings to Tissa Metteyya

2.1 TISSA METTEYYA MĀṆAVA PUCCHĀ (Sn 5.3/1040*-1042*/199)

Of the old brahmin Bāvari's 16 students, the brahmin youth (*māṇava*) **Tissa Metteyya** is the 2nd of them to question the Buddha about sensual desires and living the contented life. This is called **Tissa Metteyya Māṇava Pucchā** (the questions of the brahmin youth Tissa Metteyya) (Sn 5.3) or simply **Tissa Metteyya Sutta** (the Tissa Metteyya discourse). His Sutta is the shortest of 16 questions that comprise **the Pārāyana Vagga** (Sn ch 5), and the Sutta is here presented in full:

"Who is contented here in the world,"	(asked the venerable **Tissa Metteyya.**)	
	"For whom are there no commotions?	
Who is the wise, knowing both extremes,	not stuck in between?	
Whom do you call a great man?	Who has left behind the seamstess here?	Sn 1040
"The monk who lives the holy life	amidst sensual pleasures,"	
(Metteyya, said **the Blessed One**,)	"ever mindful, with craving gone,	
quenched by way of proper investigation—	for him there is no commotion."	Sn 1041
so ubh'anta-m-abhiññāya	He is wise, knowing both extremes [ends];	
majjhe mantā na lippati	he is not stuck in between.	
taṁ brumi mahā,puriso ti	Him I call a great man—	
so idha sibbanim accagā ti	he has left behind the seamstress here."	Sn 1042

The last verse (Sn 1042) is referred to as **Metteya,pañha**, "Metteyya's question," in the Majjhe Sutta [§1.3].

2.2 DEALING WITH EXTREMES IN DAILY LIFE

2.2.1 The teaching by the middle

2.2.1.1 The Buddha's declaration that he teaches *only* suffering and its ending [1.2.2] refers directly to *our present state* (suffering and unsatisfactoriness) and *the possible state* (happiness and liberation). However, when we merely "know" these 2 states without *experiencing* or *understanding* them, they are merely 2 extremes (*antā*): non-attainment and attainment. This is the nature of suffering.

The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15) speaks of the world—that is, the unawakened—as tending to think and act by way of extreme views that "all exists" (*sabbam atthi*) and that "nothing exists" (*sabbaṁ n'atthi*), or of eternalism (*sassata*) and annihilationism (*uccheda*); and "not following either of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches **the Dharma by the middle**" (*ete te ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṁ deseti*).[6] The "middle" here refers to dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*)[7] [3.4.2.2].

2.2.1.2 Four of the views expressed by the 6 elder monks in **the Majjhe Sutta** (A 6.61) are directly related to the 12 links of dependent arising, that is: (1) contact, (3) feelings, (4) name-and-form, and (5) the 6 sense-bases.[8] The 12 links are listed, for example, in **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), where they are called the teaching by the middle (*majjhena dhamma*), that is, the ending of all extremes, represented

[6] S 12.15.7/2:17 (SD 6.13).
[7] See **Dependent arising,** SD 5.12.
[8] S 12.15,7.2/2:17 (SD 6.13).

by each pair of the 12 links. When any pair is broken—especially that between feeling and craving—the whole chain of suffering is broken. [2.2.1.1]

The remaining 2 views—those regarding (2) time and (6) self identity (*sakkāya*) or personal existence—seem to be on their own. However, clearly, the whole cycle of 12 links involves **time**: they are rooted in the long distant past, continue in the present, and into the future, keeping us chained to the samsaric cycle. Furthermore, this cycle, when misunderstood, gives us the impression that there is "**a self or being**" in that cycle. There is really no one and nothing abiding therein, only *causes and effects*, dependently arisen.

Hence, in effect, all the 6 answers are significantly connected with dependent arising.

2.2.2 What are in "the middle"?

Because we do not really understand even our present state of suffering, we also do not really see the possible state of **liberation**. Hence, we are caught between the two. At best, perhaps we understand, even elegantly and profoundly, the words of the teaching; but we are still holding on to the middle: we are caught in the middle, deciphering messages. This means that we are habitually caught *between* states, thus:

(1)	**contact** (*phassa*)	*between* sense-faculty and sense-object;	[§2; 3.1]
(2)	**time** (*kāla*)	*between* the past and the future;	[§3; 3.2]
(3)	**feelings** (*vedanā*)	*between* the pleasant and the unpleasant;	[§4; 3.3]
(4)	**name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpa*)	*between* "something" and "nothing";	[§5; 3.4]
(5)	**the 6 sense-bases** (*āyatana*)	*between* the internal and the external;	[§6; 3.5]
(6)	**self-identity** (*sakkāya*)	*between* its arising and its ending.	[§7; 3,6]

Considering the common occurrence of such "extreme" states in our daily life, we can understand why, for example, the Buddha declares in **the (Dasaka) Brahma,vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208):

> Bhikshus, this mortal life is but an in-between state of mind.
> *citt'antaro ayaṁ bhikkhave macco*. (**A 10.208**,2.2/5:300), SD 2.10

3 The 6 elder monks' understanding of the extremes

3.1 THE 1ST ELDER MONK'S VIEW: CONTACT [§2]

3.1.1 Contact as extremes

3.1.1.1 The best known definition of **contact** (*phassa*) is its role as "attention" (***samannāhāra***) or "(mental) engagement." **The Cha Chakka Sutta** (M 148) explains that this phrase is part of the sequence of any sense-based experience, that is, the meeting of the respective *sense-faculty, sense-object and sense-consciousness*; the meeting of these 3 is called "contact" (*tiṇṇaṁ saṅgati phasso*).[9]

The Mahā Hatthi,padôpama Sutta (M 28) describes this same process as the arising of consciousness:

[9] **M 148**,7-9/3:281 f + 28-39/3:284 f (SD 26.6). On this phrase and passage, see R S Bucknell, "Conditioned arising evolves: Variation and change in textual accounts of the *Paṭicca-samuppāda* doctrine." *J of the International Assoc of Buddhist Studies* 22,2, 1999:320 f.

If, avuso, internally *the eye* is intact and *external forms* come into its range, and there is **an appropriate conscious engagement** (*samannāhāra*), then there *is* the appearance of that class of consciousness. (M 28,27/1:190), SD 6.16

The Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta (M 18), using the same formula, describes the same process with interesting details to show how one mentally proliferates (*papañceti*); for example, in the case of the eye-faculty (the same process works with the other sense-bases and the mind) thus:[10]

Avuso, dependent on **the eye and form**, eye-consciousness arises.
The meeting of the 3 is contact.[11]
With contact as condition, there is feeling.
What one feels, one perceives.
What one perceives, one thinks about.
What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates.[12]
With what is thus mentally proliferated as the source,[13]
proliferation of conception and perception[14]
assails a person regarding past, future and present ***forms*** cognizable through *the eye*.[15]
(**M 18**,16/1:111 f) + nn SD 6.14

3.1.1.2 A number of suttas explain how **contact** works as extremes (*antā*), that is, how it arises and ends. **The Majjhe Sutta** records the 1st elder monk as stating thus:

Contact … is one extreme; the arising of contact is the other extreme; the ending of contact is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress. For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.[16] [§2]

"Middle" here means a bridge "between" arising and ending; they go together, one after the other; when there is one, there is the other. In other words, with "ending," there is arising again. This is samsara, the cycle of in-betweens.

