

Viññāṇa (Consciousness)

A study of the 5th aggregate

(Based on the Suttas and the Commentaries)
by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Definitions

1.1 THE MIND’S CENTRAL ACTIVITY. Ask yourself, “Am I conscious now?” The short answer lies there, but to put this experience or understanding into meaningful words is another matter. Understandably, there is a huge and growing volume of thought, discussion and literature on consciousness.¹ There is notably a growing interest in Buddhism and psychology,² especially in meditation and what specialists now call “the neuroscience of consciousness.”³ As the American philosopher, **Daniel C Dennett**, says, “Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.”⁴ Let us now investigate the question of consciousness and try to answer in greater detail.

In simple terms, consciousness can be said to be what we generally refer to as the “mind,” and its function is that of experiencing sensations, that is, sense-experiences, or the events occurring at the six sense-doors (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind). Unfortunately, terms like “mind” and “sensation” are very general and polysemous, and as such are not very helpful in serious discussion. To compound the problem, the Suttas often use three terms—*citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*—interchangeably for what we regard as mind.⁵ However, as we shall see, these three terms are not always used in a precisely synonymous way [12].

Interpretation is less problematic when we regard the early Buddhist teachings as “canonical contexts,” rather than as “canonical texts.” As a rule, the early teachings are easily understood from its context, and if there appears to be any ambiguity, it is almost always purposeful, reflecting that the passage refers to more than one situation. All this will become evident in this study. Suffice it to say at this point that *viññāṇa* is a broad term that covers such western psychological categories as the conscious, the pre-conscious and the sub-conscious.

One great advantage in this sort of broad terminology is that it is less cumbersome. We generally begin by talking in terms of a general category, *viññāṇa*. Then we go on to understand that the unspecified term has interrelated sub-categories, each of which could, of course, have its own terminology and application. Some aspects of language and meaning have been discussed in the chapter on *saññā*.⁶

The main points about *viññāṇa* are as follows. It is an impermanent and momentary stream of consciousness that flows through one’s present life (allowing us to know things), and, upon dying, is transmitted to a new life, thus enabling karmic process to continue over many lives. This continuity represents what the world regards as the personal identity. *Viññāṇa* works with the body, rendering it alive, so that we are distinguished from inanimate things. As such, it is a key factor in Buddhist psychology.

As *viññāṇa* is the central activity of the mind, it is often translated as “consciousness.” As **Sue Hamilton** notes, “Because one of the most fundamental characteristics of human beings is that they are conscious, this makes it a particularly important term in the analysis of the human being” (1996a:82). Again, the context of *viññāṇa* in the Suttas (and the Abhidhamma) is not always clear to the modern

¹ In October 2006, when I googled “consciousness, Buddhism,” I made 5,750,000 hits, and “vinnana” itself, 16,800 hits! On some contemporary academic views on consciousness, see Uriah Kriegel, “Philosophical theories of consciousness: Contemporary Western perspectives,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, 2007:35-66 (ch 3). Accessed October 2006 from <http://www.uriahkriegel.com/downloads/theories.pdf>.

² See Luis O Gómez, “Psychology,” 2003.

³ See Lutz, Dunne & Davidson, “Meditation and the neuroscience of consciousness,” 2007.

⁴ *Consciousness Explained*, Boston & London: Little, Brown & Co, 1991:21.

⁵ Even in the Abhidhamma, these three terms does not seem to be differentiated [12.4-5].

⁶ SD 17.4.

reader. The problem is not helped by the fact that even to this day scholars and specialists of both East and West have no consensus as to the meaning or function of consciousness.⁷

1.2 SELF-AWARENESS. In many occurrences of *viññāṇa* in the early suttas, we see it used generally to refer to *self-awareness* or *reflexive consciousness*. Let us examine three such passages, namely, **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), **the Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) and **the Vīṇā Sutta** (S 35.246):

(1) The Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61):

4 But, bhikkhus, as regards that which is called “mentation [thought]” (*citta*), and “mind” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*)—the uninstructed worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be liberated from it.

5 What is the reason for this?

Because for a long time, this has been held by him, appropriated, and grasped, thus:

“This is mine; this I am; this is my self.”⁸

Therefore, the uninstructed worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be liberated from it. (S 12.61/2:94 f) = SD 20.2 [3, 12]

The Assutava Sutta shows how an unawakened worldling remains in the grasp of craving, conceit and views by regarding the mind as the self, that is, as some sort of abiding entity. Although he is conscious of his own mind or consciousness (that is, he has reflexive consciousness), he has not let go of grasping to it.

(2) Hālidakāni Sutta 1 (S 22.3):

“The form element,⁹ householder, is *the home of consciousness* (*viññāṇassa oko*).¹⁰ One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the form element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.¹¹

The feeling element, householder, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the feeling element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.

⁷ See eg Susan Blackmore 2003:7-20 (ch 1) & Max Velmans 2002.

⁸ These are **the 3 graspings** (*gāha*): “this is mine” (*etam mama*) is the grasp of craving; “this I am” (*eso ‘ham asmi*), the grasp of conceit; and “this is my self” (*eso me attā*), the grasp of views. The noble disciple, on the other hand, reflects thus: “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (S 3:18 f; cf 3:16). When this is applied to the 5 aggregates in turn, we have the 20 wrong views of the uninstructed worldling, who views form, etc. as the self, the self as possessing form, etc. form as in the self, the self as in form, etc (M 3:188, 227; S 3:3, 16, 96). Both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma def self-identity view (*sakkāya, ditthi*) as comprising these 20 wrong views (M 1:300, 3:17 f; S 3:102; Dhs 182). See Gethin 1985:44 f.

⁹ “Form element,” *rūpa, dhātu*. “The use of *dhātu* as a syn for *khandha* (aggregate) is unusual; more often the two are treated as headings for different schemes of classification” (S:B 1046 n18). This usage however is found in a number of suttas: **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 3.9, 10), **Hālidakāni S 2** (S 3.13), **Anicca S** (S 3:13), **Upāya S** (S 3:53), **Bija S** (S 3:55), **Udāna S** (S 3:58 *bis*)—all in the Khandha Samyutta—and **Mahā Niddesa** (Nm 1:198).

¹⁰ SA explains this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as karmic consciousness (*kamma, viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259). “The passage confirms the privileged status of consciousness among the five aggregates. While all the aggregates are conditioned phenomena marked by the three characteristics, consciousness serves as a connecting thread of personal continuity through the sequence of rebirths. This ties up with the idea expressed at [**Cetanā S 1-3**, S 12.38-40/2:65-68] that consciousness is the persisting element in experience that links together the old experience with the new one. The other four aggregates serve as the ‘stations for consciousness’ (*viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo*) [see **Upāya S** (S 22.53/3:52-54) & **Bija S** (S22.54/3:54 f)]. Even consciousness, however, is not a self-identical entity but a sequence of dependently arisen occasions of cognizing; see M 1:256-60 [M 38.1-8, **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S**]” (S:B 1047 n18). For a 5 aggregates as an “empty hut,” see **Udāyī S** (S 46.30/5:89 f) = SD 28.10.

¹¹ “Roams frequenting houses,” *oka, sārati*. According to DP, *oka* means “house, home; resort, refuge” (S 3:9, 5:24 = Dh 87; Dh 91; J 3:430), cf *ukka* (house) (V 1:211); *anoka*, “without a home, independent” (S 1:126; Sn 966), as n “homelessness, independence” (Dh 87); *anoka, sārī* (S 3:10; U 32; Sn 628). For other nn, see DP: *oka* & *ukka*.

The first line reads *okam pahāya aniketa, sārī* without mention of *oka, sārī*, “one who wanders about frequenting houses,” nor *anoka, sārī*, “one who wanders about not frequenting houses.” Mahā Kaccāna introduces these terms as implicit in the absolute construction *okam pahāya* (S:B 1046 n18).

The perception element, householder, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the perception element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.

The formations element, householder, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the formations element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.¹²

Such, householder, is the one who wanders about frequenting houses.

(S 22.3.4/3:9 f) = SD 10.12 [5.2 & 11.2]

This well known passage plays on the word “house” (*oka*): while the lay person lives in a house, the true renunciant has given up both the physical house and psychological “house,” that is, the support or basis for his selfhood, namely, the five aggregates. Although the saint here has self-awareness, it is that which lets go of clinging to the aggregates. [5.2]

(3) Vīṇā Sutta (S 35.246)

(1) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to forms cognizable by the eye, such a one should restrain the mind (*citta*) from them thus:

“This path is fearful, dangerous, thorny, thickly tangled, a wrong path, an evil path, beset by scarcity. This is a path taken by mean people, and it is not a path taken by worthy persons. You do not deserve this.”¹³

In this way, the mind should be restrained from these states regarding form cognizable by the eye.

(2) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to sounds cognizable by the ear...

(3) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to smells cognizable by the nose...

(4) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to tastes cognizable by the tongue...

¹² Comy: Why is not said here, thus, “the consciousness element, householder, (is the home for consciousness)?” For the sake of avoiding confusion; for “home” is here spoken as a condition (*paccaya*). An earlier karmic consciousness is a condition for both a later karmic consciousness and a resultant consciousness, and a resultant consciousness for both a (later) resultant consciousness and a (later) karmic consciousness. Therefore, the confusion could arise, “Which [what kind of] consciousness is meant here?” To avoid this, consciousness is not included, and the teaching expressed without breach. Furthermore, the other four aggregates, as objects (*ārammaṇa,vasena*), are said to be “stations for the karmically generative consciousness” (*abhisankhāra,viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhitiyo*). As such, consciousness is not mentioned here (*Kasmā pan’ettha “viññāṇa,dhātu kho, gahapatī ti na vuttanti? Sammoha,vighāt’-attham. “Oko” ti hi atthato paccayo vuccati, purejātañ ca kamma,viññāṇam pacchājātassa kamma,viññāṇassa pi vipāka,viññāṇassa pi vipāka,viññāṇañ ca vipāka,viññāṇassa pi kamma,viññāṇassa pi paccayo hoti. Tasmā “kataram nu kho idha viññāṇan?” ti sammoho bhavēyya, tassa vighāt’attham tañ agahetvā asambhinnā va desanā katā. Api ca ārammaṇa,vasena catasso abhisankhāra,viññāṇa-ṭ,ṭhitiyo vuttā ti tā dassetum pi idha viññāṇam na gahitañ*) (SA 2:259).

¹³ Cf this passage from Vitakka Saṅghāna S (M 20): “If, bhikshus, while the monk is paying attention to a different meditation sign, and there still arises in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate or delusion, then he should examine the dangers (*ādīnava*) of those thoughts, thus: ‘These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering.’ [cf M 19.3-5] Then the evil unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated. Bhikshus, just as a young man or woman, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel pained, shamed, disgusted by a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human hung around his or her neck, even so should the monk get rid of the evil unwholesome thoughts by examining the dangers of those thoughts, thus: ‘These thoughts are unwholesome, they are blameworthy, they bring suffering.’” (M 20.4/1:119 f) = SD 1.6.

Then the evil unwholesome thoughts are eliminated and disappear. By their elimination, the mind thus stands firm internally, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated.

(5) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to touches cognizable by the body...

(6) Bhikshus, if desire, or lust, or hatred, or delusion, or aversion, should arise in any monk or nun in regard to mind-objects cognizable by the mind, such a one should restrain the mind from them thus:

“This path is fearful, dangerous, thorny, thickly tangled, a wrong path, an evil path, beset by scarcity. This is a path taken by mean people, and it is not a path taken by worthy persons. You do not deserve this.”

In this way, the mind should be restrained from these states regarding mind-objects cognizable by the mind. (S 35.246.3/4:195)

In this Vīṇā Sutta passage, we see *citta* (the mind or mentation) in place of its synonym, *viññāna*. Here, we apply self-awareness not to react to any of the sense-objects in an unwholesome way so as to reinforce the latent tendencies.

1.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SENSES. The early Buddhist texts consistently speak of the six sense-faculties (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), and *consciousness* forms a vital ingredient of every sense-experience. Consciousness, as such, is divided into six types by way of its sense-base, thus:

eye consciousness	cognizes ¹⁴ visual forms and colours
ear consciousness	cognizes sounds
nose consciousness	cognizes smells
tongue consciousness	cognizes tastes
body consciousness	cognizes touches (tangible objects)
mind consciousness	cognizes the physical sense-objects, as well as mental objects, such as ideas, concepts, images, emotions, etc

Table 1. The twelve sense-bases

Simply put, consciousness cognizes sense-data. Sense-experience arises through the interaction between the sense-faculty (eg, the eye) and its related sense-object (viz, visual form) by way of sense-consciousness (viz, eye-consciousness). As such, there are altogether eighteen such factors or conditions of sense-experience: they are called the eighteen “elements” (*dhātu*). A description of the well known three conditions of sense-experience (*tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso*)¹⁵ is found **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), beginning as follows:

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. (M 18.16/1:111) = SD 6.14¹⁶

The Mahā Hatthi,padôpama Sutta (M 28) closes with a similar analysis of the eighteen elements, beginning with the statement:

If, friends, internally **the eye** is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention] (*tajjo samannā-hāro hoti*),¹⁷ then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness. (M 28.27/1:190) = SD 6.16

¹⁴ “Cognize” here means to experience, know, think or notice a mental state. Where a word encompasses a number of meanings or ideas, it is helpful to use it. Such a word or term is said to be “pregnant.”

¹⁵ Tr as “the meeting of the three is contact.”

¹⁶ See SD 6.14 Intro (4).

In these contexts, technically speaking, consciousness acts as “appropriate attention” (*samannāhāra*), that is, the directing of one’s mind towards a sense-object. In short, consciousness is the key aspect of our mind, and is the basic awareness of a sense-object that makes sensing, or what we call “experience” possible.

The Majjhima Commentary explains *samannāhāra* here as *attention arising in dependence on the eye and forms*. It is identified with the “five-door advertent consciousness” (*pañca, dvāra, vajjana, citta*), which breaks off the flow of the life continuum (*bhavaṅga*) to initiate the process of cognition (MA 2:229). Even when a sense-object (external stimulus) comes within the range of the sense-organ, if attention is not directed towards the object (because we are occupied with something else), there is still no appearance of “the corresponding class of consciousness.” It means here that no eye-consciousness would arise.¹⁸

1.4 PHASSA. N Ross Reat notices in these two passages—from the Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta and the Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta—an interconnection between the arisings of *viññāṇa* and of *phassa* (contact):

...two equations emerge:

- (1) faculty + object + *viññāṇa* = *phassa/samannāhāra* [M 18.16], and
- (2) faculty + object + *phassa/samannāhāra* = *viññāṇa* [M 28.27].

Sensory contact, accompanied by appropriate attention, is as necessary to consciousness as consciousness is for sensory contact and appropriate attention. (1987:19)¹⁹

This observation, similar to the one made by **Rune EA Johansson** (1965:213) twenty years earlier, is both interesting and insightful. However, it should be noted that although both Johansson and Reat juxtapose *phassa* (contact) with *samannāhāra*, they are only near-synonyms. *Samannāhāra* is a very specific term and refers only to the directing of one’s attention towards an object.

Phassa (or, *-samphassa*, in compounds), on the other hand, has a broader meaning and plays a central role in the human conscious process. We find two sets of *phassa* in the Suttas: a sixfold set and a twofold set. The sixfold *phassa*, the better known of the two sets, is found, for example, in **the Sammā, dīṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), where Sāriputta defines *phassa* as follows:

46 And, avuso,²⁰ what is contact, what is the arising of contact, what is the ending of contact, what is the way leading to the ending of contact?