[10] For details, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16) nn (SD 6.14).

[11] *Tiṇṇaṁ 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 1999: 320 f. See prec n.

[12] This verse up to here is also found in **(Samuday'atthaṅgama) Loka S** (S 12.44/2:71-73), SD 7.5, and **(Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā S** (S 35.60/4:32 f), SD 6.17, in different contexts.

[13] *Yaṁ papañceti tato,nidānaṁ.* This shows that the mental proliferation itself acts on our minds in an unconscious manner. Cf M 18,17 (1) etc (SD 6.14).

[14] Or, "perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation," *papañca,saññā,saṅkhā* SD 6.14 [3].

[15] This important passage is the earliest statement on the Buddhist theory of perception: SD 6.14 [4].

[16] Comy explains: "The contact (*phassa*) at the first end is one individual existence (*atta,bhāva*), which is produced by way of contact. The arising of contact (*phassa,samudaya*), the other end, is the future existence, produced with the contact of the karma done in this existence as its condition. The ending of contact (*phassa,nirodha*) is nirvana, which is said to be in the "middle" because it cuts in half **craving**, the seamstress." (AA 3:404,15 f). Since "the arising of contact is the other end," we can also see here the initial "contact" as the "ending of contact" (*phassa,nirodha*). Craving is the seamstress because it binds the contact of the previous existence to the initial arising of contact at the start of the new existence. When contact ends, there is nirvana.

The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15),[17] explains how this happens in terms of dependent arising, thus:

with the sixfold sense-base as condition,	there is contact;	*saḷ'āyatana,paccayā*	*phasso*
with contact as condition,	there is feeling;	*phassa,paccayā*	*vedanā*
with feeling as condition,	there is craving;	*vedanā,paccayā*	*taṇhā* [§7.2]

then, in the dependent ending cycle:

with the ending of the 6 sense-bases,	contact ends,	*saḷ'āyatana,nirodhā*	*phassa,nirodho*
with the ending of contact,	feeling ends,	*phassa,nirodhā*	*vedanā,nirodho*
with the ending of feeling,	craving ends	*vedanā,nirodhā*	*taṇhā,nirodho* [§8.2]

3.1.2 Contact as a noble truth

Thus in the 4-noble-truth format we see a positive cognate of the "extreme" format for contact in **the Majjhe Sutta** [3.1.1.1]. In this connection, **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9) adds:

> When, avuso, a noble disciple
> understands **contact** (*phassa*),
> understands the arising of contact,
> understands the ending of contact, and
> understands the path leading to the ending of contact,
> in that way, avuso, he is one of right view, whose view is straight, attained to wise faith in the Dharma, and has arrived at this true teaching. (**M 9**,45/1:52), SD 11.14

3.1.3 The ending of suffering

The dependent ending cycle leading to craving's end is the same as the 3rd of the 4 noble truths, such as stated in **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), thus:

> And what, avuso, is **the ending of suffering**?
> It is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go, rejecting of that same craving—this, avuso, is called the ending of suffering.
> (**M 9**,17/1:49, also 37/1:61), SD 11.14

We can thus see how dependent arising is related to the 4 noble truths. The "**ending of contact**" found in **the Majjhe Sutta** becomes "the middle." The same "**contact**" forms a part of the 12 links, which is known as "the middle" in **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** [2.2.1.1 f]. Further, the ending of contact (nirvana) forms the 3rd step of fourfold contacts in **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), following the format of the 4 noble truths.[18]

[17] S 12.15,8/2:17 (SD 6.13).
[18] **M 9**,45/1:52 (SD 11.14).

3.2 THE 2ND ELDER MONK'S VIEW: TIME [§3]

3.2.1 Time as extremes

3.2.1.1 The 2nd elder monk's view relates to **time**. The past is considered as one extreme and the future is the other extreme. The present is the middle. The past is gone, the future has not come; only the present rises and passes away, changing, becoming other. Even as we look at the present, it is already *the pas*t, a memory; then the future becomes *now* for the moment, and then moving into the past.

We experience only this "**middle**" that is between the volatile past and the volatile future; this is the ever-moving "now"; it is impermanent (it becomes other); it is unsatisfactory (it is nothing to delight in, except perhaps for a moment); it is nonself (it has no abiding entity).

The past is one extreme in the sense that it is out of reach and non-existent because it has passed. It is now only just a memory, that is, our reconstruction of what we thought occurred; it is "constructed," mind-made, subject to change, becoming other, or we simply forget it.

The future is the other extreme in the sense that it has not happened; it is not likely to happen the way we think it will or the way we want it. When the future does come, as our present, we are likely to have changed our mind anyway. Even the future moves as nothing but memory and wishes.

3.2.1.2 The Mahā Kaccāna Bhadd'eka,ratta Sutta (M 133) gives a teaching that helps us better understand time as "the middle." The elder Mahā Kaccāna states in the Sutta:

> And how, avuso, is one vanquished in regard to presently arisen states?
> In regard to **the eye and forms** [*and respectively to the other bases and their objects*]
> both presently arisen,
> one's consciousness is bound up with desire and lust in that presently arisen consciousness,
> one delights in that consciousness in which one is bound up,
> one is vanquished in regard to those presently arisen states.[19] (**M 133**,17/3:197)

However, when one delights not in the presently arisen state (*paccuppanna dhamma*), but merely sees it as arising and passing away, then one's consciousness is not bound up it with it, and one is "invincible" or "unvanquished" (*asaṁhiraṁ*).

All the 4 Bhadd'eka,ratta Suttas (M 131-134) highlight this well-known ***bhadd'eka,ratta* verses** which states how we should wisely take the presently arisen state as "the middle":

Let one not pursue [not dwell on] the past,	*atītaṁ nânvāgameyya*
nor hold fond hope for the future.	*n'appaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṁ*
The past is gone,[20]	*yad atītaṁ pahīnaṁ taṁ*
and the future has not yet come.[21]	*appattañ ca anāgataṁ.*

[19] *Kathañ ca āvuso paccuppannesu dhammesu saṁhīrati? Ya ñ'cāvuso cakkhu ye ca rūpā, ubhayam etaṁ paccuppannaṁ. Tasmiṁ ce paccuppanne chanda,raga-p,paṭibaddhaṁ hoti viññāṇaṁ, chanda,raga-p,paṭibaddhattā viññāṇassa tad-abhinandati, tad-abhinandanto paccuppannesu dhammesu saṁhīrati.*

[20] Alt tr: "For the past has passed away."

[21] Alt tr: "And the future is yet unreached"; poetically, "the future never comes."

Only this present state[22]	*paccuppannañ ca yo dhammaṁ*
as it arises[23] one sees that with insight,	*tattha tattha vipassati*
invincibly, unshakably.[24]	*asaṁhīraṁ asaṅkuppaṁ,*
Having known that, let one devote oneself to it.	*taṁ vidvā-m-anubrūhaye*

(**M 131**,3/3:187), SD 8.9

3.2.2 The presently arisen as "the middle"

3.2.2.1 The Mahā Kaccāna Bhadd'eka,ratta Sutta's [3.2.1.2] warning that we can be "vanquished," overcome by desire and lust even in the present state, reminds us that we should not be attached to the presently arisen state, even when it is wholesome, even more so when it is unwholesome. This is in fact the teaching of the parable of the raft given in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22):

> Bhikshus, having understood the parable of the raft, **you should abandon even dharmas [the good], how much more so what are not-dharmas [the bad]!**[25]
>
> (M 22,14/1:135) SD 3.13

3.2.2.2 This teaching "in the middle" also refers to the proper attitude to Dharma learning: we do not learn Dharma to "know" things or for status or to debate with others, proving them wrong; but rather to clear our minds of mental defilements so that we will gain the path.

Hence, **the Majjhe Sutta** (A 6.61), quoting **Metteyya's Question**, says:

He is wise, knowing both extremes [ends];	*so ubh'anta-m-abhiññāya*	
he is not stuck in between.	*majjhe mantā na lippati*	[§1.3]

3.2.3 "Not stuck in between"

3.2.3.1 The teaching that one should "not (be) stuck in between" [3.2.2.2] is echoed in a number of ancient suttas, all of them found in **the Sutta,nipāta**.

Both **the Atta,daṇḍa Sutta** (Sn 4.15) and **the Jatu,kaṇṇi Mānava Pucchā** (Sn 5.12) of the Sutta,nipāta give the same verse:

Let the past wither away.	*yaṁ pubbe taṁ visosehi*	
Let there be nothing for you thereafter.	*pacchā te māhu kiñcanaṁ*	
If you grasp not (anything) in between,	***majjhe** ce no gahesassi*	
you will fare along in peace.	*upasanto carissasi*	Sn 949 = 1099

Commentary on Sn 949

Therefore, if any among you wishes to be like this, the verse says, let me say to you the preceding verse.

---

[22] Comy: One should contemplate each state as it arises by way of the 7 contemplations of insight (ie by way of insight into impermanence, suffering, not-self, revulsion, dispassion, cessation, relinquishment) (MA 5:1 f).

[23] "As it arises," from *tattha tattha.*

[24] Comy: This is said for the purpose of showing insight (*vipassanā*) and counter-insight (*paṭivipassanā*) [ie, the directing insight into consciousness itself so that that insight is the basis for attaining arhathood: M 52,4/1:350, 121,-11/3:108; also M:ÑB 1333 n1143.] For insight is "**invincible, unshakable**" [foll Sn:N 1149] because it is neither defeated nor shaken [moved] by lust and other defilements (MA 5:2). Elsewhere, "invincible, unshakable" refers to nirvana (**Sn 1149**) or the liberated mind (**Tha 469**). Here, however, it seems to refer to a stage in insight. Note that vb *saṁhīrati* recurs at §8 and *asaṁhīrati* in §9, suggesting that we should watch the present moment without being overwhelmed by self-views regarding the past or the future.

[25] *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag'eva adhammā*. For comy, see SD 3.13 (3.3), esp (3.3.2).

Here, **the past** means past karma and the defilements that arise with the conditioned past.

Let there be nothing for you thereafter: let there be nothing such as lust subject to arise with respect to future conditions.

If you grasp not anything in between. If you do not grasp any present state such as form, then **you will fare along in peace**. (SnA 568,20-28)

3.2.3.2 Mahā,niddesa on Sn 949; Cūḷa,niddesa on Sn 1099[26]

Be warned! This passage is not meant to be read, especially in a word-based scribal modern way. It is meant to be heard reflectively. It is not meant to inform *but to open our minds to the perceptions and feelings behind the lemmata (the headwords) of Sn 949.*[27]

"Let the past wither away." Regarding past formations, those defilements that arise, be they pleasant or unpleasant, those ripened, those yet to ripen, let them not have seeds. Abandon those defilements, remove them, make an end of them, make them non-existent.

Even so let the past wither away. Or, those past karmic formations, unripe and ripened, those karmic formations, be they pleasant or unpleasant, those ripened, those yet to ripen, let them not have seeds, abandon them, make an end of them, make them non-existent. Thus let the past wither away.[28]

"**Let there be nothing for you thereafter**." "Thereafter" means the future. Regarding future formations, whatever that may arise as desire, as hatred, as delusion, as conceit, as view, as defilement, as misconduct —whatever these may be—let them not be, act them not, produce them not, let them not arise, let them not become, abandon them, remove them, make an end of them, make them non-existent. Thus you make nothing of the thereafter [what follows].[29]

"**If you do not grasp anything in between**." The "in-between"[30] is a name for feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. When formations arise presently on account of craving or of view, grasp them not, take them not, hold them not, cling not to them, delight not in them, seek them not, cling not to them, see no delight in them, approve them not, be not attached to them. Abandon grasping, clinging, inclination to them. Get rid of them, make an end of them, let them not exist.[31]

"**You will fare along in peace**." Because of the stilling, appeasing, settling of lust, of hatred, of delusion, of anger, of enmity; because of the stilling, appeasing, settling of attachment to all unwholesome formations; because of their stilling, appeasing, settling, pacifying, extinguishing, cooling, disappearance,

---

[26] The 2 comys are almost identical with only minor variations that do not affect their exegesis.

[27] The repetitiveness of parts of this passage is also the occasion for the earliest Buddhist dictionary, in the form of thesaurus, entitled **Abhidhāna-p,padīpikā** (12th cent, Sri Lanka), by the elder Moggallāna.

[28] ***Yaṁ pubbe taṁ visosehī*** *ti. Atīte saṅkhāre ārabbha ye kilesā uppajjeyyuṁ te kilese sosehi visosehi sukkhāpehi visukkhāpehi abījaṁ karohi pajaha vinodehi vyantiṁ karohi anabhāvaṁ gamehī ti. Evam pi yaṁ pubbe taṁ visosehi. Atha vā ye atītā kammâbhisaṅkhārā avipakka,vipākā te kammâbhisaṅkhāre, sosehi visosehi, sukkhāpehi visukkhāpehi, abījaṁ karohi, pajaha vinodehi vyantiṁ karohi anabhāvaṁ gamehī ti. Evam pi yaṁ pubbe taṁ visosehi.*

[29] ***Pacchā te māhu kiñcanan*** *ti. Pacchā vuccati anāgata. Anāgate saṅkhāre ārabbha yāni uppajjeyyuṁ raga,kiñcanaṁ dosa,kiñcanaṁ moha,kiñcanaṁ māna,kiñcanaṁ diṭṭhi,kiñcanaṁ kilesa,kiñcanaṁ duccarita,kiñcanaṁ, imāni kiñcanāni tuyhaṁ mā ahu, mā akāsi, mā janesi, mā sañjanesi, mā nibbattesi, mā abhinibbattesi, pajaha vinodehi, vyantiṁ karohi, anabhāvaṁ gamehī ti—pacchā te māhu kiñcanaṁ.*

[30] Nc:Be 146 on **Jatu,kaṇṇi Māṇava Pucchā**, has all these aggregates in the plural.