There are, avuso, these six classes of contact:²¹

eye-contact	(<i>cakkhu, samphassa</i>),
ear-contact	(<i>sota, samphassa</i>),
nose-contact	(<i>ghāna, samphassa</i>),
tongue-contact	(<i>jivhā, samphassa</i>),
body-contact	(<i>kāya, samphassa</i>),

¹⁷ *Tajjo* (*tad + ya*), “this like,” appropriate; “engagement [of attention]” (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasikāra*, “attention” (M 1:445; Vbh 321). PED gives the following definitions of *samannāhāra* (vb): 1. to concentrate the mind on, to consider, reflect (D 2:204; M 1:445; A 3:162 f, 402 f; S 1:114); 2. to pay respect to, to honour (M 2:169; V 1:180). The PED however gives the meanings of *samannāhāra* (n) as “concentration, bringing together (M 1:190 f; DA 1:123; Miln 189). As such, *tajjo samannāhāro hoti* means “there is an appropriate attention,” or, as **Jayatilleke** suggests, that there is “an appropriate conscious engagement” or “an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind” (1963: 433). See Sarachchandra 1994:14 f.

¹⁸ See Harvey 1996:95.

¹⁹ See also Hamilton 1996a:89.

²⁰ “Avuso” (*āvuso*; BHS *āvusa, āyuṣṣamā*), “friend(s), gentleman/-men, sir(s),” used by non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike. A common form of address between strangers and peers; later (after the Buddha), use by seniors to address juniors; never used by the Buddha.

²¹ Cf S 2:3; Vism 444-446.

mind-contact (*mano,samphassa*).
 With the arising of the six sense-bases, there is the arising of contact.
 With the ending of the six sense-bases, there is the ending of contact.
 The way leading to the ending of contact is just this noble eightfold path; that is, right view...right concentration. (M 9.46/1:52) = SD 11.14

The less known, but no less important, is the twofold set of *phassa* defined in the **Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (D 15) as *paṭigha,samphassa* (sense-impression) and *adhivacana,samphassa* (conceptual impression).²² When there is input through any of the physical senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body), *saññā* (perception) arises as a result of the stimulus, that is, our attention is directed at the experience: we then apperceive, that is, recognize or identify it. When there is no physical sense-stimulus, and the stimulus is purely mental, then we conceive an idea or a state, that is, we ideate,²³ or mentally “see” or conceive an image from an earlier experience, or conjures up new one.

Phassa, the Buddhist Dictionary, reminds us, “does not signify any physical impact,” but is one of the seven “mental factors” (*cetasika*), or constant concomitant factors of consciousness, and belongs to the mental formations aggregate (*sāṅkhāra-k,khandha*). In Abhidhamma lists of both the mental factors and of the formations aggregates, *phassa* is generally mentioned first (eg Dhs 1), because of its fundamental position in the cognitive process.²⁴

Phassa, as we can see plays a hugely vital role in the cognitive process, while *samannāhāra* is a special term for advertence or attention. As such, the correlation between the two formulas (as suggested by Reat, above) is better simply shown in this manner:

- (1) sense-faculty + object + *viññāṇa* = *phassa* [M 18.16], and
 (3) sense-faculty + object + *samannāhāra* = *viññāṇa* [M 28.27].

If we look at the links of dependent arising, we can now understand why *viññāṇa* is a much earlier link than *phassa* [Table 6].

2 Canonical contexts of *viññāṇa*

As we all know, the teachings of the Buddha and the early saints are all oral transmissions. Teachings are presented to the listener or audience depending on the occasion and their spiritual disposition. Very often the audience’s understanding (or misunderstanding) becomes the point of departure for a teaching specially tailored for them so that they attained certain levels of sainthood. Attempts to systematize these *ad hoc* and personalized teachings have been done even in the Buddha’s time in such suttas as the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) and the **Das’uttara Sutta** (D 34). The most complete systematization is of course found in the Abhidharma traditions of the post-Buddha sects.²⁵ Challenging though a study of *viññāṇa* may be, but there are enough materials in the Pali Canon to give us a clear insight into its nature and the purpose of the teachings around it.

²² For details, see *Saññā* = SD 17.4(2.2).

²³ For a discussion, see Hamilton 1996a:59 f.

²⁴ In the dependent arising, *phassa* is conditioned by the six sense-bases and is a condition for feeling [3]. The **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1) states that *phassa* influences feeling and wrong views (D 1.131-143/1:43 f) = SD 25.2). Along with material food, mental volition and consciousness, it is one of the 4 foods (*āhāra*) (see **Sammā,diṭṭhi S**, M 9.11/1:48 = SD 11.14). It is the first of the sense-impression pentad (*phassa,pañcamaka*), together with feeling, perception, volition and consciousness (see Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies*, 3rd ed 1976:47 ff). As *phassa* is “a key function in the mind’s contact with the world of objects and being a potential source of defilements,” it forms an important subject for reflection (Sn 736 f, 778, 851, 870-872, 923).

²⁵ According to Frauwallner, “Abhidharma-Studien IV. Der Abhidharma der anderer Schulen.” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost)asiens*, 15:103-121 (1971), 16:95-152 (1972); 1971b:106, the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is considerably later than both the Vinaya and the Sutta Piṭaka, ie, between 200 BCE and 200 CE. See also Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, 1996 §129.

Sue Hamilton, in chapter 5 of her thoughtful monograph on the five aggregates entitled *Identity and Experience* (1996a), attempts to establish how we might understand the meaning and function of *viññāṇa* as an aggregate (*khandha*) by suggesting the following five headings (though some of the points under each may overlap):

- (1) *Viññāṇa* as impermanent;
- (2) *Viññāṇa* as “consciousness of”;
- (3) *Viññāṇa* as a factor in cognition;
- (4) *Viññāṇa* as providing continuity; and
- (5) *Viññāṇa* as evolving.

Such headings as given by Hamilton help us get a better perspective of the meaning and function of *viññāṇa* in the early texts. However, she cautions us:

In imposing such headings on unsystematic material there is of course the danger that one is projecting onto it a greater degree of coherence than exists in the texts. Indeed, such is the lack of any systematic approach in the texts that to a certain extent this is unavoidable if one is to attempt to come to any meaningful understanding of the function of *viññāṇa*. (1996a:83)

I shall, in the following sections, use this structure of ideas as my point of departure, especially to link more teachings and sutta references together to throw more light into our study of *viññāṇa*.

3 Viññāṇa is impermanent

3.1 CONSCIOUSNESS IS THE MOMENT. In translating *viññāṇā* as “consciousness,” we have not only used one of the most problematic terms in modern psychology and mind science, but more significantly, may allow the impression, since it is a substantive noun, that it is something of a permanent entity (which is clearly not the case in early Buddhism). As such, “our concern here is to establish that any interpretation of *viññāṇa* as permanent is erroneous” (Hamilton 1996a:64). Any suggestions of permanence would be against the key teachings of the Buddha. The doctrine of dependent arising and the three universal characteristics, for example, declare that all samsaric experiences are conditioned, dependently arising, and therefore impermanent. The impermanence of the mind and consciousness is clearly stated by the Buddha in the monkey simile in the Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61), thus:

Bhikshus, that which is called “mind” (*citta*), or “mentation [thought]” (*mano*), or “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another.

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, wandering through the forest, seizes one branch, lets go of that and grabs another—even so, bhikshus, that which is called “mind,” or “mentation,” or “consciousness,” night and day, arises as one things and ceases as another. (S 12.61/2:95) = SD 20.2²⁶

3.2 CONSCIOUSNESS ARISES ON ACCOUNT OF FORMATIONS. Not only is *viññāṇa* impermanent, it does not arise on its own, but is arises on account of *saṅkhāra* (formations) [17.6]. This is the fuel (*upā-āna*) of consciousness as an aggregate of clinging (*upādāna-k,khandha*), that is, as a component of the unawakened individual. Conversely, when formations cease, consciousness ceases, too. This is the interdependence of *viññāṇa* and *saṅkhāra* in the links of the dependent arising, thus:²⁷

²⁶ Although this simile is often quoted to illustrate that the restless mind is like a monkey in a tree, neither the Sutta nor its commentary does so, but points to the fact that the mind is always dependent on a sense-object. See S:B 771 n157.

²⁷ See below §6. For a discussion on dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), see SD 5.16.

<i>avijjā</i>	ignorance
↓	
<i>saṅkhāra</i>	formations
↓	
<i>viññāṇa</i>	consciousness
↓	
<i>nāma, rūpa</i>	name-and-form
↓	
<i>saḷāyatana</i>	the 6 sense-bases
↓	
<i>phassa</i>	contact (sense-stimulus)
↓	
<i>vedanā</i>	feeling
↓	
...	

Table 3. The traditional dependent arising formula

This notion of impermanence was apparently later developed by the Abhidhamma tradition into the theory of momentariness (*khana, vāda*).²⁸ However, as **Sue Hamilton** notes,

...in the Sutta Piṭaka, the purpose of this passage is simply to illustrate that one’s mental processes are impermanent. And its concern is not to establish that the object(s) of one’s mental processes are constantly changing (though of course they are) but that this is how one’s mind operates subjectively: the context of the Sutta indicates that it is to one’s subjective experience that the Buddha is referring. (1996a:86)

4 The “stream” of consciousness

4.1 THE STRINGED JEWEL. Let us now examine a few similes on the impermanence of consciousness. **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) contains this enigmatic passage on the nature of the body and consciousness:

²⁹Maharajah, just as if there were a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread³⁰—and a man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand, were to reflect on it thus:

‘This is a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water—eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread.’

²⁸ Discussed in detail by Collins, 1982:237-261. See SD 17.2b.

²⁹ This passage also at **Subha S** (D 10.2.21-22/1:209) = **Mahā Sakuludāyi S** (M 77.29/2:17).

³⁰ “Through which runs...etc.” *tatra suttam āvutam nīlam vā pītam vā lohitaṃ vā odātam vā paṇḍu, suttam vā*. Rhys Davids tr *pītam* here as “orange-coloured,” and *paṇḍu* as “yellow” (D:RD 1:87), while Bodhi has as “yellow” and “brown” respectively (1989:44). *Paṇḍu, sutta* is found in **Vidhura Paṇḍita J** (J 545/6:305), where EB Cowell & WHD Rouse tr it as “white thread” (J:C&R 6:147). Both *pīta* and *paṇḍu* sometimes refer to “yellow.” SED def *pāṇḍu* as “yellowish white, white, pale.”

Even so, maharajah—with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and utterly unshakable—he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He knows:

‘This body of mine is form, composed of the four great elements, born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to uncertainty, rubbing, pressing, breaking up and destruction. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.’

(D 2.84/1:76 f) = SD 8.10

Neither the Suttas nor the Commentaries offer any explanation on the gem simile here, except for saying that the gem “is like the physical body, and the thread running through it is like insight knowledge (*vipassanā,ñāṇa*)” (DA 1:211). The New Sub-commentary corrects “insight knowledge” to “insight consciousness” (*vipassanā,viññāṇa*).³¹

The Pali for the phrase, “through which runs a blue, or yellow, or red, or white thread, or a light yellow thread”—*tatra suttam āvutaṃ nīlaṃ vā pītaṃ vā lohitaṃ vā odātaṃ vā paṇḍu,suttam vā*—is rather curious, in that the first four colours are simply listed as adjectives, but the last is a noun clause (*paṇḍu,-sutta*, “light yellow string”). It is possible that these five colours—blue, yellow, red, white, and light yellow—represent five of the sense-consciousnesses, that is, respectively, the eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness. The string is the mind-consciousness, and the gem is the physical body. In simple terms, all this refers to the mind and body of an individual. We will discuss this further below [4.4].

The last sentence of the gem simile in the Sāmañña,phala Sutta, “this consciousness of mine lies attached here, bound up here” (*viññāṇam ettha sitam ettha paṭibaddham*) [4.1] means that consciousness in a physical being is dependent on the physical body. As Sue Hamilton notes,

This analogy suggests that just as both gem and thread have to be present in order for there to be a necklace at all, so it is with the human being: body and *viññāṇa* are interrelated and interdependent. Indeed the passage implies that far from being an independent entity, *viññāṇa* is bound up with and *dependent on* the body... The analogy of the gem on a thread further suggests that occurrences of consciousness are held together, as it were, by their common physical locus, a particular body. The way in which *viññāṇa* represents continuity of experience is discussed [9].

(1996a:87)

This enigmatic but well known passage, as such, describes the nature of *individuality*: the human person comprises of body and *viññāṇa* (consciousness), both integrally bound up together, without either one, there is no “individual” at all.

4.2 TRULY KNOWING THE MIND. We can only really begin to know the nature of this consciousness at the dhyanic level of the third satipatthana, the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*).³² More specifically, this direct experience of the nature of consciousness begins in the ninth stage of the twelve-stage breath meditation, as laid out in **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118), where the meditator breathes “experiencing the mind” (*citta,paṭisamvedī*).³³

Only with the insight based on the absolute stillness and peace of the fourth dhyana, can we have a fuller vision of the true nature of consciousness.³⁴ The fourth dhyana is likened to *a man fully covered from head to foot with a clean white cloth*, and “he sits, pervading the body with a pure, bright mind,³⁵ so

³¹ DANṬ :VRI 2:126.

³² **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.12/2:299) = SD 13.2 = **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.34/1:59) = SD 13.3.

³³ M 118.20/3:83 (SD 7.13) = (**Ānāpāna,sati**) **Kimbila S** (S 54.10.12/5:323 = SD 12.22). See Brahmavamso 2006:92-94, where he explains how the arising and nature of the *nimitta* in this connection; also 2006:116-124..

³⁴ On the nature of the 4th dhyana, see Brahmavamso 2006:163.

³⁵ See **Accharā Vagga** (A 1.6.1-2): “Monks, this mind is radiant (*pabhassara*), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The uninstructed ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no personal development.” (A 1:10). On reaching the 4th dhyana, the practitioner becomes directly aware of the truly and naturally pure nature of the mind. See also A:ÑB 1999 §4 & **The Radiant Mind** = SD 8.3.

that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by a pure, bright mind.”³⁶ In fact, if we have actually seen someone all draped in such a clean white robe, we would often notice an iridescence, a bright glow from the cloth.

“The man,” notes Brahmavamso, “represents the mind, while the cloth represents the perfect purity of equanimity and mindfulness that is the hallmark of the fourth jhāna” (2006:166). In other words, this is the nature of consciousness when it is purified (even temporarily) of all mental hindrances and defilements, that is, the radiant mind (*pabhassara, citta*), mentioned in the suttas.³⁷ This will be more fully discussed in the section on Dh 1-2 [4.5].

4.3 THE BRAHM FRUIT SALAD SIMILE. Consciousness, as such, is not a permanent entity; it is not even a smooth “stream of consciousness,” but is really a *series of discrete mental events*. Consciousness is sometimes compared to a sandy beach that looks continuous and compact, but on closer examination, we discover that it is made up of discrete particles of sand. In fact, under magnification, we would even notice that there are spaces around each of the sand-particles. As **Brahmavamso** explains:

There are empty spaces between each particle of sand, with no essential sandiness flowing in the gap between any two particles. In the same way, that which we take to be the flow of consciousness is clearly seen to be a series of discrete events, with nothing flowing in between. (2006:118)

Brahmavamso goes on to explain the nature of consciousness by using the fruit salad analogy,³⁸ which I have here adapted into a fuller version in terms of the six sense-objects. Suppose there is an apple on a plate. You see it disappear completely, and in its place a pineapple appears. Then the pineapple disappears and a banana appears in its place. The banana then disappears, and a pineapple appears again in its place. And so it goes on: then lemon, pineapple, papaya, pineapple, pineapple, pineapple, and so on. This illustration will graphically show what has just occurred:

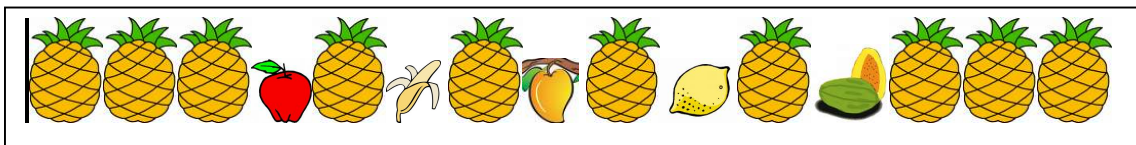


Fig 4. The fruit salad simile

The apple represents *eye-consciousness*; the banana, *ear-consciousness*; the mango, *nose-consciousness*; the lemon, *tongue-consciousness*; the papaya, *body-consciousness*; the pineapple, a mind-object (such as a thought); and the ever present pineapple in the intervals, the mind-consciousness.