[31] ***Majjhe ce no gahessasī*** *ti. Majjhaṁ vuccati paccuppannā, rūpa,vedanā,saññā,saṅkhāra,viññāṇā. Paccuppanne saṅkhāre taṇhā,vasena diṭṭhi,vasena, na gahessasi, na uggahessasi, na gaṇhissasi, na parāmasissasi, nâbhinandissasi, nâbhicarissasim na ajjhosissasi, abhinandanaṁ abhivadanaṁ ajjhosānaṁ gāhaṁ parāmāsaṁ abhinivesaṁ pajahissasi vinodessasi vyantiṁ karissasi, anabhāvaṁ gamessasī ti—majjhe ce no gahessasi.*

tranquillisation—you will live, dwell, move, conduct yourself, go on, keep going in peace, appeased, settled, cooled, tranquil—you will live in peace.[32] (Nm 434 f ≈ Nc:Be 146 f)

3.2.3.3 The term ***majjhe*** is also found in a question (*pucchā*) of another of the 16 youths, pupils of Bāvarī, that is, in **the Bhadr'avudha Mānava Pucchā** (Sn 5.13), the questions of the brahmin youth Bhadr'āvudha; that is, in **Sn 1103**, which contains the same teaching put in a different verse:

Dispel all craving for grasping [to have],	*ādāna,taṇhaṁ vinayetha sabbaṁ*
(Bhadr'āvudha, said the Blessed One)	*bhadr'āvudha to bhagavā*
above, below, across in between.	*uddhaṁ adho tiriyañ câpi majjhe*
For whatever they grasp in the world,	*yaṁ yaṁ hi lokasmiṁ upādiyanti*
by that very thing Māra pursues a person.	*ten'eva māro anveti jantuṁ* (Sn 1103)

3.2.3.4 Commentaries on Sn 1103 (SnA & Nc)

SnA 599,8-14

Then the Blessed One spoke the next two verses, teaching him (Bhadr'āvudha) the Dharma in accordance with his inclination.

Here, **acquisitive craving**[33] means the craving and grasping that take up forms and so forth; what is meant is craving and clinging.

Whatever they cling to in the world: whatever they cling to in these quarters, above and so forth.

By this itself Māra pursues a person: By this itself Māra, as the aggregates obtained at conception, follows that being produced by the karmic volitional activities, which are in turn produced with clinging as condition.[34]

Nc:Be 151,10-24 on Sn 1103

Acquisitive craving: It is craving for form … that is called acquisitive craving. And why is it called acquisitive craving? Through that craving they (beings) seize it, acquire form, grasp it, cling to it, adhere to it; they acquire feeling, perception, formations, consciousness; a destination, rebirth, conception, existence, samsara, the round; they seize it, grasp it, cling to it, adhere to it. For this reason, it is called acquisitive craving.[35]

---

[32] ***Upasanto carissasī*** *ti. Rāgassa santattā samitattā upasamitattā, dosassa santattā samitattā upasamitattā, mohassa santattā samitattā upasamitattā, kodhassa santattā samitattā upasamitattā, upanāhassa santattā samitattā upasamitattā, sabbâkusalâbhisaṅkhārānaṁ santattā samitattā upasamitattā vūpasamitattā vijjhātattā nibbutattā vigatattā paṭipassaddhattā santo upasanto vūpasanto nibbuto paṭipassaddho carissasi viharissasi iriyissasi vattissasi pālissasi yapissasi yāpissasī ti—upasanto carissasi.*

[33] ***Ādāna,taṇhaṁ***. As dvandva (*dvanda*), "taking and craving." Niddesa takes it as a ***tappurisa samāsa*** (specifically a *chaṭṭhī,tappurisa* or genitive dependent determinative compound). Nc takes ***ādāna*** (gen) as a function of ***taṇhā*** (nom f): *tāya taṇhāya rūpaṁ ādiyanti upādiyanti gaṇhanti parāmasanti abhinivisanti* (Nc:Be 151,15 f).

[34] **Māra** here is regarded as the 5 aggregates, one of the 4 kinds of Māra (*catu māra*) listed in Comys— 1. *kilesa,-māra* (mental defilements), 2. *khandha,māra* (the aggregates), 3. *maccu,māra* (death), 4. *deva,putta* (deity) (SnA 436); SD 61.21 (3.1.1.1). In the formula of dependent arising, the aggregates are acquired at birth (*jāti*), which is conditioned by karmic existence (*bhava*) in the previous life, which is in turn conditioned by clinging (*upādāna*). On the 5 kinds of Māra (incl 3. karma-formations. *abhisaṅkhāra,māra*): SD 19.17 (3.2); **Māra**, SD 61a.

[35] ***Ādāna,taṇhaṁ vinayetha sabban*** *ti ādāna,taṇhaṁ vuccati rūpa,taṇhā -pa- ādāna,taṇhā ti kiṁ,kāraṇā vuccati ādāna taṇhā, tāya taṇhāya rūpaṁ ādiyanti upādiyanti gaṇhanti parāmasanti abhinivisanti. Vedanaṁ. Saññaṁ. Saṅkhāre. Viññāṇaṁ. Gatiṁ. Upapattiṁ. Paṭisandhiṁ. Bhavaṁ. Saṁsāraṁ. Vaṭṭaṁ ādiyanti upādiyanti gaṇhanti parāmasanti abhinivisanti, taṁ,kāraṇā vuccati ādāna,taṇhā. …*

Nc:Be 151,25-152,13

Above, below, across the middle: The future is called **above**, the past is called **below**, and the present is called **across the middle**: in between.[36]

By that very thing Māra pursues a person: By this itself, Māra as the aggregates acquired at conception, Māra as the elements, Māra as the sense-bases, Māra as a birth-destination, Māra as rebirth, Māra as conception, Māra as existence, Māra as samsāra.[37]

Thus, Māra pursues **a person** (*jantu*), a being (*satta*), people (*jana*), a human (*nara*), a human being (*māṇava*), a person (*posa*), an individual (*puggala*), a living being (*jīva*), an awake person (*jāgu*), a human person (*jantu*), a sense-based person (*indagu*), man (*manuja*).[38]

3.3 THE 3RD ELDER MONK'S VIEW: FEELINGS [§4]

3.3.1 Feelings as extremes

3.3.1.1 We have seen **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) listing the 12 links; how a pair of contiguous links work as cause and effect, evolving from ignorance to suffering. Thus when a cause is interrupted, the effect does not arise. Some teachers consider the weakest link to be between feeling and craving, that is, "with feeling as condition, there is craving" (*vedanā,paccayā taṇhā*).[39]

The technique here is to watch the feeling (liking or disliking of the object) as it arises; it is simply to be regarded as merely "feeling," that is, it is mind-made, and thus conditioned and impermanent. In this way, we are not carried away with the feeling. The reflection on impermanence defuses the potency of the feeling, rendering it as a neutral feeling, that is, "neither pleasant nor painful." Thus, craving does not arise, and the chain is broken, at least for the moment: "with the ending of feeling, craving ends" (*vedanā,-nirodhā taṇhā,nirodho*).[40]

3.3.1.2 We should here understand how "neutralizing" feelings works as the "**middle way,**" that is, the way out here. Now, there are 3 kinds of feelings: the pleasant, the unpleasant and the neutral. As stated, for example, in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33).[41] Technically, "**neutral**" is said to be "neither painful nor pleasant" (*adukkha-m-asukha*), that is, the absence of both the painful and the pleasant.

This word examination is vitally helpful. It shows that "neutral" is not meant in the sense of something "in between," that is, a bit of painful and a bit of pleasant; it simply means the absence of both extremes. One thus experiences or "feels" neither the painful nor the pleasant feelings. In fact, it is best to understand this "middle" state not as a noun (nor adjective) but as a verb: we *feel* nothing.

This is how the 3 kinds of feelings should be understood when **the Cūḷa,niddesa** explains them as follows:

---

[36] ***Uddhaṁ adho tiriyañ câpi majjhe*** *ti uddhan ti anāgataṁ. Adho ti atītaṁ. Tiriyañcāpi majjhe ti paccuppannaṁ.* Nc incl other "above/below/middle" triads: devas/hells/humans; wholesome/unwholesome/neutral, formless element/sense-element/form element (sic), pleasant/unpleasant/neutral feelings, the sole/the crown-/the body. (Nc:Be 151,25-152,2)

[37] ***Ten'eva māro anveti jantun*** *ti ten'eva kammâbhisaṅkhāra,vasena paṭisandhiko khandha,māro dhatu,māro āyatana,māro gati,māro upapatti,māro paṭisandhi,māro bhava,māro saṁsāra,māro vaṭṭa,māro anveti anugacchati anvāyiko hoti.* (Nc 152,7-10)

[38] ***Jantun*** *ti sattaṁ janaṁ naraṁ māṇavaṁ posaṁ puggalaṁ jīvaṁ jāguṁ jantuṁ indaguṁ manujan ti* ***ten'eva māro anveti jantuṁ*** (Nc:Be 152,10 f). This register of synonyms for "person" (*jantu*) is stock: Nm 3,15, 4,18, 68,5, 76,11, 127,24, 281,23, 304,1; Nc 145,20.

[39] S 12.15,8.1/2:17 (SD 6.13).

[40] S 12.15,8.2/2:17 (SD 6.13).

[41] **D 33**,1.10(26)/3:216.

"**Above**" is pleasant feelings. "**Below**" is painful feelings. "**Across the middle**" is neutral feelings.
***Uddhan** ti sukhā vedanā. **Adho** ti dukkha vedanā. **Tiriyañ câpi majjhe** ti adukkha-m-asukhā vedanā.*
(Nc:Be 15129-31)

3.3.2 The "middle" of feelings

3.3.2.1 The Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta (M 52) and **the Dasama Sutta** (A 11.16) relate how one may attain nirvana through any of the "11 doors to the death-free" (*ekādasa amata,dvāra*), that is, the 4 form dhyana, the 4 divine abodes and the first 3 formless dhyana.[42] The meditator, having attained any of these dhyanas, uses it as a base to develop insight and then attains arhathood.

Of special interest is that upon attaining **the divine abode of equanimity** (*upekkhā brahma,vihāra*):

> He considers thus:
> "Even **this mental freedom by equanimity**[43] is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending."
> If he is steady therein, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.[44]
> If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,
> then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the pure abodes), and there attains **final nirvana**, not subject to returning from that world.
> (**M 52**,11/5:351 f = A 11.17/5:345), SD 41.2

Using *lovingkindness, or compassion, or gladness*, one can attain only the 3rd dhyana at best. With equanimity, one is able to attain the 4th dhyana. Then, emerging from it, one reflects on it as described in the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta (M 52) [above].

3.3.2.2 Strictly speaking, equanimity is characterized by "**neutral feeling**." While the dhyana itself is a state without various dhyana-factors, the neutral feeling itself is not a state, but *an experience that is neither painful nor pleasant*. This is the "middle" of feelings, what is "between" feelings, that is, "not feeling" or "no feeling." Again, these words should not be literally swallowed but tasted for its Dharma sweetness, as done by Sāriputta in **the (Navaka) Nibbāna Sutta** (A 9.34):

> "**This nirvana, avuso, is happiness!** This nirvana, avuso, is happiness!"[45]
> When this was said, the venerable Udāyi said to the venerable Sāriputta:
> "But, avuso Sāriputta, what happiness can there be here, where there is no feeling?"
> "That's just what this happiness is here, avuso, **where there is *no feeling*** [nothing that is felt]![46]
> (**A 9.34**/4:414 f), SD 55.1

---

[42] M 52,11/1:352 f = A 11.17/5:346 (SD 41.2).

[43] "Mental freedom by equanimity," *upekkhā,ceto.vimutti.* See ***Brahma,vihāra***, SD 38.5 (6).

[44] This method is for developing "insight preceded by calm" (*samatha,pubb'angaṁ vipassana*) [**(Yuga,naddha) Patipadā S** (A 3.170/2.157), SD 41.5]. The meditator, emerging from dhyana, contemplates that the state is "mind-made," willfully constructed. Then, he reflects on its impermanence, and then contemplates the dhyana with insight into the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and nonself. See also **M 64**,9-15 (SD 21.10) for a variation of the same samatha-based method.

[45] *Sukham idaṁ āvuso nibbānaṁ, sukham idaṁ āvuso nibbānan ti*.

[46] *Etad eva khv-ettha āvuso sukhaṁ, yad ettha n'atthi vedayitaṁ*.

Sāriputta goes on to explain that nirvana is well above all sensual feelings, even the bliss of the highest formless dhyanas. When a living arhat experiences nirvana, he dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling** (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*).[47] The Sutta closes with Sāriputta stating:

"In this way, avuso, it can be indirectly[48] understood how nirvana is happiness."[49]

3.4 THE 4TH ELDER MONK'S VIEW: NAME AND FORM [§5]

3.4.1 Name and form as extremes

3.4.1.1 The most fundamental cognitive process is that of our "naming" of "forms." **Name** (*nāma*) refers to our "bending back" (*namati*) to the past, to our memory, to label the object of our sense-experience and thoughts. When we *see, hear, smell, taste, touch or mind* something we, as a rule, refer it to some past experience of that present object. When the memory of that past object is a pleasant one, we will like, even desire, the present sense-object or mind-object. When the memory of it is an unpleasant one, we are likely to dislike it, even reject it and want to get rid of it.

3.4.1.2 From our memory, we "**name**" (*namati*), that is, recognize the object, which is called "**form**" (*rūpa*). "Form" here refers to any object that is "named." **The Khajjanīya Sutta** (S 22.79) gives an interesting derivation of the word "**form**":

> And what, bhikshus, is called **form** (*rūpa*)?[50]
> It vexes [is vexatious] (*ruppati*), bhikshus; therefore it is called form.[51]
> It is vexed by what?
> Vexed by cold, vexed by heat, vexed by hunger, vexed by thirst, vexed by the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and serpents.
> It vexes, bhikshus, therefore it is called form. (**S 22.79**,5/3:86), SD 17.9

3.4.2 Name and form, and consciousness

3.4.2.1 In the light of **the Majjhe Sutta**, "name" (*nāma*) is one extreme, "form" (*rūpa*) is the other extreme, and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is the middle. This is demonstrated in **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta**

---

[47] "The cessation of perception and feeling," ***saññā,vedayita nirodha****:* see (3.4). More briefly, it is "the attainment of cessation" (*nirodha,samāpatti*, S 14.11/2:151) or simply, "cessation" (*nirodha*): see SD 48.7 (3.2); SD 50.7 (1.2).