Depending on what we are experiencing, the same fruit may try to appear successively for some time, but the flow is often interrupted by some other fruit. It is important to note here that as soon as one fruit (or fruit-event, if you like) disappears, another takes its place without any fruit-essence linking them up. No two fruits are the same (even if they are the same *kind* of fruit). **Brahmavamso** further explains:

Mind consciousness [the pineapple] appears after every other species of consciousness and thereby gives the illusion of sameness to every conscious experience. To the average person, there is a quality in seeing that is also found in hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. We can call the quality “knowing.” However, with superpower mindfulness, we will discern that this knowing is not part of seeing, hearing, and so on, but arises a moment after each type of sense consciousness. Moreover, this knowing has vanished when, for example, eye consciousness is

³⁶ (D 2.82/1:75 f) = SD 8.10

³⁷ See **The Radiant Mind** = SD 8.3.

³⁸ Brahmavamso 2006:118.

occurring. And eye consciousness has vanished when knowing (mind consciousness) is occurring. In the simile of the fruit salad, there can't be an apple and a coconut on the plate at the same time. (2006:118; see also 202) [4.5]

It is the mind, the *citta*, that rules all conscious activity. Sight might be assumed to be capable of seeing on its own, but in fact it is the mind sense, which immediately following seeing, that makes knowing what is seen possible. Sight on its own does not register. As the Buddha said (S 48.42),³⁹ the mind can appropriate for itself any of the events in the five senses, as well as its own unique field of experience. Since the mind consciousness follows every recognizable event of the five sense consciousnesses, these five sense consciousnesses carry an illusion of sameness.

There appears to be something similar in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Once one has come face to face with the *citta* in *jhāna*, one recognizes that it is the accompanying *citta* that gives the illusion of continuity to the stream of consciousness. (2006:202 f)

4.4 THE PHYSICAL SENSES DEPEND ON THE MIND. From what we have discussed above, the mind (*citta*) evidently “rules all conscious activity.”⁴⁰ In conventional terms, we often say or think that sight is capable seeing on its own, but in reality it is the mind that sees. In the fruit salad simile [4.3], the pineapple (mind-consciousness) that immediately follows each of the other fruits, allows us to *know* what we see: sight (one any other sense-consciousness) on its own does not register.

According to **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and **the Uṇṇābha Sutta** (S 48.42), the five physical sense-faculties, each have their own resort (*gocara*) and range (*visaya*)—or sense-data—and do not experience one another's resort or range. They all however resort to the mind, only the mind experiences all the sense-data. [12.4]⁴¹ In other words, as the Sutta says, the physical sense-faculties are like data-sensors, the data of which are processed or experienced in the mind. The mind itself resorts to mindfulness (or memory, in a wholesome sense) (*sati*),⁴² mindfulness (memory) resorts to liberation (*vimutti*), and liberation resorts to nirvana.⁴³ Giving the essence of the Uṇṇābha Sutta, **Brahmavamso** says:

... the mind can appropriate for itself any of the events in the five senses, as well as its own unique field of experience. Since the mind consciousness follows every recognizable event of the five sense consciousnesses, these five sense consciousnesses carry an illusion of sameness. There appears to be something similar in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Once one has come face to face with the *citta* in *jhāna*, one recognizes that it is the accompanying *citta* that gives the illusion of continuity to the stream of consciousness. (2006:203)

4.5 DHAMMAPADA 1-2. There is another important side of the fruit salad simile.⁴⁴ In the fruit salad simile, the pineapple (the coconut in Brahmavamso's simile) represents not only the consciousness as attention (*samannāhāra*), but also as intention (*cetanā*). We find this usage in the first two verses of **the Dhammapada**, where *mano* (mind or mentation)⁴⁵ is used:⁴⁶

³⁹ Uṇṇābha S (S 48.42/5:217-220) = SD

⁴⁰ Brahmavamso 2006:202 f.

⁴¹ *Mano, paṭisaraṇaṃ mano ca nesaṃ gocara, visayaṃ paccanubhoti*, “the mind is (their) resort [refuge], and the mind experiences their resort and range.” (M 43.21/1:295 = S 48.42/5:218). Comy explains *mano* here (following the Abhidhamma tradition) as the mind-door impulsion (*javana*), which experiences the object by way of lust, hate or delusion (SA 3:245). **Bodhi**, however thinks, “In my view, this introduces an unnecessary ethical slant on the passage, which I take to be primarily epistemic [having to do with knowing] in import. I interpret the sentence simply to mean that mind-consciousness has access to the data provided by the five types of sense consciousnesses, which it collates, categorizes, and interprets with its own stock-in-trade, namely, concepts.” (S:B 1936 n226)

⁴² *Manassa kho...sati paṭisaraṇaṃ*.

⁴³ S 48.42/5:217-219 = SD 29.3.

⁴⁴ Not explained in Brahmavamso's book.

⁴⁵ On def of *mano*, see (12.5) below.

⁴⁶ On how this work with karma, see SD 18.1(3).

The mind (*mano*) precedes all mental states;
 The mind is supreme; mind-made are they:
 If, with a defiled mind (*paduṭṭhena*), one speaks or acts,
 Suffering follows one like a wheel that dogs a draught ox's foot. (Dh 1)

The mind (*mano*) precedes all mental states;
 The mind is supreme; mind-made are they:
 If, with a pure (*pasannena*) mind, one speaks or acts,
 Happiness follows one like a shadow that leaves not. (Dh 2)

The moral dimension of these two verses is very clear: *it is the thought that counts*. The moral quality of an action is decided by its intention. As **the Attha,sālinī**, the Commentary on the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī (the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka), says:

When the mind is unguarded, physical action is unguarded; speech also is unguarded; thought also is unguarded. When the mind is guarded, physical action is guarded; speech also is guarded; and thought also is guarded. (DhsA 68)

The Dhammapad'aṭṭhakathā (Commentary on the Dhammapada) explains “**mental states**” (*dhammā*) as the “formless aggregates” (*arūpino khandhā*), that is, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and formations (*saṅkhāra*) (DhA 1:22). The term “preceded by the mind” (*mano,puṭṭhaṅgamā*) also occurs in two short passages in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (A 1.6.6-7),⁴⁷ reflecting similar sentiments as Dhammapada 1-2.

Here “**mind**” (*mano*) refers to the intention. While the mind does not actually precede the wholesome and unwholesome states in a temporal sense, it is said to arise first because it is a volition or intention that determines the ethical quality of the deeds that issue from the mind.

(Bodhi, A:ÑB 278 n15)

The Dhammapada Commentary says that *mano* is a term for “thought [conscious moment]” (*citta*) on all the four levels of being.⁴⁸ However, here it specifically refers to “a thought connected with mental displeasure associated with repulsion” (*domanassa,sahagata.paṭigha,sampayutta.citta*), that is, a mentally hostile reaction due to dislike (DhA 1:21 f). Explaining “**defiled**” (*paduṭṭhena*), the Commentary says:

It is defiled by adventitious faults [“arriving” at the sense-doors] such as covetousness (*āgantukehi abhijjhādīhi dosehi*). The “natural mind” (*pakati,mano*) is the *bhavaṅga,citta*,⁴⁹ which is undefiled. Just as clear water is tainted by (such colours as) blue and so on, flowing into it and becomes known as “blue water,” and so on, but not so the earlier clear water (before it was tainted by the colour) nor new (fresh) water.

⁴⁷ “Bhikshus, whatever states that are unwholesome, partaking of the unwholesome, pertaining to the unwholesome—all these are preceded by the mind. The mind arises as the first of them, followed by the unwholesome states. (*Ye keci bhikkhave dhammā akusalā akusala,bhāgiyā akusala,pakkhikā sabbe te mano,pubbaṅgamā*). Bhikshus, whatever states that are wholesome, partaking of the wholesome, pertaining to the wholesome—all these are preceded by the mind. The mind arises as the first of them, followed by the wholesome states. (*Mano tesam dhammānam paṭhamam uppijati anvad-eva akusala dhammā ti. Ye keci bhikkhave dhammā kusalā kusala,bhāgiyā kusala,-pakkhikā sabbe te mano,pubbaṅgamā. Mano tesam dhammānam paṭhamam uppijati anvad-eva kusala dhammā ti*). (A 1.6.6-7/1:11)

⁴⁸ DhA 1:21. That is, the sense realm, the form realm, the formless realm, and the supramundane realm, Pm 1.397/1:83. BDict on *mano*: “Mind,’ is in the Abhidhamma used as a synonym of *viññāṇa* (consciousness) and *citta* (state of consciousness, mind). According to the [Vism Comy], it sometimes means sub-consciousness (see *bhavaṅga-sota*).” Here, however, I have rendered *citta* as “thought.”

⁴⁹ Often tr as “life-continuum,” ie the underlying stream of consciousness that supervenes whenever active consciousness lapses, most notably in deep dreamless sleep. See A:ÑB 278 n13.

In the same way, thought too becomes tainted by adventitious ills, such as covetousness and so on, but not the earlier *bhavaṅga,citta* nor a new thought (*navam cittam*). Hence, has the Blessed One said,

“Monks, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by impurities that arrive (through the sense-doors)” [A 1:10].
(DhA 1:23)

On a simple level, what is **the practice to guard one’s mind**? It is threefold. Firstly, the restraint of the senses, which means, see less, hear less, smell less, taste less, touch less, think less: these are the six wise monkeys. Often enough, if there is nothing worth doing, it is worth not doing anything: just let it be. Secondly, when sense-objects arrives at the sense-doors, regard them as impermanent; they become more meaningful and valuable lessons that way. Thirdly, when expressing yourself, do it with lovingkindness, otherwise, it is better not to express yourself. Gentle silence often heals.

SUMMARY. The nature of conscious experience can be summarized in this manner. When a sense-experience (such as our noticing a visual object: the apple in the fruit simile) arises [4.3], the related mind-consciousness arises almost immediately after that.⁵⁰ How we respond then (whether we are motivated by greed, hate, or delusion, or by non-greed, non-hate, or non-delusion: the pineapple in the fruit simile), decides the moral quality of the thought-moment (that is, the act). In this sense, the mind is not “naturally pure.” We have to assert ourself to clear the mind of the unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion). Having done so, and overcoming all the mental hindrances (active manifestations of the unwholesome roots), we then see the pure radiant mind. Although the Commentaries equate the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) with the radiant mind (*pabhassara,citta*), it is difficult to see how this would apply to one whose dying thoughts are unwholesome. The radiant mind, as such, refers only to the dhyanic experience or to the awakened mind.

5 *Viññāṇa* is dependent upon the other aggregates

5.1 VIÑÑĀṆĀ AND LATENT TENDENCIES.⁵¹ The suttas of the **Khandha Saṃyutta** (S 22), where *viññāṇa* is mentioned alongside other aggregates, not only imply its impermanence, but also its close connection with the latent tendencies, or the subconscious roots of our personal habits and tendencies. Take, for example, the delightful **Aññatara Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 22.35), the Buddha gives a short teaching to a certain monk, thus:⁵²

Bhikshu, whatever latent tendency one has, that is what one is. Whatever latent tendency one has not, that is what one is not.
(S 22.35/3:35) = SD 31.4

The Cetanā Sutta 2 (S 12.39), on the other hand, explains the benefits of overcoming the latent tendencies so that there is no more mental basis for the support for consciousness, in these words:⁵³

But, monks, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for consciousness to remain.

When there is no mental basis, there is no support for consciousness.

When consciousness has no support⁵⁴ and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth.**

⁵⁰ According to Benjamin Libet (1985), the “readiness potential” (RP) is followed by a gap of about 350 milliseconds before one’s awareness of a volitional act: see **Free will and Buddhism** = SD 7.6(12).

⁵¹ See **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48) = SD 17.1a Intro (1.3).

⁵² *Yaṃ kho bhikkhu anuseti tena saṅkham gacchati. Yaṃ nānuseti na tena saṅkham gacchati.*

⁵³ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See **Cetanā S 2** Intro (4) = SD 7.6b for detailed nn.

⁵⁴ Bodhi interprets the phrase “**when consciousness has no support**” (*appatiṭṭhita viññāṇa*) here to refer to “a consciousness without the prospect of a future rebirth through the propulsive power of ignorance, craving, and the volitional formations” (S:B 760 n114). The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122) and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24). See Intro (4) for more details.

When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.39.64/2:66) = SD 7.6b

The aggregates are impermanent, but regarding them in terms of a self or abiding entity, make them seem less so, that is, we live with the delusion that we have a reality of their own. This is what reinforces our negative acts so that the latent tendencies become even stronger. An understanding of the aggregates, of knowing how they work, helps in the weakening of the latent tendencies. The best way to being to deal with the aggregates is to constantly regard them as impermanent.

5.2 THE HOME OF CONSCIOUSNESS. The synopsis (*uddesa*) of the **Hāliddakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) states that the other four aggregates are the “home” of consciousness (*viññāṇassa oko*) [1.2(2)]. The teaching of this interesting Sutta is that *the true renunciant is one who has given up the aggregates of clinging*, thus:

The form element, householder, is the home of consciousness.⁵⁵ One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the form element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.

The feeling element,

The perception element,

The formations element, householder, is the home of consciousness. One whose consciousness is bound by lust for the formations element is called one who wanders about frequenting houses.⁵⁶

Such, householder, is the one who wanders about frequenting houses.

(S 22.3.4/3:9 f) = SD 10.12 [1.2(2)]

The Commentary glosses *viññāṇa* here as “karmic consciousness” (*kamma, viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259) [10]. This is what sustains us in this life and holds us down in future lives. In his Sutta translation, **Bodhi** reminds us of the interdependence of the aggregates and the impermanence of *viññāṇa*:

The passage confirms the privileged status of consciousness among the five aggregates. While all the aggregates are conditioned phenomena marked by the three characteristics, consciousness serves as a connecting thread of personal continuity through the sequence of rebirths. This ties up with the idea expressed at [**Cetanā Suttas 1-3**]⁵⁷ that consciousness is the persisting element in experience that links together the old experience with the new one. The other four aggregates serve as the “stations for consciousness” (*viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo*) [see **Upāya Sutta**⁵⁸ and the **Bija Sutta**⁵⁹]. Even consciousness, however, is not a self-identical entity but a sequence of dependent-ly arisen occasions of cognizing; see M 1:256-60 [M 38.1-8, **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta**].

(S:B 1047 n18)

In other words, of the four mental components of the five aggregates, it is *viññāṇa*, or *citta*, or *mano*, that stands out as the fundamental factor. The other three—*vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra*—are called *cetasikā* (“pertaining to *citta*”) or “mental concomitants.” The commentator **Dhammapāla**, for example, separates *viññāṇa* (which he equates with *mano*) from the other three aggregates, which he subsumes under the category of *dhammā*,⁶⁰ that is, objects of *mano* or *viññāṇa*. He even contrasts the three with *nāma* (“name”), clearly implying that the other three mental aggregates are included in *nāma*.⁶¹

⁵⁵ SA explains this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as karmic consciousness (*kamma, viññāṇa*) (SA 2:259). See 1.2(2) n & S:B 1047 n18 quoted below.

⁵⁶ See 1.2(2) n.

⁵⁷ S 12.38-40/2:65-68 = SD 7.6abc.

⁵⁸ S 22.53/3:52-54 = SD 29.4.

⁵⁹ S 22.54/3:54 f = SD 39.2.