[48] Comy glosses *pariyāyena* with "by reasoning" (*kāraṇena,* AA 4:194,13). See ***Pariyāya nippariyāya*** SD 68.2.

[49] *Iminā'pi kho etaṁ āvuso pariyāyena veditabbaṁ yathā sukhaṁ nibbānaṁ*.

[50] *Kiñ ca bhikkhave rūpaṁ vādetha.* Comy says that although emptiness (***suññatā***) is discussed here, it is not fully defined because the characteristic of emptiness (*suññatā,lakkhaṇa*) has not been discussed. It merely introduces the characteristic of emptiness. Using the simile of a cow, Comy says that the cow is like emptiness, and the cow's characteristics are like the characteristic of emptiness: one discerns the cow by its characteristics; even so one will be able to discern emptiness by noticing its characteristics (SA 2:289 f). For details on form, see ***Rūpa,*** SD 17.2a.

[51] *Ruppatī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā rupan ti vuccati.* Although the vb *ruppati* and the n *rūpa* look related, their roots are not related. ***Ruppati*** is a passive vb derived from √RUP = Skt LUP, to break, injure, spoil. SED: *rup* has *rupyate,* "to suffer violent or racking pain." PED defines *ruppati* as "to be vexed, oppressed, hurt, molested," & refs to S 3:86 & Sn 1121. Comy: *Ruppatî ti kuppati ghaṭṭiyati pīḷīyati, bhijjatî ti attho* (It is vexed, meaning it is disturbed, stricken, oppressed, broken) (SA 2:290). Comys gives examples of how some existences (eg, the cold hells, hot hells, intergalactic "black holes," etc) "deform" those beings there (SA 2:290 f; VbhA 3-5). SA adds that being "deformed" is the specific characteristic (*paccatta,lakkhaṇa*) of form, which distinguishes it from feeling and the other aggregates, but they share the general characteristics (*sāmañña,lakkhaṇa*), namely, impermanence, suffering, and not self (SA 2:292). See S:B 1070 n110 (where Bodhi also points out Woodward's misunderstanding of comy).

[2.2.1.1], which puts each of the 12 links "in the middle" as dependent arising, functioning as causes and effects; when the cause is removed or ended, so is the effect.

The Majjhe Sutta gives "the middle" of our present living experience in these 6 stages [§§2-7], which may be explained as synchronous[52] cognitive consciousness[53] [3.4.2.2], as follows:

(1) **Contact** conditioned by past karmic formations arising as attention.
(2) **The past** refers to our memory and inclination (conditioned by the past), by what we perceive or recognize as **present** sense-objects and mind-objects. **The future** refers to our feelings for them (which follows).
(3) **Feelings** that are pleasant, unpleasant or neither arise accordingly, depending, respectively, on whether we like, dislike or are unfamiliar with the object.
(4) **Name and form**. We give "names" (*nāma*) (we recognise) to those "forms" (*rūpa*) or objects.
(5) **Self identity**. We feed and form our faculties, and so we "make sense" of "something," and so form our self identity or personality. This is an on-going experience that we go through even now as we read this. It is how we become a person.

3.4.2.2 While **the Majjhe Sutta** presents this cognitive process objectively, how we form ideas in the present, **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** [2.2.1.1] presents the same process subjectively, that is, as cause and effect, linking our present personality as the result of past dependent arising to future dependent arising, thus:

with karmic formations as condition, there is	consciousness;	*saṅkhāra,paccayā viññāṇaṁ*
with consciousness as condition, there is	name-and-form;	*viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṁ*
with name-and-form as condition, there are	the 6 sense-bases;	*nāma,rūpa,paccayā saḷ'āyatanaṁ*
with the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is	contact;	*saḷ'āyatana,paccayā phasso*
with contact as condition, there is	feeling;	*phassa,paccayā vedanā*
with feeling as condition, there is	craving;	*vedanā,paccayā taṇhā*
with craving as condition, there is	clinging;	*taṇhā,paccayā upādānaṁ*
with clinging as condition, there is	existence;	*upādāna,paccayā bhavo*

(**S 12.15**,8/2:17), SD 6.13

We can thus say that the dependent arising cycle presented here is part of how we are conditioned by the past, and also the present conditioning the future. Technically, this is a description of diachronous[54] existential consciousness. It connects into a future life with rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*).

3.4.2.3 The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15) describes the dependent arising of consciousness which gives rise to name-and-form (our experience of the moment) which keeps us alive and conscious: hence, we can call this "**cognitive consciousness**." This is a convenient modern English term for *how we know and make sense of things*. As the link between our past memory and present perception, cognitive consciousness is "the middle" or nexus that lets us know things.

As **Metteyya's Question** quoted by **the Majjhe Sutta** [§1.3] reminds us: "having understood both extremes, | the wise is not stuck in between" (Sn 1042ab). This means that we must constantly see the impermanence of this "middle"—that it is merely a passing moment—and just let it go. The spiritual act of "letting go" can only be fully experienced when we have experienced that "middle" moment. That is how

[52] "Synchronous": Happening or existing at the same time, esp in this lifetime or this very moment.
[53] On cognitive consciousness, see SD 17.8b (3).
[54] "Diachronous": happening or existing across time, over a certain period or across contiguous lives.

we joyfully live the moments of our lives. We can only let go of something that we have experienced; in letting go, we see it as a joy forever.

3.4.2.4 The Commentary on the Majjhe Sutta explains its 4th cycle [§5] as follows: "'**In the middle**' is consciousness, both rebirth-relinking-consciousness and the other kinds, is said to be between name and form because it occurs as the condition for name and form"[55] (AA 3:404,17-19). We have already seen above how rebirth-relinking-consciousness works as existential consciousness [3.4.2.2] and how cognitive consciousness works linking name and form [3.4.2.1].

3.5 THE 5TH ELDER MONK'S VIEW: THE SENSE-BASES [§6]

3.5.1 Karmic consciousness

In the 5th cycle of **the Majjhe Sutta**, the 6 sense-faculties are considered one extreme, the 6 sense-objects as the other extreme, and consciousness as in the middle. According to the Majjhe Sutta Commentary, the *viññāṇa* in this context is karmic consciousness (*kamma,viññāṇa,* AA 3:404,20-24). This is explained in the Subcommentary as *abhisaṅkhāra,viññāṇa,* that is, the consciousness or mind that roots all our actions, *bodily, verbal and mental* (in other words, the 3 kinds of karma),[56] and which is attended by craving and view (*taṇhā,diṭṭhi,sahagataṁ*).[57]

Karmic consciousness, since it features in daily life, is a form of "existential consciousness" [3.4.2.2]. It is a kind of mind that flows in our lives giving us thoughts, memories and activities that shape us as individuals capable of bodily and mental cultivation as the basis for spiritual liberation.

3.5.2 The 6 sense-faculties

3.5.2.1 Both **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** [2.2.1.1] and **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** [3.1.2] contain the links relating to name and form (*nāma,rūpa*) and the 6 sense-faculties (*saḷ-āyatana*). The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta embeds both name and form and the 6 sense-faculties within the links of dependent arising.[58] **The Sammā,-diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9) presents the 6 sense-faculties in its definition of **feeling** using the framework of the 4 noble truths, thus:

> And, avuso, what is **feeling**, what is the arising of feeling, what is the ending of feeling, what is the path leading to the ending of feeling?
>
> There are, avuso, these 6 classes of feeling:[59]
>
> feeling born of eye-contact,
> feeling born of ear-contact,
> feeling born of nose-contact,
> feeling born of tongue-contact,
> feeling born of body-contact,
> feeling born of mind-contact.
>
> With the arising of contact, there is the arising of feeling.
> With the ending of contact, there is the ending of feeling.