⁶⁰ *Mano ti viññāṇa-k, khandho, dhammā ti vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra-k, khandhā* (NettA 255 = NettA:VRI 306).

⁶¹ *Vijānātī ti viññāṇam... Nāmā ti nāmaṃ, vedanādi-k, khandha-t, tayam* (UA 41).

All the four mental aggregates are closely interconnected in their operation; *viññāṇa* or *citta*, however, is the first amongst equals, forming the basic or predominant factor in the mental process. We should not mistake that *viññāṇa* is some sort of “home,” “vehicle,” or “container” for the other three aggregates; rather, if we are to speak of a “support” for conscious, it would be one of the other four aggregates, as stated in **the Hāliddakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3).⁶² Dhammapāla reminds us that we simply cannot perceive *citta* (or *viññāṇa*) aside from the other three mental aggregates, just as the waters from several rivers, or various kinds of oil, cannot be discerned once they have been mixed together (Pm 432).

The physical component, *rūpa*, is also sometimes called *kāya* or *sarīra* in the Commentaries. **Kāya** has two important senses: as “locus” or “basis” (*ṭhāna*) and as “body” (in the sense of a collection or corporation). As the former sense, *kāya* is the locus of *citta* (Pm 124), and *citta* is the locus of the other mental factors like *vedanā*, as much as *kāya* is.⁶³ *Kāya*, in other words, is the physical body in which *citta* and the other mental processes occur.

Kāya sometimes refers to the whole “body” of psycho-physical factors known as the five aggregates.⁶⁴ Dhammapāla points out that it is this psycho-physical body that is often referred to as the *atta-bhāva* (literally, “selfhood”) or the empirical being (ThaA 2:47). “In other words,” concludes Pieris, “the “the *kāya* which is the locus of *citta* may not denote merely the fifth *khandha* as it often does, but the whole pentad of aggregates, including the *citta*!”⁶⁵

The Pali Canon and its Commentaries often take *atta,bhāva* as being somewhat synonymous with *sakkāya* (self-identity).⁶⁶ Understandably, Buddhaghosa points out that the *atta,bhāva* is only a concept (*paññatti*), that is, a way of naming or referring to the body.⁶⁷ Dhammapāla goes further to state that the five aggregates (that is, the body) are called *atta,bhāva* precisely because they have the inherent danger of being misunderstood as being *attā*.⁶⁸

6 Uses of consciousness

6.1 TWO KINDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS. As we have seen, there is no unified definition of consciousness in the Suttas. In fact, the term *viññāṇa* is used in early Buddhism in at least two important senses, that is, **the two basic conscious processes**—namely, the functions of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*)—discovered by the Buddha, that is, cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness.⁶⁹

The first—**cognitive consciousness**—centering around *viññāṇa* and *nāma,rūpa*, shows how our senses work and how our lives are sustained down to the moment; in modern terms, this comprises processes that are mostly either *conscious* or *pre-conscious*.⁷⁰ The second function of dependent arising—that of

⁶² It is curious that a contemporary Sinhalese scholar monk has described *viññāṇa* as “the receptacle, so to speak, for all the fifty-two mental concomitants or factors, since without consciousness no mental factors are available” (Piyadassi, *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, London 1964:48). See also Pieris 1979:13 = 1980:219.

⁶³ *Kāyo cittaṅ ca vedanāya ṭhānam* (ItA 2:22).

⁶⁴ ThaA 3:151; ThīA 86, 239. Sometimes, the mental factors are aggregates referred to as *nāma,kāya* in contrast to *rūpa,kāya*, the physical body (ThīA 160).

⁶⁵ Pieris 1979:14 = 1980:220. Dhammapāla compares the *atta,bhāva* to a hut (*kuṭṭikā*), put together with sticks, etc; so too the *atta,bhāva* is composed of the 5 aggregates. It is also the dwelling (*nivāsa*) or locus of the monkey called *citta*. Here the monkey symbolizes restlessness and impulsiveness of *citta*, and not a self or soul (ThaA 1:29; ItA 1:53, 179); cf *kuṭṭi,purisa* (Miln 147).

⁶⁶ V 2:238,17 = A 4:200,2 = 204, = 207,2; D 3:111,10; M 2:32,8, 181,11; S 5:442,1; A 1:134,20, 279,2; MA 2:88,19; KhA 1:132,10; DhA 1:78,9, 291,23, 316,6, 2:64, 68,13, 3:115,8. See CPD for more refs. See also Vism:Ñ 256 n11.

⁶⁷ Vism 9.54/310.

⁶⁸ *Apariññatā,vatthukānam attā ti bhavati ettha abhidhānam cittaṅ cāti, atta,bhāvo sarīram khandha,pañca-kam-eva vā*, “Here, the body or the aggregate pentad is taken to be *atta,bhāva* when, on the ground of not comprehending, the expression (*abhidhāna*) and thought (*citta*) of *attā* occurs” (VismṬ 298). On Pieris’ n regarding Ñāṇamoli’s mistranslation of this passage, see Pieris 1979:15 n56 = 1980:222 n56.

⁶⁹ Amongst the scholars who have used these or related terms are OH de A Wijesekera 1964, Rune EA Johanson 1965: 198 f, & WW Waldron 2003: 41–45. See also Harvey 1995:158 f & **The unconscious** = SD 17.8b(3).

⁷⁰ See (6) below; also **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8a (3) & (5.1).

existential consciousness—centering around *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging or fuel), is to show the true nature of what we call an “individual,” that is reborn, going through various lives, and it shows this by stating that *consciousness* arises conditioned by ignorance and formations; in modern terms, this comprises mostly *subconscious* processes.⁷¹

The qualifier *mostly* is used because the *unconscious* (in the form of latent tendencies, *anusaya*) are always present in the mental process and rebirth process of an unawakened being.⁷² This distinction is not a modern one, but goes back to at least the mediaeval Abhidhamma times. In Anuruddha’s **Abhidhamm’-attha,saṅgaha** (12th century), for example, we find consciousness defined and discussed in detail as being either “process consciousness” (*vīthi,citta*), that is, involving thought, or “process-free consciousness” (*vīthi,mutta*), a purely mental, but thought-free, process.⁷³ Although such terms are not found in the Suttas or early Abhidhamma, they are found in their commentaries.⁷⁴

Cognitive consciousness,⁷⁵ simply put, is the “this-life” (synchronic) moment-to-moment consciousness with which we perceive, define and respond to the world, that is, how we live our lives. Both **the Upādāna Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56)⁷⁶ and **the Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57)⁷⁷ deal solely with a synchronic view of the five aggregates. Cognitive consciousness is defined in a synchronic context in **the Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57), where notice how the process centres around *viññāna* and *nāma,rūpa*, thus:

26 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

There are these six classes of consciousness:⁷⁸

eye-consciousness	(visual awareness,	consciousness of seeing);
ear-consciousness	(auditory awareness,	consciousness of hearing);
nose-consciousness	(olfactory awareness,	consciousness of smelling);
tongue-consciousness	(gustatory awareness,	consciousness of tasting);
body-consciousness	(tactile awareness,	consciousness of touch);
mind-consciousness	(cognitive awareness,	consciousness of mentation).

This is called “consciousness.”

With the arising of name-and-form, there is the arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of name-and-form, there is the cessation of consciousness.

This noble eightfold path itself is the way to the ending of consciousness, that is to say: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

27 The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on consciousness—this is the gratification regarding consciousness.

That consciousness is impermanent, suffering, subject to change—this is the danger regarding consciousness.

The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for consciousness—this is the escape regarding consciousness.

⁷¹ See (6) below; also **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

⁷² On latent tendencies, see *Anusaya* = SD 31.3.

⁷³ See *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14 esp (4) on rebirth.

⁷⁴ The term *vīthi,citta* eg is found in: MA 1:76 ×3; KhpA 102; ItA 1:97 ×4; NmA 2:391, 392 ×2, 393; NcA 142 ×3, 143 ×2; VbhA 156, 157, 406; KvA 270, 279; DhA 269, 280, 401 ×2, 402 ×2; PaṭA 107 ×2; Mohv:VRI 23, 59, 77. *Vīthi,mutta*, however, is a slightly later term found only in the Abhidhamma compendia and later works. See (9.3) below.

⁷⁵ WS Waldron suggests “cognitive awareness, since it is an awareness that arises in conjunction with specific cognitive objects” (2003:29).

⁷⁶ S 22.56/3:58-61 = SD 3.7.

⁷⁷ S 22.57/3:61-66 = SD 29.2.

⁷⁸ “**Classes of consciousness**,” *viññāṇa,kāya*. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) here refers to “cognitive consciousness” [6], and is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object. See SD 3.7 Intro (6.5).

28 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,
 having directly known the gratification regarding consciousness,
 having directly known the danger regarding consciousness,
 having directly known the escape regarding consciousness,
 practise it for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation—
 they are well practised.

Those who are well practised gain a firm footing in this Dharma and Discipline.

29 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known the gratification regarding consciousness, the danger regarding consciousness, the escape regarding consciousness,*
 practise for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation,
 are well liberated.

Those who are well liberated are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round to
 describe them. (S 22.57/3:64 f) = SD 29.2

Existential consciousness, in simple terms, refers to the rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*), that is, consciousness as the “many-lives” (diachronic) linking factor between lives. It comprises the dependent arising cycle centering around *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging). In **the (Paṭicca,samup-pāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2), however, we see the existential consciousness defined *as a link in dependent arising*.⁷⁹ **The Cetanā Sutta 2** (S 12.39) describes the end of birth in terms of an abridged dependent ending formula, thus:

But, monks, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for the support for consciousness.

When there is no mental basis, consciousness is not established.

When consciousness is not established and does not grow, there is **no descent of name-and-form**.

With the ending of name-and-form, the six sense-bases end;

With the ending of the six sense-bases, contact ends;

With the ending of contact, feeling ends;

With the ending of feeling, craving ends;

With the ending of craving, clinging ends;

With the ending of clinging, existence ends;

With the ending of existence, birth ends;

With the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
 mental pain and despair.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.39/2:66) = SD 7.6b

A similar description is given in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15), where it is said that if no consciousness were “to descend into a mother’s womb,” or “were to depart” after that, *nāma,rūpa* would not form; or, if consciousness “were to be cut off” in a young person, *nāma,rūpa* would not develop and mature.⁸⁰

This mutual conditioning of *viññāṇa* and *nāma,rūpa* shows that no part of an individual should be regarded as having independent existence or selfhood. This fact is clearly shown in the stock formula found in **the Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta** and elsewhere:

Whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all consciousnesses as they really are with right wisdom, thus: “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.”

⁷⁹ S 12.2/2:2-4 = SD 5.15.

⁸⁰ D 15.21-22/2:62 f = SD 5.17.

It is when one knows thus, when one sees thus, that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs, there is no latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit. (M 109.13/3:18; S 22.82/3:103; S 3:56 f, 68, 86 ff, 103; V 1:12 f) = SD 17.11

Both cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness are mentioned in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15),⁸¹ showing that they are interconnected, thus:

22a EXISTENTIAL CONSCIOUSNESS. It is said: ‘**With name-and-form as condition, there is consciousness.**’

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

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

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, the source, the origin, the condition for consciousness, that is to say, name-and-form.⁸²

22b COGNITIVE CONSCIOUSNESS. It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born, decay and die, pass away and re-arise; thus far that there is a pathway for designation; thus far there is a pathway for language; thus far there is a pathway for description; thus far there is a sphere for wisdom; thus far that the round [of cyclic lives] turns **[64]** for describing this [state of being], that is, when there is name-and-form together with consciousness.⁸³ (D 15.22/2:63) = SD 5.17

We shall continue this discussion on how cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness interact in the next study.⁸⁴

6.2 THE LOOPED SEQUENCE. There is a special secondary, or “looped,” sequence of dependent arising found probably only in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15) and **the Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65).⁸⁵ This variant sequence begins with *viññāṇa*, but states that *viññāṇa* and *nāma, rūpa*, given as the second link in the formula, are mutually conditioning,⁸⁶ thus:

⁸¹ D 15.21-22/2:63 = SD 5.17. For a tr of detailed explanation at DA 2:501-503 with excerpts from Sub-comy, see Bodhi (tr), *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 2nd ed 1995:84-89.

⁸² On *nāma, rūpa*, see *Saññā* = SD 17.4(2).

⁸³ The PTS ed is followed here. Be adds *añña-m-añña, paccayatā pavattati*, “(which) occur as conditions for one another.” “But this phrase seems to have been mistakenly read from the commentarial gloss into the text itself.” (Bodhi 1984:60 n1). On the interrelationship between name-and-form and consciousness [21, 22], see **Naḷa, kalapiya S** (S 12.67) which compares this intimate interconnection (*nāma, rūpa* and *viññāṇa*) to “two bundles of reeds that are standing and supporting each other...if one of the two were to fall, the other would fall, too.” (S 12.67/ 2:114).

⁸⁴ **The unconscious** = SD 17.8b(3).

⁸⁵ D 15.3/2:56 = SD 5.17 & S 12.65.9.3/2:105, 12.65.17ab/2:105) = SD 14.2 respectively.

⁸⁶ *Iti kho Ānanda nāma, rūpa, paccayā viññāṇam, viññāṇa, paccayā nāma, rūpam* (D 15.3/2:56) = SD 5.17. For details, see **Nagara S** (S 12.65.9.3/2:105 & 12.65.17ab/2:105) = SD 14.2 Intro (2).

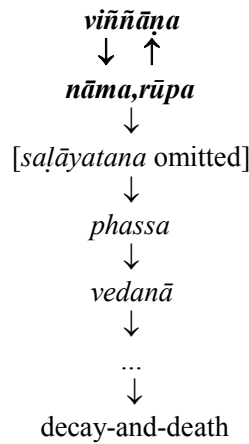


Table 6. The looped dependent arising

In the usual sequence, after giving contact as the condition for feeling, feeling as the condition for craving would follow.⁸⁷ Here, however, the Buddha introduces a variation (D 15.9-18). From feeling, he returns to craving and then, from craving a new series—a **secondary sequence**—of nine factors are listed, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor. This more down to earth sequence shows, as a result, how “there are born various evil unwholesome states” (D 15.9).⁸⁸ The purpose of this sequence is clear: it is to show that dependent arising can be used to explain the origins of social disorder just as effectively as it can be used to understand the origins of individual suffering.⁸⁹ Thus craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, but also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.⁹⁰

7 Viññāṇa as “consciousness of”

7.1 CONSCIOUSNESS IS A PROCESS. *Viññāṇa* is impermanent because it is a *process*; as such, it is more meaningful here to speak of being “conscious of” something, that is, subjective consciousness. This phrase helps to highlight the difference between an abiding entity (sometimes suggested by the term “consciousness”) and the process of being conscious (that is, being “conscious of”).⁹¹ But *what* is that we are conscious of? We are conscious of contacts (stimuli) of the six sense-bases. **The Upādāna Parivaṭṭā Sutta** (S 22.56) defines *viññāṇa* as follows:

19 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?
There are these six classes of consciousness:⁹²

⁸⁷ D 15.21-22/2:62 f = SD 5.17.

⁸⁸ D 15.9/2:58 f = SD 5.17.

⁸⁹ Well known examples of the causal origins of social problems are found in **the Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-98), **the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda S** (D 26/3:57-79, esp 26.14-22/3:67-75) and **the Vāseṭṭha S** (Sn 594-656): see discussion in Payutto 1994:73-75. Other suttas that investigate the causal conditions behind social disorder are **Sakka,-pañha S** (D 21), **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13) and **Kalaha,vivāda S** (Sn 4.11). Despite their differences in formulation, they all come to the same conclusion. See **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15) = SD 5.7 Intro (3).

⁹⁰ Comy labels the two side of craving as “craving which is the root of The rounds” (*vaṭṭa,mūla,taṇhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra,taṇhā*) (DA 2:500).