[55] *Catuttha,vāre **viññāṇaṁ majjhe** ti paṭisandhi,viññāṇaṁ hi nāma,rūpa,paccaya,samud'āgatattatā nāma,rūpāṇaṁ majjhe nāma.*

[56] Subcomy to Uddesa Vibhaṅga S Comy (MA 5:29,20) on *kamma,viññāṇa* (MAṬ:Be 3:389,26).

[57] SAṬ:Be 2:212,9 f.

[58] A 12.15.8/2:17 (SD 6.13).

[59] Cf **(Nidāna) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2/2:3 f), SD 5.15.

> The path leading to the ending of feeling is just this noble eightfold path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. (**M 9**,58/1:54), SD 11.14

This Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta passage elaborates on the brief presentation on **the middle** based on the 6-sense-faculties in the Majjhe Sutta, which nevertheless corresponds to the 3rd truth of the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta framework.

3.5.2.2 Although the Majjhe Sutta, the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta and the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta appear to be structurally different, their respective expositions of the ceasing of the 6 sense-faculties are identical. Such Suttas are examples of the deep and diverse understanding of Dharma amongst the early disciples, apparently differing only in Dharma presentation but shining with the same light of liberation on the path. All this stands to highlight the fact that the Buddha Dharma is not a word-based or dogmatic religion but the true reality of life and liberation.

3.6 THE 6TH ELDER MONK'S VIEW: SELF-IDENTITY [§7]

3.6.1 Self identity (*sakkāya*)

3.6.1.1 The 6th and last cycle of **the Majjhe Sutta** is based on **self identity** or existence (self-body or 5 aggregates), which is one extreme, the arising of self identity is the other extreme, and the ending of self identity is the middle; it is not mentioned in the other 2 suttas. ***Sakkāya*** is a term for the 5 aggregates, and its arising leads to the various extremes.

By this explanation, "the middle" is the **ending** of self identity, at different levels, depending on the level of path attainment. **The self identity view** (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*)—identifying with any of the 5 aggregates—is common amongst the unawakaned, and is only fully understood and removed when one attains streamwinning. The 5 aggregates of clinging are only removed when one attains arhathood, and so has only the functional aggregates; that is, an arhat does not create new karma.

3.6.1.2 The (Khandha) Sakkāya Sutta (S 22.105) presents self identity by way of the model of 4 noble truths. As the 1st noble truth, self identity is defined as **the 5 aggregates of clinging**: *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.* As the 2nd truth, the arising of self identity is from **craving**, that is, craving for sensual pleasures, for existence, and for non-existence. As the 3rd truth, the ending of self identity is the total ending of that very craving. And the 4th truth, the path to the ending of self identity, is the noble eightfold path.[60] The noble eightfold path is of course the middle way.

3.6.2 Craving

3.6.2.1 The Cūḷa,vedalla Sutta (M 44), too, explains self identity (*sakkāya*) by way of the 4 noble truths,[61] as in the (Khandha) Sakkāya Sutta [3.6.1.2]. In fact, the Cūḷa,vedalla Sutta defines the "ending of self identity" (*sakkāya,nirodha*) as "the utter fading away and ending of that very craving, giving it up, let-

[60] **S 22.105**/3:159 (SD 42.21).
[61] **M 44**,2-5/1:299 (SD 40a.9)

ting it go, being free from it, being detached from it,"[62] as in the 3rd noble truth explained in **the Dhamma,-cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11).[63]

Further, the Cūḷa,vedalla Sutta lists the 20 kinds of self identity views (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), wherein any of the 5 aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—is viewed "(1) as the self, or (2) as possessing that aggregate, or (3) the aggregate as in the self, or (4) the self as in the aggregate."[64]

Technically, any of these self identity views involves extremes (*antā*), that is, the notion that the aggregates are "something," some kind of abiding entity, and that it *is* the self or related to some self. The way to break such a false view is to cut right through the "middle" or "between" of the extremes—that there is neither an abiding entity nor a "self" (which is simply imaginative).

3.6.2.2 The Majjhe Sutta, as the title suggests, is about "the middle," that is, there is the way out of the 2 extremes, the world and our desire or attachment to it. With Dharma-based training we gradually rise out of these extremes, first by way of the body (moral training) and then by way of the mind (mental training). Then we are ready to be liberated from both extremes and from the world itself.

The Majjhe Sutta (A 6.61) and similar texts address the middle as a principle, similar to **the Dhamma,-cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) [3.6.2.1]. Other texts like **the Sammā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9) [3.5.2], **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), and **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) [3.1.1.2] show how the middle is known through time, that is, by way of dependent arising, and breaking any of the links unravels the whole cycle [3.3.1]. **The Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta** (M 52) and **the Dasama Sutta** (A 11.16) list as many as 11 "doors to the death-free," that is, cultivating the middle by way any of the form dhyanas, any of the divine abodes, or any of the first 3 formless dhyanas [3.3.2.1].

All these suttas present different and interesting facets of the same Dharma that is the "**middle way**" (*majjhima paṭipadā*). Thus the Majjhe Sutta closes with the Buddha reprising the first and simplest of the 6 answers regarding the middle:

> **Contact**, bhikshus, is one extreme; the arising of contact is the other extreme;
> the ending of contact is in the middle; and **craving** is the seamstress.
> For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence. [§12]

— — —

[62] *Yo kho āvuso visākha tassā,y'eva* [*tassa-y-eva*] *taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti* anālayo (**M 44**,4.2/1:299), SD 40a.9.

[63] **S 56.11**,7/5:421 (SD 1.1).

[64] **M 44**,7.3/1:300 (SD 40a.9).

Majjhe Sutta

The Discourse on the Middle

A 6.61

1 Thus have I heard.

1.2 At one time the Blessed One was dwelling in the deer park at Isipatana outside Baranasi.

Now at that time, after their meal, on returning from their almsround, a number of elder monks assembled, sitting together in the pavilion[65] when this conversation arose:

1.3 "It was said, avusos, by the Blessed One in the Pārāyana,[66] in (response to) **Metteyya's Question**: [1.2.1]

Yo ubhonte viditvāna[67]	Having understood both extremes [ends],
majjhe mantā[68] *na lippati*	the wise is not stuck in between.[69]
[*majjhe-m-antā na lippati*[70]]	[one is not stuck between the extremes.][71]
taṁ brūmi mahā,puriso ti	Him I call a great man—
so'dha sibbanim[72] *accagā ti*	he has left behind the seamstress here." (Sn 1042)

1.4 "What, avusos, is the first extreme? What is the other extreme? What is in the middle? And what is the seamstress?"

2 (1) When this was said, a certain bhikkhu said to the elder monks:

"**Contact**, avusos, is one extreme; the arising of contact is the other **[400]** extreme; the ending of contact is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress. For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.[73]

---

[65] "Pavilion," *maṇḍala,māḷa* : **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,10.4), SD 8.10.