⁹¹ See Hamilton 1996a:87 f & 115 n29.

⁹² “**Classes of consciousness,**” *viññāṇa,kāya*. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) here refers to “cognitive consciousness” [6], and is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object. See SD 3.7 Intro (6.5).

Eye-consciousness	(visual awareness,	consciousness of seeing).
Ear-consciousness	(auditory awareness,	consciousness of hearing).
Nose-consciousness	(olfactory awareness,	consciousness of smelling).
Tongue-consciousness	(gustatory awareness,	consciousness of tasting).
Body-consciousness	(tactile awareness,	consciousness of touch).
Mind-consciousness	(cognitive awareness,	consciousness of mentation).
This, bhikshus, is called “consciousness.”		(S 22.56.19/3:61) = SD 3.7

The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya Sutta (M 38) defines *viññāna* arising dependent on the sense-faculty and its related sense-object, and is named after the sense-faculty, thus:

Monks, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises.

When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the nose and smells, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and tastes, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the body and touches, it is reckoned as body-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

THE FIRE SIMILE. Just as **fire** is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it burns:⁹³

when fire burns dependent on wood,	it is reckoned as “wood fire”;
when fire burns dependent on wood chips,	it is reckoned as “wood-chip fire”;
when fire burns dependent on grass,	it is reckoned as “grass fire”;
when fire burns dependent on cow-dung,	it is reckoned as “cow-dung fire”;
when fire burns dependent on chaff,	it is reckoned as “chaff fire”;
when fire burns dependent on refuse,	it is reckoned as “refuse fire”;

even so, too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises. (M 38.8/1:259 f) = SD 7.10

The fire might be said to imply that, just as there is no latent, non-burning, form of fire, so there is no latent form of consciousness, apart from its six form arising dependent on a sense-organ and sense-object.⁹⁴ It is not that the fire, or *viññāna*, is of different types: just as a fire is named after the fuel feeding it, consciousness is named after the faculty in which it arises. And just as under the appropriate conditions, fire burns, even so, under the appropriate conditions, consciousness arises.

⁹³ The following are the fuel mentioned above for the fire in Pali: *kaṭṭha* (wood, stick, twig), *sakalika* (splinter, chip), *tiṇa* (grass), *go,maya* (cow-dung), *thusa* (chaff), *saṅkāra* (rubbish, refuse). The Pali word for “fuel,” *upādāna*, also means “clinging”, since clinging adds fuel to our craving (*taṇhā*). Our desire works closely with our self-view and self-identity: in fact, we are what we desire. “Monks, one having sensual desires is reborn as an individual (*atta,bhāva*) into this or that existence depending on one’s merit or on one’s demerit.” (Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S, A 6.63.4c/3:411). This passage centring around the fire simile is a sort of abridgement of **Aditta,pariyāya S** (S 35.28) = SD 1.3.

⁹⁴ See **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38) = SD 7.10 Intro (4).

Though those conditions are infinitely variable, in the case of the former [the fire] the relevant characteristic of fire is burning, and in the case of the latter the relevant characteristic of the *viññāṇakkhandha* is providing consciousness of them. (Hamilton 1996a:90)

7.2 THE SENSES AS FACULTIES. The additional translations (within parentheses) for the six consciousnesses above have been added, based on **Hamilton’s** note that their usual translation as “eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness,” etc, “has little or no precise meaning for us in English,” and she adds that

If we translate the words *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna*, *jivhā*, *kāya* and *mano* not as the organs of sense themselves but as representing the functions of those organs of sense, that is, sight or seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on, and if we specifically word the translation of each term as a genitive *tappurisa* compounds,⁹⁵ then we have the following: *cakkhuvīññāṇa*, for example, would mean awareness of sight or seeing, *sotavīññāṇa* would be awareness of sound or hearing; *ghanavīññāṇa* awareness of taste, and so on. The same meaning is perhaps achieved more elegantly by translating as “visual awareness,” “auditory awareness,” and so on, but by using the overtly genitive wording in the first instance we gain a clearer understanding of the *viññāṇakkhandha* as providing “consciousness (or awareness) of.” (1996a:88; see also 89-91; emphasis added)

Hamilton’s observation of the six internal senses as “faculties” (rather than “organs”) finds support in the early Pali texts. The suttas use a different terminology for the first three physical organs (*akkhi*, *kaṇṇa*, *nāsā*), thus:

	Organ	Faculty
<u>eye</u>	<i>akkhi</i>	<i>cakkhu</i>
<u>ear</u>	<i>kaṇṇa</i>	<i>sota</i>
<u>nose</u>	<i>nāsā</i>	<i>ghana</i>
tongue	<i>jivhā</i>	<i>jivhā</i>
body	<i>kāya</i>	<i>kāya</i>
mind	<i>mano</i>	<i>mano</i>

Table 7.2 Physical organs and faculties

The fact that the set of faculties is more common in the discourses shows that the emphasis is on the subjective, that is, one’s ability to see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Experience as represented by the six types of consciousness, however, is the outcome of two determinants: the “objective” in-coming sensory impressions—the “sensing” of things—and the “subjective” way in which these sensory impressions are received and cognized—the “making sense” of things.⁹⁶

How this “subjective” experience occurs through the senses so that we are *conscious of* a sense-experience has been explained at the opening of this essay. **The Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18) explains that when sense-consciousness or sense-awareness arises dependent on its sense-faculty and sense-object, and the meeting of the three is *contact* (that is, sense-stimulus).⁹⁷ [1]

After defining *viññāṇa*, **the Upādāna Parivaṭṭā Sutta** (S 22.56) (see above) goes on to instruct how insight into the nature of consciousness leads to liberation:

⁹⁵ A *tappurisa* or *tatpurusha* is a class of compounds having as first component a noun or noun stem that modifies the second component relating to it as possessor (as in *lionskin*), thing possessed (as in *waterski*), object of action (as in *keymaker*), location or habitat (as in *tree frog*), agent (as in *mindmade*), instrument (as in *water-logged*), and so on. A *genitive* *tatpurusha* relates to possessor, ie here we have *cakkhussa viññāṇam* (the consciousness belonging to the eye).

⁹⁶ See *Rūpa* = SD 17.2a(9.2).

⁹⁷ M 18.16/1:111 = SD 6.14 Intro (4).

With the arising of name-and-form, there is the arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of name-and-form, there is the cessation of consciousness.

This noble eightfold path itself is the way to the ending of consciousness, that is to say:

- (1) right view,
- (2) right thought,
- (3) right speech,
- (4) right action,
- (5) right livelihood,
- (6) right effort,
- (7) right mindfulness,
- (8) right concentration.

20 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins, having directly known consciousness, having directly known the arising of consciousness, having directly known the ending of consciousness, having directly known the way to the ending of consciousness,

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation—they are well practised.

Those who are well practised gain a firm footing in this Dharma and Discipline.

21 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known consciousness, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending*, practise for the sake of revulsion towards consciousness, for its fading away, for its cessation, are well liberated.

Those who are well liberated are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round to describe them. (S 22.56.19-21/3:61) = SD 3.7

7.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AND ĀYU, SĀṆKHĀRA. There is a Sutta passage where *viññāṇa* is mentioned that appears problematic when we translate *viññāṇa* as “consciousness of.” **The Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) comprises of a dialogue on various topics between Mahā Koṭṭhita (the questioner) and Sāriputta (the respondent). Sāriputta has, earlier on, explained to Mahā Koṭṭhita that the five sense-faculties (*pañc'indriya*), that is, the physical senses, are dependent on life (or vitality) (*āyu*), which is dependent on heat (*usmā*), which is in turn dependent on life (*āyu*).⁹⁸ Then, this dialogue ensues:

“Avuso, when this body loses how many states is it then discarded, cast aside, lying like a lifeless log?”⁹⁹

“Avuso, when this body loses three states—vitality, heat, and consciousness—it is then discarded, cast aside, lying like a lifeless log.” (M 43.24/1:296)

Viññāṇa here seems to be identical with “life principle” (*āyu, saṅkhāra*), which according to the Majjhima Commentary refers to “life” (*āyu*) itself (MA 2:350). **Hamilton** makes the following observations:

The suggestion is that life, heat and *viññāṇa* collectively represent some form of basic life principle, and there is little room here for *viññāṇa* to mean “consciousness of.” But there are only two contexts in which *viññāṇa* is used in this way [here at M 43.24, and in **the Pāyāsi Sutta**, D 23.17/2:335]. In other contexts where the term *āyusaṅkhāra* is used it either appears in the singular,¹⁰⁰ or is not explicitly associated with *viññāṇa*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ M 43.22/1:295.

⁹⁹ Death does not occur merely with the departure of consciousness from the body. Life (or vitality) (*āyu*) and heat (*usmā*) must also be exhausted at the same time.

¹⁰⁰ D 2:106; A 4:311; U 64. (Hamilton’s fn)

¹⁰¹ S 2:266 (plural).

It is possible that the notion of *viññāṇa* as a life principle contributed to the development in later Buddhist traditions of more elaborate theories of consciousness. In the Sutta Piṭaka, however, it does not significantly compromise the many other contexts in which *viññāṇa* seems to mean “consciousness of.”¹⁰² (1996a:90 f)

Hamilton goes on to point out that she has stressed that the being conscious is a fundamental characteristic of a human being and this might be why it is associated with the life-principle in the Mahā Vedalla Sutta.

But in Buddhism there is a further reason for suggesting that it is consciousness of that is of greater importance. This is the Buddha’s teaching that karma is volition. The purpose of this teaching is precisely that one should be conscious of the process of cyclic rebirth that is fuelled by one’s volitions: the qualitative causal dimension implicit in the Buddha’s definition of karma requires consciousness *of* what one is willing. This association between consciousness of and spiritual progress might also explain why there is no discussion of peripheral awareness or involuntary reactions: they are not spiritually relevant. (1996a:90 f; underscore added)

We have by now established the fact that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is impermanent, and its usages in the Suttas suggest that it functions as *a process of being aware*, for which, as Hamilton proposes, “consciousness of” is a good translation. Another important point to note is that while other philosophies and religions (such as the Upanisāds and many other brahmanical systems) regard consciousness as the very stuff of existence, as a metaphysical entity, both Reat (1990:296) and Hamilton (1996a) stress that “[t]he Buddha’s teaching is more concerned with how the human being operates than with what he or she consists of, and *viññāṇa* refers to the process which provides consciousness of.” (1996a:91; emphasis added)

8 *Viññāṇa* as a factor in cognition

8.1 THE KEY FACTOR OF COGNITION. The five aggregates are not separate entities, but function interdependently as an integral whole.¹⁰³ Although, we are now discussing “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), it is not a separate reality and does not operate in itself. *Viññāṇa* is, however, the key factor in the cognitive process,¹⁰⁴ as is evident from this famous passage from in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18):

Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is contact.

With contact as condition, there is feeling.

What one feel, one perceive.

What one perceive, one think about.

What one think about, one mentally proliferate. (M 18.16/1:111)¹⁰⁵

“The meeting of the three is contact” here refers to *viññāṇa* operating, in the presence of the sense-faculty and sense-object, as simple awareness (without any discriminatory function). Then we see this *phassa* (contact) giving rise to *vedanā* (feeling), and *vedanā* to *saññā* (perception).¹⁰⁶

This is a description of the “normal” unawakened way we look at things. Here, *viññāṇa* is the key process and, as the prerequisite of the cognitive process, appears in the first line of each of the passages related to the other sense-faculties and the sense-objects (ear and sounds, nose and smells, etc). *Viññāṇa* is, in other words, present at every stage of the cognitive process.

¹⁰² See also Hamilton’s fn here.

¹⁰³ See SD 17.1b Intro (1).

¹⁰⁴ “Cognitive process” refers to the mental process centering around consciousness (*viññāṇa*); “perceptual process” refers to the same process but centering around perception (*saññā*).

¹⁰⁵ See *Saññā* = SD 17.4(8.2).

¹⁰⁶ All this is briefly mentioned at §1.3; see also *Saññā* = SD 17.4(7.1.1).

Phassa (contact or sense-stimulus)—the sensory event—gives rise to *vedanā*, not simply because of contact between the sense and its object. Only when *viññāṇa* is present does *phassa* give rise to feeling, which is then identified by *saññā*. This is then regarded as painful, pleasant or unnoticed as neither is felt, which, when sustained, leads to *vitakka* (discursive thought), and then to *papañca* (mental proliferation). *Viññāṇai* enables us to be aware of all these cognitive stages.

8.2 VIÑÑĀṆA AND SAÑÑĀ. In the Suttas, we sometimes see a very close relationship between *viññāṇa* and *saññā*. In the **Khajjanīya Sutta** (S 22.79), for example, we have these definitions:

7 And what, bhikshus, is called **perception** (*saññā*)?

It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called perception
(*Saññānāṭī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā saññā ti vuccati*).¹⁰⁷

And what does it perceive?

It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white.

It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called perception.

9 And what, bhikshus, is called **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

It cognizes, bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness
(*Vijānāṭī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇan ti vuccanti*).

And what does it cognize?

It cognizes sour, it cognizes bitter, it cognizes spicy hot, it cognizes sweet, it cognizes sharp, it cognizes mild [not sharp], it cognizes salty, it cognizes bland [not salty].¹⁰⁸

It cognizes, bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness. (S 22.79/3:87) = SD 17.9

We can see here that the explanation of *viññāṇa* is very similar to that of *saññā*, the difference being only in the type of sense-objects they cognize. The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that this difference in sense-object highlights a difference in their cognitive functions. Perception is analysed by way of the eye-door because it is evident in apprehending the appearance (*ākāra*) and shape (*saṅghāna*) of the object. Consciousness, on the other hand, is analysed by way of the tongue-door because it can apprehend an object's distinct qualities (*paccatta, bheda*) even when there is neither appearance nor shape (SA 2:293).

Here we see both *saññā* and *viññāṇa* defined in discriminative terms. **Sue Hamilton** helpfully points out that although the definition of *viññāṇa* here encroaches on that of *saññā*, we should understand that *saññā* does the actual discrimination of the five sensory objects, identifying, say, a taste, more precisely (that is, what sort of taste),¹⁰⁹ while *viññāṇa* “is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, including the process of discriminating” (1996a:92, 55). The two, in other words, perform different functions. *Viññāṇa* is a bare or fundamental “conscious of” (or awareness of) sense-objects, while *saññā* apprehends the distinctive qualities of sense-objects. Consciousness cognizes, perception recognizes.

WS Waldron gives this helpful note to show the differences between *saññā* (Skt *sañjñā*) and *viññāṇa* (Skt *vijñāna*):

Usually translated as “perception,” the Sanskrit term *sañjñā* is composed of the prefix *sañ*, “together,” plus the root verb *jñā*, “to know, perceive, understand,” that is, a “knowing-together.” *Sañjñā* (P *saññā*) thus means “conception, idea, impression, perception” (BHSD 551 f). Interestingly, it is etymologically parallel with “conscious”: *com*, “together, with,” plus *scire*, “to

¹⁰⁷ On *saññā*, see SD 17.5. See S:B 1072 n114.

¹⁰⁸ The 8 kinds of taste are, respectively, *ambila*, *tittika*, *kaṭuka*, *madhuka*, *khārika*, *akhārika*, *loṇaka*, *aloṇaka*. See also **Sūda S** (S 47.8/5:149-152) qu at Vism 4.122/150 f.