[66] **Pārāyana:** the 5th and last chapter of Sutta,nipata (Sn), consisting of a frame-story and 16 sections in each of which the Buddha answers the questions of the elder brahmin Bāvarī's 16 students. Verses from the Pārāyana are cited, and explained elsewhere in the suttas, showing the Pārāyana's antiquity, esp as an independent work before being included in Sn. The Pārāyana has an ancient canonical commentary, **Cūḷa,niddesa**, the 2nd half of the Niddesa, the 11th book of Khuddaka Nikāya.

[67] Sn 1042a: *so ubh'anta-m-abhiññāya,* "He, knowing both ends."

[68] Comy: "Wisdom is called *manta*" (*mantā vuccati paññā,* Nc 224,10 f = Be 44; also SnA 2:402,26).

[69] *Majjhe mantā na lippati*. Comy glosses *mantā* with *paññā* (as fem, foll Nc 10,12') which glosses *mantā* as if it were a truncated feminine instrumental: *majjhe mantāya na lippati*. It is also poss that *mantā* is nominative of the agent noun *mantar*, "a thinker, one who is wise." On this form, see Norman, *The Group of Discourses,* 2001, 2006b: 198 n159 f. On the reading *majjhe-m-antā,* see foll n.

[70] Sn *limpati.*

[71] Alt tr. The reading ***majjhe-m-antā*** is possible and preferable; the reading *majjhen'antā* is also possible. The term *majjhena* is found, for example, in **Kaccāna,gotta S** (S 12.15,7.2/2:17), SD 6.13, as *majjhema dhamma*, "the teaching or truth by the middle." For sandhi *-m-,* see **Sn** 132, 151, 163, 249, 269, 306, 311, 411, 437, 458, 534, 664, 692, 765, 787, 796, 826, 840, 868, 909, 911 f, 955, 986, 1002, 1040, 1042, 1071 f; **Tha** 29, 74, 225, 646, 863; **Thī** 48; and **Dh** 34. Also cf *rajjena-m-atthiko* J 5:258.5*, *tāhi-m-eso* J 5:260,2*, *nayanti-m-etaṁ* J 5:445.19*. See Sn:N 193 n132.

[72] Only Be *sibbinim.* ***Sibbānī*** (f), noun *sibbana* (nt), derived from *sibbati,* "to sew." This also has the sense, "the sewing." Comy: "Craving is called the seamstress" (*sibbanī vuccati taṇhā,* Nc 276,7 f = Be 46). Jayawickrama (Sn:J p390): "PED 'seamstress' (= *sibbanti*) is unlikely."

[73] See n on **Contact** [3.1.1].

It is in this way, avuso, that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."[74]

3 (2) When this was said, another monk said to the elder monks:

"**The past**, avusos, is one extreme; the future is the other extreme; the present is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress. For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.

It is in this way, avusos, that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."

4 (3) When this was said, another monk said to the elder monks:

"**Pleasant feeling**, avusos, is one extreme; painful feeling is the other extreme; neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress. For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.

It is in this way, avusos, that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."

5 (4) When this was said, another monk said to the elder monks:

"**Name**, avusos, is one extreme; form is the other extreme; consciousness is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress.[75] For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.

It is in this way, avusos, that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."

6 (5) When this was said, another bhikkhu-said to the elder monks:

"**The 6 internal bases**, avusos, are one extreme; the 6 external bases are the other extreme; consciousness is in the middle; and craving is the seamstress.[76] For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.

It is in this way, avusos, that a monk **[401]** *directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."*

7 (6) When this was said, another bhikkhu said to the elder monks:

"**Self identity**, avusos, is one extreme; the arising of self identity is the other extreme; the ending of self identity is the middle; and craving is the seamstress.[77]

For craving sews one to the production of this or that self identity.

It is in this way, avusos, that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."

---

[74] Comy: "What should be directly known (*abhiññeyyaṁ*) is the 4 noble truths; what should be fully understood (*pariññeyyaṁ*) is the pair of mundane truths (suffering and its arising). In this very life, he makes an end of the suffering of the round; he ends it and uproots it." (AA 3:403,23-26)

[75] Comy: "Consciousness—both rebirth-consciousness and the other kinds—is said to be in the 'middle' because it occurs as the condition for name-and-form." (AA 3:404,17-19)

[76] Comy: "Karmic consciousness is in the middle; or here, because karma is included by the mind-base among the internal bases, any kind of consciousness is in the middle; or else the *javana* consciousness is dependent on an internal base—for [it depends on] adverting in the mind-door—and so it is said to be in the middle." (AA 3:404,20-24)

[77] Comy: "Self-identity (*sakkāya*) is the round of existence with its 3 planes. The arising of self-identity is the truth of the arising; the ending of self identity is the truth of ending." (AA 3:404,25). Now there is our present "self identity" (personal existence); then the arising of self identity is the arising of the next existence (in the sense of the next moment as well as the next life); the ending of self identity is the ending of the present moment of existence or present life. Craving is the seamstress that generates life, sews the present one to future existence.

8 When this was said, a certain monk said this to the elder monks:

"Avusos, we have each explained according to our own inspiration. Come, let's go to the Blessed One and report this matter to him. As the Blessed One explains it to us, so should we keep it in mind."

"Yes, avuso," those elder monks replied.

9 Then the elder monks went to the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and reported to him the entire conversation that had taken place, [asking:]

"Bhante, which of us has spoken well?"

9.2 [The Blessed One:] "In a way,[78] bhikshus, you have all spoken well, but listen and attend closely as I tell you what I intended when I said in the Pārāyana, in (response to) **Metteyya's Question** (Metteyya Pañha):

10	*yo ubho'nte viditvāna*	Having understood both extremes,
	majjhe mantā na lippati	the wise one does not get stuck in the middle.
		[one is not stuck between the extremes.]
	taṁ brūmi mahā,puriso ti	Him I call a great man—
	so'dha sibbinim accagā ti	he has left behind the seamstress here." [1.3]

11 "Listen well to this, pay close attention, I will speak."

"Yes, bhante," the elder monks replied to the Blessed One.

12 The Blessed One said this:

"**Contact**, bhikshus, is one **[402]** extreme; the arising of contact is the other extreme; the ending of contact is in the middle; and **craving** is the seamstress.

For craving sews one to the production of this or that state of existence.

It is in this way that a monk directly knows what should be directly known; fully understands what should be fully understood; and by doing so, in this very life he makes an end of suffering."[79]

—evaṁ—

260810 260817 261027.2

[78] "In a way," *pariyāyena.* See ***Pāriyāya Nippariyāya***, SD 68.2.

[79] In a Chinese parallel to this Sutta, SĀ 1164 (T2.310b20-311a2), the monks propose only 5 interpretations of the verse; (1) 6 internal bases, 6 external bases, and feeling; (2) the past, the future, and the present; (3) pleasure, pain, and neither pain nor pleasure; (4) existence, its arising, and feeling; (5) identity and its origin (the middle term is missing). When they ask the Buddha, he explains the verse in terms of contact, its arising, and feeling. Understandably, the verse in the Chinese parallel does not have a Chin cognate for *mantā*.