¹⁰⁹ The following 13 tastes are mentioned in the texts: astringent (*kasāva*) and sweet (*madhura*), salty (*lavana*, *loṇika*) and bland (*aloṇika*), sour (*lambila*, *ambila*), acrid or spicy hot (*kaṭuka*), sharp or alkaline (*khārika*) and mild (*akhārika*), tasty or pleasant (*sādu*), and tasteless or unpleasant (*asādu*), bitter (*tittika*, *tittika*, also in *~ālābu*, M 1:80, 315), cold (*sīta*) and hot (*uṇha*): 12 of them (excl *aloṇika*) are mentioned at Nm 240; Nc 236. The rest occur separately or in pairs at S 3:87, 5:140 f, J 3:145, DhA 1:344, Dhs 629, DhsA 320, Miln 56, 63.

know.” *Samjñā* is formally the opposite of *vijñāna* (P *viññāṇa*), which is composed of *vi-* “dis-,” plus the same root, *jñā*. While *vijñāna* stress disjunctive discernment, *samjñā* emphasizes a conjunctive construction of an image or idea that brings disparate sensations together into a whole, often connected with a name or concept. This is why *samjñā* is a *samskāra* (P *sankhāra*) of mind, a construction or complex (S 4:29): *saññā va vedanā ca cittasāṅkhāre ti*.

Saññā is often described as the apperception of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental phenomena (*dhammā*) (D 2:309). The example of *saññā* most typically given is color perception (M 1:293): “And what does [one] apperceive (*sañjānāti*)” [One] apperceives what is green, yellow, red, white” (Johansson, 1979:92). (Waldron 2003:198 n69)

Viññāṇa (Skt *vijñāna*, consciousness) discerns (*vijānāti*), that is, “splits” (*vi-*), or analyses, the sense-object that impinges on the sense-doors, deciding whether it is a visual object, a sound, a smell, a taste or a touch. We *know* things (on a very general, simple but important level) through *viññāṇa*: that is, we have to *know* that we see, or hear, smell, taste, or touch something. Otherwise, there is no knowledge of sensing. As such, *viññāṇa* is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object, that is,

eye-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of physical form
ear-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of sound
nose-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of smell
tongue-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of taste
body-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of touch
mind-consciousness	the mental awareness of the presence of a mind-object (which can include any of the previous five)

Understandably, the most dominant of the consciousnesses is mind-consciousness (*mano,viññāṇa*), since the mind leads all mental experiences (*mano pubb ’aṅgamā dhammā*, Dh 1-2) [4.5]. However, at this point, on the level of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the process is still rudimentary and very much dragged on by latent tendencies or past karma. In this sense, we act (think, speak, physically exert) simply out of old habits: we really have no free will. Only through mindful practice and wisdom we realize this and could correct the process.

Saññā (Skt *samjñā*, perception) recognizes (*sañjānāti*) or forms an idea with which it identifies the object. The word *sañjānāti* is resolved as *sam + jānāti*, whose cognates in English are as follows:

com- + *gnoscere* (to know) → *cognize* (verb)
com- + *scire* (to know) → *conscious* (adjective).

The Latin prefix *com* or *con* has the sense of putting together, a synthesis of parts. *Saññā*, as such, is outward-oriented, and interprets (“puts together,” *sam-*) *what* is known by the sense-organ. In the full perceptual process directed to a visual object, for example, an eye-based consciousness is followed by a mind-based ones (*mano,viññāṇa*), with a sequence of cognitions interpreting the same object as it is discerned at progressively higher levels.

Sometimes, aspects of *viññāṇa* and *saññā* overlap—they refer to the same thing—as in the names of the mental realms or meditation spheres, *saññā* refers to consciousness in its entirety, namely, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n ’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana*), and the non-conscious beings (*asañña,satta*). In both cases, *saññā* does not refer to perception alone, but also to all the other aspects of consciousness.¹¹⁰

Contrasted against *sāṅkhāra* (mental formations) as the “doer,” *viññāṇa* is as the “knower,” present at every stage of the cognitive process. In reality, there is neither doer nor knower, but a whole process of instantaneous discrete mental moments that race through our being even as we read this right now. Everything is impermanent. All this not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.

¹¹⁰ For other senses of *saññā*, see **Saññā** = SD 17.4(7.1).

8.3 PAÑÑĀ. In terms of the growth, refinement and penetration of awareness, *viññāna* leads to *paññā* (Skt *prajñā*, wisdom). The Suttas often use *paññā* in a qualitative sense that is more advanced than any form of ordinary knowledge (as it can have a sense broad enough to encompass such knowledge, too). A well known application of *paññā* in the Suttas is found in the second of the threefold training (*sikkhā*), that is, the traditional threefold division of the noble eightfold path into *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.¹¹¹

<u>Factor</u>	<u>(aṅga)</u>	<u>Training (sikkhā)</u>	<u>(khandha)</u>
(7) Right view	<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>	} <u>Wisdom group</u> (liberation-based)	<i>paññā khandha</i>
(8) Right intention	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>		
(1) Right action	<i>sammā kammanta</i>	} <u>Moral virtue group</u> (the body and speech)	<i>sīla khandha</i>
(2) Right speech	<i>sammā vācā</i>		
(3) Right livelihood	<i>sammā ājīva</i>		
(4) Right effort	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>	} <u>Concentration group</u> (the mind)	<i>samādhi khandha</i>
(5) Right mindfulness	<i>sammā sati</i>		
(6) Right concentration	<i>sammā samādhi</i>		

(D 2:312; M 1:61, 3:251; Vbh 235)

Table 8.3 The noble eightfold path schema

According to the **Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117), right view comes first because it knows right view and wrong view as they really are. In the same way, with right view, we know the other factors as they really are.¹¹² In other words, without right view, none of the factors would be “right” (*sammā*), that is, complete and true to reality and spiritually liberating. In actual practice, moral virtue (*sīla*) comes first because one’s body and speech should be restrained first so that living together in some level of harmony is possible. This body and verbal restraint forms a good basis for mental development (*samādhi*), which in due course leads to wisdom (*paññā*) and liberation (*vimutti*). And a wholesome consciousness runs through the whole process: it supports the spiritual evolution, and is in turn transformed by it.

In the noble eightfold path schema, a distinction is made between *samādhi* (mental concentration) and *paññā* (cognitive wisdom). Both need to be practised, that is, realized or internalized. With mindfulness as the tool, *samādhi* arises strengthening mindfulness further, as a result of which *paññā* arises. In the end, *aññā* (the arhat’s penetrative insight) is achieved, not by the meditation itself, but through *paññā*.

The evolution of consciousness [11] through the dynamics of the threefold training can be seen in another way: that of the threefold wisdom (*paññā*), that is,

wisdom through thinking (*cintā, mayā paññā*),
 wisdom through listening (*suta, mayā paññā*) and
 wisdom through cultivation (*bhāvanā, mayā paññā*).¹¹³

What we know usually begins with listening (*suta*) to teachings (including reading about them). However, much of what we know actually comes from external sources, that is, through conversing and communicating with others and the mass media, that is, through second-hand (even third-hand), that is, “received” information. This is traditionally called the “heard” (*suta*). This knowledge is built up and refined with how we thinks (*cintā*) or reflects on it: as we think, so we are. The former may be said to be *intellectual wisdom* while the latter, *philosophical wisdom*. Neither is spiritually liberating as they are not a direct

¹¹¹ D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:229. For detailed studies on the noble eightfold path, see **Sammā, diṭṭhi S** (M 9) = SD 11.14; **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117) = SD 6.10; **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (M 16) = SD 9 Intro (10d); see also **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.11/1:301) = SD 21.7.

¹¹² M 117/3:71-78 = SD 6.10 Intro (2).

¹¹³ D 3:219; Vbh 324. This model is sometimes presented with *suta, mayā paññā* first as the first two usually develop somewhat simultaneously in a person.

experience of reality: they are like *reading* and *thinking* about food, but not really eating at all, so that we are still hungry! Only the third, the wisdom self-realized through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), or *spiritual wisdom*, the direct experience of reality through deep mental focus, leads to liberation.

In **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), Mahā Koṭṭhita asks Sāriputta a series of questions of special interest to us here as it concerns *vedanā*, *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *paññā*. Let us examine the relevant passages:

5 “Wisdom (*paññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), avuso—are these states associated¹¹⁴ or dissociated? And is it possible to separate these states in order to describe their difference?”

“Wisdom and consciousness, avuso—these states are associated, not dissociated. And it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.

For what one understands (*pajānāti*), that one cognizes (*viñānāti*), and what one cognizes, that one understands.

Therefore these states are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.”¹¹⁵

6 “What is the difference, avuso, between wisdom and consciousness, these states that are associated, not dissociated?”

“The difference, avuso, between wisdom and consciousness, these states that are associated, not dissociated, is this: wisdom is to be developed (*bhavetabbam*), consciousness is to be fully understood (*pariññeyyam*).¹¹⁶

9 “Feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), avuso—are these states associated or dissociated? And is it possible to separate these states in order to describe their difference?”

“Feeling, perception and consciousness, avuso—these states are associated, not dissociated. And it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.

For what one feel (*vedeti*), that one perceive (*sañjānāti*); and what one perceive, that one cognize (*viñānāti*).

Therefore these states are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to separate these states in order to describe their difference.”¹¹⁷ (M 43/1:292 f) = SD 35.1

Viññāṇa is singled out here because without it—without consciousness or awareness—no feeling, no perception, no wisdom, is possible. “Its inseparability from *paññā* implies that wisdom has to be con-

¹¹⁴ “Associated” (*samsattha*). Comy explains as “associated by way of arising together, ceasing together, sharing the same basis (sense-faculty), sharing the same sense-object” (*ek’uppāda,eka,nirodha,eka,vatthuka,ek’ārammaṇatāya samsatthā*) (MA 2:342).

¹¹⁵ Comy says that this statement refers to the wisdom and consciousness on the occasions of both insight and the supramundane path. The two are associated in that they arise and cease simultaneously, and share a single sense-base and object. However, the two are not totally associated in that while wisdom always needs consciousness, consciousness can occur by itself (without wisdom). (MA 2:342)

¹¹⁶ Wisdom, as a factor of the noble eightfold path—the path factor of right view—is to be developed. Consciousness, as one of the five aggregates pertaining to the noble truth of suffering, is to be fully understood, that is, as impermanent, suffering, and not self. **Hamilton’s** rendition of “*viññāṇa* is for everything that is to be known (*parineyyam*)” despite her careful explanations, is forced, has no canonical basis, and is ungrammatical (1996a: 94 f). Most clearly, it also does not fit the context: *paññā bhavetabbam viññāṇam pariññeyyam*, where the prefix -*ñeyya* is fut pass part in -*aneyya* (Geiger & Norman, *A Pāli Grammar*, 2000 §201). The point here is that just as “*paññā* should be cultivated, *viññāṇa* should be fully understood”: it is a sentence with two correlative now phrases. This is how *pariññeyyam* is used in **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 22.56) where we have *tam...dukkham ariya,-saccam pariññeyyam*, “this noble truth is that suffering (or, this suffering that constitutes a noble truth) should be fully known” (S 22.56.9/5:422) = SD 1.1.

¹¹⁷ Comy says that wisdom has been excluded here because the intention is to show only the states that are associated on every occasion of consciousness. (MA 2:343)

scious: you have to know what you know.” (Hamilton 1996a:95). **Hamilton** concludes with the following observation:

We have the three mental *khandhas* of *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* working together, each contributing to the process: *vedanā* as affective cognition, *saññā* as discriminatory or identificatory cognition, and *viññāṇa* as consciousness of each and every part of the process as a whole. The absence of the *saṅkhārakkhandha* here will not surprise us since we have seen that it is the source of volitions, which are to be neutralized completely if wisdom is to be attained. *Viññāṇa*, the *khandha* which provides awareness, represents the very basis of knowledge, and while the highest levels that constitute liberating insight may be qualitatively and inconceivably different knowledge from mundane cognition, one is nevertheless conscious of it in some way: this much is evident from the Buddha’s accounts of his own experience of Enlightenment.¹¹⁸ (1996a:95)

Here Hamilton follows Buddhaghosa’s commentarial scholarship found in the *Visuddhi,magga* (Vism 14.3-5/437), the *Sāmyutta Commentary* (SA 2:293 f) and the *Attha,sālinī*,¹¹⁹ where *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *paññā*—operating as *sañjānāti*, *viñānāti*, *pajānāti* respectively—are cognitive functions of increasing depth, discriminative acumen, and power of comprehension, but **Bodhi** cautions that

this, however, is difficult to reconcile with the account of these factors found in the *Nikāyas*. Usually in the suttas *viññāṇa* is presented simply as the basic awareness of an object through which one of the sense-bases, ie, as bare “conscious of” rather than as a discriminative capacity. A parallel treatment of *viññāṇa* at M 1:292,26-29 defines it through its ability to cognize the three types of feelings (pleasant, painful, neutral); this just shifts the problem to that of distinguishing between *viññāṇa* and *vedanā*. (S:B 1072 n114)

This is where we can see a radical difference between Western psychology, especially of the Freudian tradition,¹²⁰ where the cognitive, the affective and the conative are three different processes. In Buddhist psychology, the mind (*citta*) functions in all these three ways. When we refer to the mind as a cognitive process, we call it consciousness (*viññāṇa*); when we refer to the mind’s affective process, we call it feeling (*vedanā*); and when we refer to the mind’s conative process, we call it formations (*saṅkhāra*) or volition (*cetanā*). The mind or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) pervades all these processes; otherwise we would not *conscious* of them at all.¹²¹

However, as Sue Hamilton has already stated [8.2], we should understand that *saññā* does the actual discrimination of the five sensory objects, identifying, say, a taste, more precisely (that is, what sort of taste), while *viññāṇa* “is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, in-

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of the conceptual and linguistic problems associated with describing a transconceptual insight, see Paul Williams, “Non-conceptuality, critical reasoning and religious experience: Some Tibetan Buddhist discussions,” in M McGhee (ed), *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, Cambridge, 1992:194 f. (From Hamilton’s fn)

¹¹⁹ *Saññā* is def in some detail at DhsA 110 f; *viññāṇa* (under *citta*) at DhsA 63 f.

¹²⁰ The Freudian terms “id,” “ego,” and “super-ego” are not his inventions but are latinisations originating from his translator James Strachey. Freud himself used “das Es,” “das Ich,” and “das Über-Ich”—respectively, “the It,” “the I,” and the “Over-I” (or “Upper-I”). As such, for the German reader, Freud’s original terms are more or less self-explanatory. The term “das Es” (tr “it”) was borrowed from **Georg W Groddeck**, a German physician, whose unconventional ideas attracted Freud. Groddeck’s “It” refers to the concept of Dao or organic universal spirit. See GW Groddeck, *The Book of the It*, NY: Nervous and Mental Diseases Publishing Company, 1928. The term “unconscious” appeared in **Eduard von Hartmann**’s *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) some 30 years before Freud (1856-1939) wrote about the Unconscious. Hartmann was influenced by the Buddhism popular in the intellectual circle of his time. See Irvin A Hansen, “Buddhist influences on the idea of the unconscious,” 2007.

¹²¹ See Thich Minh Thanh 2001:5 f, 128 f.

cluding the process of discriminating.” (1996a:92).¹²² And we must remember that *viññāna* also functions as *attention* [1.3], by which it allows sense-stimuli to occur.

9 *Viññāna* as providing continuity

9.1 A SENSE OF CONTINUITY. It has been shown earlier, by way of Brahmavamso’s fruit salad simile [4.3], that consciousness is not a permanent entity, but merely a series of discrete mental events, rising successively and instantaneously as it were. The consciousness’ impermanence is further illustrated in the monkey simile of **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61) [3.1], where the tree-swinging monkey grasps one branch after another as it moves through the forest. Just as the monkey shows a continuous movement, we experience our consciousness as having continuity.

Although we may not recall how we feel like when we were babies, we are convinced that they are conscious beings; that as living beings, we are all conscious. Upon waking after a period of sleep, our consciousness seems to continue as it does before we have fallen asleep. Even when we are not normally conscious, such as when under anaesthesia during an operation, or when having a fainting spell, or when in a coma, we still regard consciousness as functioning within us. There are those who claim that, while asleep, they are aware of their dreams (as in lucid dreaming), or that while in a coma, they are still aware of external events (such as out-of-body experiences). Even the mentally ill are believed to have some awareness of their environment. Sometimes, those pronounced clinically dead or whose body fail to show any sign of life, unexpectedly “return to life.”

Apparently, there is some sort of undercurrent of “fuel” (like electricity running through wires and various electrical gadgets) linking the moments of our lives. The Buddha however rejects the notion of any abiding entity (such as a “soul”) as they simply cannot exist because whatever exists can only exist in change and impermanence.

9.2 VIÑÑĀNA AND SLEEP. Very little is said in the Suttas about sleep and dreams [9.3]. Even the best known passage—the locus classicus for the satipatthana practice—in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), tersely instructs, “Furthermore, bhikkhus, a monk [meditator], while asleep, while awake, clearly knows what he is doing” (*puna ca param bhikkhave bhikkhu...sutte jāgarite...sampajāna,kārī*).¹²³ However, some useful insights can be found from the oral transmission of meditation instructors. Here are two examples.

Brahmavamso’s method. Like many others familiar with meditation, Brahmavamso explains that mindfulness need not always be focused in the present moment. The Pali term for mindfulness is *sati*, which also translates “memory” or “remembering.” As Brahmavamso explains,

Superpower mindfulness can focus on an object many moments old, bore into it without the object fading, and uncover its truth.

For example, in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta one is asked to practise mindfulness focused on sleeping. Even arahants are not aware when they’re asleep, so what does this mean? Some translators have attempted to solve this question by changing the meaning of the exercise to mindfulness on falling asleep. However, the Pāli word used in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta means “in sleep,” and there is a different phrase for falling asleep, *niddam okkamati*.

The practice of mindfulness focused on sleeping means one uses a previous experience of having been asleep as the focus of superpower mindfulness in the present. It is mindfulness that takes an old experience as its object. This may seem pedantic to one now, but it becomes crucially important, as one will see, when I explain the focus on mindfulness on the citta (mind consciousness). [2006:116 f] (2006:112; emphasis added)

Piya’s method. On a simpler level of mind-training, especially for those who for some reason are unable to do sitting meditation—or if we *do* practise sitting meditation but have not advanced themselves very far—it is most advantageous to do a short “perception practice” (*saññā*) immediately before falling

¹²² See Hamilton (1996a:53-55, 92-95). Bodhi however agrees with these explanations of hers (S:B 1072 n114).

¹²³ D 22.4/2:292 (SD 13.2) = M 10.8/1:57 (SD 13.3).

asleep and as soon as we wake up. We could, for example, mindfully focus our attention on the breathing process and fall asleep on that. If this is properly done, we could easily fall asleep within a few minutes. Upon awakening, we should immediately and happily smile and cultivate lovingkindness. These two meditations could be alternated or any one used as it applicable and efficacious. Or, we could also use the “Bud-dho” breath meditation (for either case), at the end of each inhalation, mindfully note “Bud,” at the end of each exhalation, note “dho.”

A key purpose of meditating is to transform old negative habits and mental states into present-moment awareness and wholesome response. It takes a good habit to tame a bad habit, as it were. As such, the “sleep perceptions” should be a proper routine like one’s toilet. Even when, especially when, we were to suddenly awaken mid-sleep, we should apply this sleep perception exercise instead of sinking into some unhappy thought cycle or sense of loss.

There is a way of ascertaining that one’s perception practice is working well. Our dream quality improves, for example, but more significantly we may actually “hear” the positive feedback we have been doing before and after sleep, or we generally feel a pervading sense of inner ease. Please note, however, these are still very mundane states, but which should facilitate us in cultivating the deeper aspects of proper Buddhist meditation.¹²⁴

9.3 DREAMS. As mentioned in the previous section, very little is said in the Suttas about sleep and dreams.¹²⁵ However, beginning in the mid-20th century, as western interest in Buddhism grew and gravitated towards Buddhist psychology and meditation, literature on the Buddhist notion of sleep is slowly growing.¹²⁶

The earliest statement in modern Buddhist scholarship is that of the Burmese scholar, **Shwe Zan Aung**, in “An introductory essay to the Compendium of Buddhist Philosophy,”¹²⁷ where his comments on dreamless sleep are found on pages 9-12. Speaking from the Abhidhamma tradition, he says that the thought-free (*vīthi,mutta*, literally, “process-free) mind [6.1]], such as during dreamless sleep, is called *bhavaṅga* (life-continuum).¹²⁸ All thinking consists of mental processes (*vīthi,citta*). The mind-door (*mano,dvāra*) divides the *bhavaṅga* and the consciousness (*citta*), and he uses the term subliminal for the *bhavaṅga*, and supraliminal for normal consciousness. It is the *bhavaṅga* (subliminal consciousness, for which I use “the subconscious”) that, as the *paṭisandhi,citta* (rebirth consciousness) or *cuti,citta* (the death consciousness), links this life to the next: hence it is called life-continuum.¹²⁹ Shwe Zan Aung explains:

And when that current is opposed by any obstacle of thought from the world within, or perturbed by tributary streams of the senses from the world without, the thoughts (*vīthi-citta*’s) arise. But it must not be supposed that the stream of being is a subplane from which thoughts arise to the surface. There is juxtaposition of momentary states of consciousness, subliminal and supraliminal, throughout a life-time and from existence to existence. But there is no superposition of such states. (Abhs:SR 9-12)

¹²⁴ On meditation, see *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.1.

¹²⁵ The Pali Canon and Commentaries, however, make significant references to dreams and dream-stories, the best known of which are Mahā Māyā’s dream (J 1:50 f; MA 4:175) and the Bodhisattva’s pre-awakening dreams (A 3:240; Mvst 2:136), both of which are followed by dream interpretations. The Jātaka mentions Pasenadi Kosala’s 16 dreams (J 77/1:334-343).

¹²⁶ For developments in this area in modern Chinese Mahayana, see Heng Sure, “A Buddhist Approach to Dreams Jung and Junti—Dreams West and East.” Accessed 20 Oct 2006, <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma-7/dreams.html>. For contemporary Tibetan teachings on dream yoga, see Namkhai Norbu, *Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light*, ed Michael Katz, Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, rev ed 2004; also <http://www.plotinus.com/zhine-tibetan-dream-yoga.htm>.

¹²⁷ *Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha*, tr Shwe Zan Aung (as *Compendium of Philosophy*) [Abhs:SR]; rev & ed CAF Rhys Davids, London: Pali Text Society, 1910:1-76.

¹²⁸ Shwe Zan Aung uses the term “being”; on *bhavaṅga*, see Abhs:SR 265-268.

¹²⁹ Shwe Zan Aung uses “the stream of being” for *bhavaṅga,sota*.

In a recent study, **Steven Collins** has commented on deep sleep, saying that the *bhavaṅga* is a convenient concept for explaining it, in which neither conscious process nor dreams occur. He quotes Nāgasena's explanation of dreams from **the Milinda,pañhā**:

one who dreams does so neither when (fully) asleep nor when awake, but in the interval state while falling deeply asleep before *bhavaṅga* is reached... When someone is deeply asleep, his mind is in the *bhavaṅga* state; a mind in the *bhavaṅga* state does not function... whereas one sees dreams with a functioning mind. [Miln 299 f]

The stage of sleep in which dreams occur is called “monkey-sleep...the middle stage of sleep,” whereas “the final stage is in *bhavaṅga*” (id). Collins goes on to summarize **the Vibhaṅga Commentary's** interesting discussion on dreams. **Peter Harvey**, too, briefly discusses dreams, especially in his section on the *bhavaṅga* in his book, *The Selfless Mind*.¹³⁰

Here¹³¹ I present more details of the Commentarial explanation of dreams. Buddhaghosa explains that dreams occur when we “wake up at the mind-door impulsion (*mano,dvārika javana*), not with the five-door: he sees a dream only with that, not with the five-door” (VbhA 2050/407). He gives **four reasons for the occurrence of dreams** (that is, they are commentarial):

- (1) The disturbance of the elements (*dhātu-k,khobha*), that is, through an imbalance of the humours (internal elements of earth, water, fire and air).¹³² Examples include dreams of falling down a mountain, moving through space, being chased by wild beasts or robbers.
- (2) Past experiences (*anubhūta,pubba*) (that is, a mental replay of some past events or perceptions).
- (3) Divine intervention (*devatopasamhāra*), that is, devas (probably past relatives) wishing him well or wishing him ill, present good omens or ill omens to him by way of dreams.
- (4) A portent (*pubba,nimitta*), that is, signs of good or ill seeking to arise due to one's merit or demerit, such as the dream of the Bodhisattva's mother of her conception,¹³³ or the Bodhisattva's five great dreams,¹³⁴ king Pasenadi Kosala's sixteen dreams.¹³⁵ (VbhA 2051/407)

Buddhaghosa interestingly states that dreams occur to all ordinary worldlings and learners (all saints, except the arhat). Only the adepts or arhats (*asekha*) (including the Buddhas) do not see dreams because they have abandoned the four perversions.¹³⁶

Buddhaghosa begins by saying that dreams can only occur on three possible occasions, that is, during sleep, in a waking state, or when we are neither asleep nor awake (eg unconscious). The first case—that of dreaming during sleep—is not possible because it conflicts with the Abhidhamma, which teaches that sleep (that is, deep dreamless sleep)¹³⁷ occurs with the life continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga citta*), when there is no sign of form, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought as object, nor does it become associated with greed, hate or delusion—all of which occur as part of a dream.

On the other hand, if dreams were to occur during the waking state, this conflicts with the Vinaya. For the waking state is normal (*samvohārika*) consciousness, and when a monastic offence is committed, it is

¹³⁰ 1995: §§6.7, 29, 31, 10.13-14, 40.

¹³¹ VbhA 406-408; cf AA 3:317.

¹³² On the humours, see *Rūpa* = SD 17.1(5-6).

¹³³ MA 4:175; J 1:50 f.

¹³⁴ A 5.196/3:240; also Mvst 2:136; AA 3:240-242 & VA 520.

¹³⁵ J 77/1:334-343.

¹³⁶ That is, the perversions of perception (*saññā vipallāsa*), of thought (*citta vipallāsa*), of view (*diṭṭhi vipallāsa*): see *Saññā* = SD 17.4(9.3).

¹³⁷ Buddhaghosa elsewhere says that the *bhavaṅga* consciousness occurs as long as no other mind-moments arise to interrupt it, and it goes on endlessly as in periods of deep, dreamless sleep (Vism 14.114/458; VismṬ ad loc; Vism:Ñ 515 n45).

regarded as an offence. But when such an offence is committed during a dream, it is not an offence. Furthermore, we see no dream when we are neither asleep nor awake, too.

Buddhaghosa, quoting Nāgasena, says that dreaming only occurs during “monkey sleep” (*makkāṭa, -niddā*) (Miln 300) or “monkey torpor” (*kapi, middha*) (VbhA 408).¹³⁸ Monkey sleep is a light sleep, because it is again and again interspersed with wholesome, unwholesome and indeterminate consciousness, and during which time he again and again drops into the life continuum. This is when dreams occur, and as such, they are wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate.

Buddhaghosa gives the following examples. If we dream of paying homage at a shrine, or of listening to the Dharma, and so on, it is wholesome. If we dream of such things as the killing of living beings, it is unwholesome. When we are free from either extreme, at the moment of mental advertence and registration,¹³⁹ it is indeterminate.

At this point, **the Aṅguttara Commentary** adds that a dream is unable to bring about rebirth linking (*paṭisandhi*) through volition because it has a weak basis. It may bring about some karmic result when supported by other wholesome or unwholesome karma. Anyway, because it arises outside the sensory field, dream volition is negligible. Buddhaghosa, in the Aṅguttara Commentary, makes another interesting remark, that dreams occur *only* around dawn, “when what has been eaten, drunk or chewed is fully digested, when the nutritive essence is absorbed into the body, when the sun is rising” (AA 3:317). This remark is interesting as in modern research, dreaming is said to occur just before we waken.

Evaluation. How does the commentarial explanation¹⁴⁰ of dreams stand today? Let us first look at the modern scientific definition of dreams. A **dream**, according to modern science, is mental activity associated with the rapid-eye-movement (REM) period of sleep. It is commonly made up of a number of visual images, scenes or thoughts expressed in terms of *seeing* rather than in those of the other senses or in words. Electroencephalograph (EEG) studies, measuring the electrical activity of the brain during REM sleep, have shown that young adults dream for 1½ to 2 hours of every eight-hour period of sleep. Infants spend about half of their sleep in the REM phase, and as such are believed to dream more often than adults, but the dream duration decreases steadily with age. During dreams, blood pressure and heart rate increase, and breathing speeds up, but the body is otherwise still. Studies have shown that those deprived of dream-sleep are likely to become irritable and lose coordination skills.¹⁴¹

10 *Viññāna* and karma

Earlier on [5.2], we noted that according to **the Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3), the other four aggregates—form, feeling, perception, and formations—are the “home” of consciousness (*viññāna*): *viññāna* is present in all of them, just as it is common to all states or classes of consciousness (DhsA 63). The Sutta commentary glosses *viññāna* here as *kamma, viññāna* (karmic consciousness) (SA 2:259), clearly evident from its role in linking one’s personal continuity through the rounds of lives. This is what sustains us in this life and holds us down to future lives.

In fact, we have discussed *saṅkhāra* as “karmic fuel” that sustains our present lives and propels future ones.¹⁴² The fact that *viññāna* is the only process that clearly continues across many lives, shows its close

¹³⁸ Also qu at AA 3:317, where *kapi, middha* is used.

¹³⁹ These two Abhidhamma terms refer to the cognitive process, such as seeing: when an object impinges on a sense-door or the mind-door, there occurs a mind-moment called *bhavaṅga, calana* (vibration of the life-continuum), by which the *bhavaṅga* “vibrates” for a single moment. This is followed by another moment called *bhavaṅg’upaccheda* (arrest of the life-continuum), by which the flow of the *bhavaṅga* is cut off. Then, immediately, a *citta* (mind-moment), adverts to the object either at the one of the five physical sense-doors or the mind-door: this is called “**advertence**” (*āvajjana*). Then a series of mind-moments arise resulting in the act of seeing, etc. This is followed by the all-important *javana* (impulsion) stage—usually seven moments—which give the sensing its moral flavour. This is usually followed by the mind taking this object as its own: this is “**registration**” (*tad-ārammaṇa*). Then the mind sinks back into the *bhavaṅga*. See Abhs:BRS 3.8/122-124, 4.6/153-156; SD 8.3(11-12); SD 7.6 Intro (2.2).

¹⁴⁰ Ie those of Nāgasena and of Buddhaghosa.

¹⁴¹ For a biblio on dream psychology, see http://psych.ucsc.edu/dreams/Library/fmid_refs.html.

¹⁴² See esp SD 17.6 §§5(4), 5(6), 8.4.

connection with karma, hence with formations (*saṅkhāra*). That all we can bring along, indeed are bound to, is our karma, and we are often reminded to constantly reflect as follows:

I am the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds,
the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds,
my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I do,¹⁴³ good or evil, I will be its heir.

(M 3:203 = A 5.57/3:72 f= 186 = 5:88, 288) = SD 5.13

Suttas, such as **the (Kamma) Nidāna Sutta** (A 3.33), caution us how our karma stalks us as we journey through time: we are karma-burdened time-travellers, reaping karmic fruits and sowing karmic seeds along the way:

Monks, just as viable [good] seeds, not rotten, undamaged by wind or sun, viable,¹⁴⁴ properly planted in well-prepared soil in a good field, and if there were proper and timely rain,¹⁴⁵ then, monks, these seeds would sprout and grow in abundance.

Even so, monks, whatever action that is done in **greed**, born in greed, caused by greed, arising in greed, it ripens wherever the individual is born. And wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma's result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

Whatever action that is done in **hate**... wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma's result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

Whatever action that is done in **delusion**, born in delusion, caused by delusion, arising in delusion, it ripens wherever the individual is born. And wherever that karma ripens, he will feel the karma's result even in this life itself, or in the next life, or in subsequent lives.

(A 3.33.1/1:135) = SD 4.14

When a passage such as this one above is compared with one concerning *viññāṇa*—such as **the Parivīmaṁsana Sutta** (S 12.51)—we can actually see that they refer to the same context, that they are in fact referring to the same thing:

Monks, if a person, drowned in ignorance,¹⁴⁶ creates meritorious volitional formation,¹⁴⁷ his consciousness fares in merit. If he creates demeritorious volitional formation, his consciousness fares in demerit. If he creates imperturbable volitional formation, his consciousness fares in the imperturbable.¹⁴⁸

(S 12.51.12/2:82) = SD 11.5

Here, “merit” (*puññā*) refers to a good rebirth in the sense-world or the form world, “demerit” (*apuñña*) a painful rebirth in the sense-world, and “imperturbable” (*āneñja*) to the formless world.

11 *Viññāṇa* as evolving

¹⁴³ *Yaṃ kammaṃ karissāmi*, lit “whatever karma I will do.”

¹⁴⁴ “Viable,” *sāradāni*, (of seeds) “fresh” (D 3:354=A3:404); fr *sārada*, “autumn”. Also fr *sāra*, “essence”.

¹⁴⁵ “Proper and timely rain,” *devo ca sammā dhāraṃ*., lit “right and seasonable rain”.

¹⁴⁶ “A person drowned in ignorance,” *āvijjā'gato*, lit “one gone to ignorance,” one engaged in ignorance.

¹⁴⁷ “Creates meritorious volitional activities,” *puññaṃ...saṅkhāraṃ abhisankharoti*.

¹⁴⁸ Comy: “Meritorious volitional formation” (*puññaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) is one of the 13 kinds of volition (ie the volitions of the 8 wholesome sense-sphere cittas (*kāmāvacara,cittā*) and the 5 wholesome cittas of the form sphere (*rūpāvacara,cittā*)). “His consciousness fares in merit” (*puññūpagaṃ hoti viññāṇaṃ*) means that the karmic consciousness becomes associated with a meritorious karma, the resultant consciousness with the fruits of merit. “Demeritorious volitional formation” (*apuññaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) is the twelve kinds of volition (ie in the 12 unwholesome cittas). “Imperturbable volitional formation” (*āneñjaṃ saṅkhāraṃ*) refers to the 4 kinds of volition (ie in the 4 wholesome cittas of the formless realms (*arūpāvacara,citta*)). (SA 2:78).For analysis of these 3 types of volitional activities, see Vbh 135. **The Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106) explains in detail how consciousness “fares in the imperturbable” (*āneñjūpaga*) (M 106/2:261-266). On the tr of *saṅkhāra*, see S:B General Intro & 727 n7.

11.1 THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS.¹⁴⁹ The word *saṃvattanikaṃ viññāṇaṃ* (“evolving consciousness”) occurs only eight times in the Pali Canon, and all eight are found in **the Āneñja, sappāya Sutta** (M 106).¹⁵⁰ The Sutta commentary explains that here, *saṃvattanika* (or *saṃvaṭṭanika*) refers to one whose rebirth process is incapable of realizing arhathood (MA 4:61).¹⁵¹ PED defines the two words and related ones as follows (abridged):¹⁵²

<i>saṃvaṭṭanika</i>	[from <i>saṃvaṭṭa(na)</i>] turning to, being reborn (D 1:17).
<i>saṃvattanika</i>	[from <i>saṃvattati</i>] conducive to, involving (A 2:54, 65; It 82; Kvu 618; J 1:275; Nett 134 = S 5:371. As <i>saṃvattaniya</i> at PvA 205.
<i>saṃvaṭṭati</i>	1. to be evolved, to be in a process of <i>evolution</i> (opp <i>vivaṭṭati</i> , in <i>devolution</i>); 2. to fall to pieces, to come to an end (like the world’s destruction), to pass away, perish, dissolve.
<i>saṃvattati</i>	to lead (to), to be useful (for)—often in the phrase <i>nibbidāya virāgāya... nibbānāya saṃvattati</i> (eg D 1:189, 2:251, 3:130; S 5:80, 255; A 3:83, 326).

Both the key words appear in three Dīgha suttas in the same sentence in the same context, thus:

Samvaṭṭamāne loke yebhuyyena sattā ābhassara, saṃvattanikā honti.

When the world is contracting [collapsing], beings mostly arise in the Ābhassara [streaming radiance] Brahmā world. (D 1.2.2 = 24.2 = 27.10)¹⁵³

Here, *saṃvattanika* also has the sense of “conducive to,” that is to say, when the physical universe collapses, the consciousness of most beings generally become conducive for rebirth in the Ābhassara world, which lies just beyond the destroyed universe.

Another important sense of *saṃvattanika* (as a qualifier of *viññāṇa*) is that it “evolving,” here meaning changing in an either wholesome way or unwholesome. Traditionally, we find this theme depicted in the painting of the Wheel of Life (dependent arising in graphic form):

¹⁴⁹ See S Collins 1982:213-218 (§7.2) & S Hamilton 1996a:97-101.

¹⁵⁰ M 106.3-10/2:262-264.

¹⁵¹ Buddhaghosa is here referring specifically to one who has attained the 4th dhyana but fails to win arhathood. We can however tease out the sense to apply more generally.

¹⁵² See Collins 1982:297 n8 for other refs.

¹⁵³ **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1.2.2/1:17) = SD 25.2, **Paṭhika S** (D 24.2.17/3:28), **Aggañña S** (D 27.10/3:84) = SD 2.19.

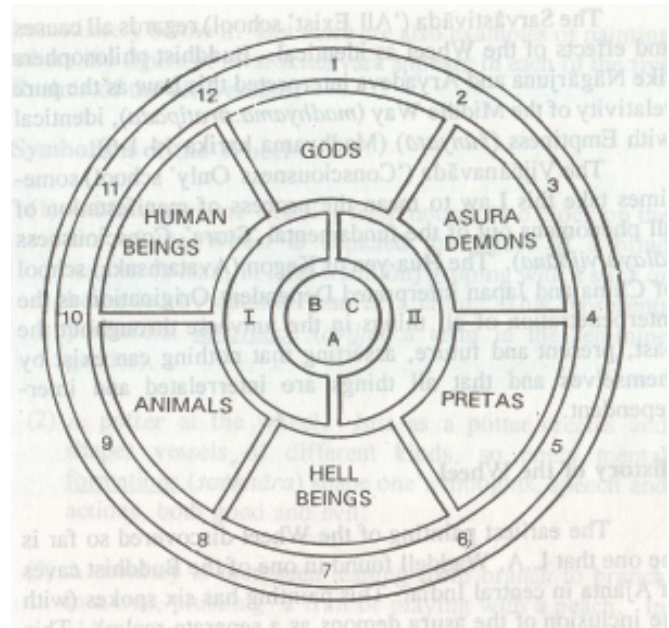


Fig 11.1 Dependent arising showing evolution: (l) the 5 realms; (r) the 6 realms.

<http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/books/wheel/circle3.htm>

The hub of the wheel contains **three animals**: (A) a black pig (ignorance), (B) a green snake (hatred), and (C) a red rooster (greed), each biting the other’s tail reflecting their neurotic inter-reaction or co-dependency, and that they lie right at the core of our lives, influencing almost all that we do.

The evolutionary aspect of consciousness is depicted in the two sectors of the wheel’s outer hub (sectors I-II in the schema on the right of Figure 11.1), representing **the cycle of rebirth** (*samsāra*). Sector I (usually white) depicts beings floating upwards towards higher births (here we see lay followers meditating, followed by a monk doing walking meditation, sitting in meditation, and in dhyana). Sector II (usually coloured black) shows beings devolving or falling downwards in the lower realms.

The third circle represents **the six realms** (ie the traditional five realms and the asura or titan realm). Only five realms (*pañca,gatī*) are mentioned in the Pali Canon (Fig 11.1 left circle).¹⁵⁴ According to the Pali Commentaries, the titans (*asura*) or “fallen gods” are classed with the hell-beings.¹⁵⁵

11.2 THE STATIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS. Consciousness can exist as *a personal mental process*, or as *a realm of being*, that is, an actual world inhabited by those whose consciousness conduces (*samvattanika*) to that realm. **The Sutta Nipāta** contains this stanza, whose commentary throws some light on the nature of existential consciousness:

*Viññāṇa-t,ṭhitiyo sabbā
(Posāla ti Bhagavā)
abhijānaṃ Tathāgato
tiṭṭhantaṃ enaṃ jānāti
vimuttaṃ tapparāyanaṃ*

All the stations of consciousness
(Posāla, said the Blessed One)
he has directly known, the Tathagata
knows the one who remains (with karma),
or, the liberated, or the one intent on that path. (Sn 1114)

The type of “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) meant here can be known from another commentarial phrase, “stations of constructive consciousness” (*abhisankhāra,viññāṇa-t,ṭhiti*, SA 2:259). The Sutta Nipāta

¹⁵⁴ D 33.2.1(4)/3:234; M 12.35-36/1:73; S 56.102-131/5:474; A 9.68/4:459; also Vism 443 passim.

¹⁵⁵ DA 3:1061; UA 140, 418; ItA 1:73, 101, 2:118. The Paṭisambhidā,magga Comy, however, defines “the plane of misery” (*apāya*) as comprising the hells, animals, departed ghosts and asuras (PmA 2:411), all of which however comprise “the lower realm” (*vinipāta*) (ThīA 282). See SD 5.16(15) for further details.

Commentary explains that there are two sets of “stations” (*thiti*), namely, four stations “by virtue of constructions” (*abhisankhāra,vasena*) and seven stations “by virtue of rebirth” (*paṭisandhi,vasena*).¹⁵⁶

The four stations here refers to the other four aggregates (form, feeling, perception and formations), that is, the constituents of a physical being. It is by becoming attached to these four that consciousness “while standing, would stand” (*tiṭṭhamānaṃ tiṭṭheyya*) engaged with form, with feeling, with perception, or with formations.¹⁵⁷ Earlier on, we saw **the Hālidakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3) explain how consciousness makes the other four aggregates its home [1.2(2)], where its commentary glosses “consciousness” as *abhisankhāra* (construction) or *kamma,viññāna* (karmic consciousness)—that is, karma of body, speech and mind (SA 2:259). We see here a close link between consciousness and karma.

The seven stations of consciousness (*satta viññāna-ṭ,thiti*) are often mentioned together with the two spheres (*āyatana*), totalling what are known as the “nine abodes of beings” (*nava satt’āvāsa*). This model classifies beings according to the nature of their consciousness, as follows:¹⁵⁸

- (1) beings different in body, different in perception (such as humans, the sense-world gods);
- (2) beings different in body, same in perception (that is, the four lower realms);
- (3) beings same in body, different in perception (such as the Ābhassara devas);
- (4) beings same in body, same in perception (such as the Vehapphala devas);
- (5) the sphere of the infinity of space;
- (6) the sphere of the infinity of consciousness; and
- (7) the sphere of nothingness.

The two spheres (*āyatana*), which are not exactly “stations” for consciousness, are as follows:

- (8) the sphere of non-percipient beings; and
- (9) the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

These last two are called “spheres” (and not “stations”) because consciousness there is *totally suspended* (8) in a sort of total hibernation or suspended animation, or that it is *so subtle* (9) that it cannot be said whether it exists or does not. It is interesting that the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*), are not listed as “stations for consciousness.” **The Pure Abodes** are inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Untroubled”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akañiṭṭhā (“Peerless”).¹⁵⁹

11.3 THE UNESTABLISHED CONSCIOUSNESS. The consciousness of an arhat who has passed away is said to be *appatiṭṭha*, which is best translated as “unestablished,” in the sense that it does not arise any more because there is no more “footing” or basis (*patiṭṭha*) for it. The most famous illustration for this is that of the extinguished fire in **the Aggi Vacchagotta Sutta** (M 72), where the brahmin Aggi Vacchagotta asks the Buddha where does the liberated mind (*vimutta,citta*), that is, the arhat’s consciousness, arise. The Buddha answers that it is beyond all logical premises for any answer: “arise” does not apply, “does not arise” does not apply, “both arises and does not arise” does not apply, and “neither arises nor not arises,” too, does not apply. Vaccha becomes confused at the reply. The Buddha then gives his famous fire simile:

19a Now, what do you think, Vaccha: suppose there were a fire burning before you, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if there were a fire burning before me, I would know it.”

“Suppose, Vaccha, someone were to ask you: ‘This fire that is burning before you, depending on what does it burn?’ What, Vaccha, would be your answer?”

“Master Gotama, on being asked thus, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns depending on grass and wood.’”

¹⁵⁶ SnA 602; cf Nc 570.

¹⁵⁷ **Upāya S** (S 3:53) = SD 29.4 & SA 2:271; **Saṅgīti S** (D 3:228) & DA 3:1021.

¹⁵⁸ See **Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (D 15.33-34/2:69 f) = SD 5.17 where see Table 2. At Sn 1114, the Buddha is said to know “all the stations of consciousness.”

¹⁵⁹ D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46. See Bodhi 1984:48.

19b “Suppose, Vaccha, this fire before you were to go out, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if this fire before me were to go out, I would know it.”

19c “Now suppose, Vaccha, you were asked, ‘When that fire before you went out in which direction has it gone—to the east, or to the west, or to the north, or to the south?’ How would you answer it?”

“It does not apply, master Gotama! The fire had burned depending on grass and wood. When that fuel is used up and it does not receive any more fuel, being without fuel, it would be regarded as quenched.”¹⁶⁰

20 “In the same way, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned the form by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth. (M 72.19-20/1:487) = SD 6.15

There is nothing mystical about the answer that the Buddha has given here: it is simply a linguistic problem. The “taste of freedom” (*vimutti, rasa*) is a direct and personal experience: just as we have to taste salt to know what it is like, even so we have to experience liberation for oneself. No one can save another: we can at best direct the way or stretch out a hand in assistance.

The other point is that the arhat’s consciousness is *unestablished*, for like the extinguished fire, there is no more fuel for it. This point is best explained in connection with the death of the arhat Godhika. While the monk **Godhika** was at Kāla, silā (Black Rock) on the side of Isigili (today, Sona Hill),¹⁶¹ he kept falling away from temporary release of mind due to his sickness.¹⁶² So, when he attained release of mind, he committed suicide to gain liberation.¹⁶³ It is said that Māra the evil one tried to look for his rebirth-consciousness but failed. Godhika has passed away with his rebirth-consciousness unestablished (SA 1:184).¹⁶⁴

The Subcommentary to the Godhika Sutta explains that the consciousness is not subject to arising (*anuppatti, dhammena*); for if there were an arising, consciousness would be said to be “established.” The cause of the non-establishment of consciousness is precisely the cause for his parinirvana (*yad eva tassa viññāṇassa appatiṭṭhāna, kāraṇaṃ tad eva parinibbānaṃ, kāraṇaṃ*) (SAT:VRI 1:191). In **the Upāya Sutta** (S 22.53), the Buddha declares, “When consciousness is unestablished, not coming to growth, non-generative, it is liberated,”¹⁶⁵ that is, when it no more generates volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), or, according to the Commentary, it does not bring rebirth (SA 2:271). Only non-arhats have their consciousness “established.”¹⁶⁶

11.4 THE UNMANIFESTED RADIANT MIND. Another interesting quality of the arhat’s consciousness is that it is said to be “radiant” (*pabha*). This quality is mentioned in **the Kevalāḍḍha Sutta** (D 11) in the Buddha’s reply to a certain monk’s question on how all matter totally cease to exist:

¹⁶⁰ *Tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbuto t’eva saṅkhaṃ gacchatī ti.* The fire simile here is balanced by the following great ocean simile. See SD 6.15 Intro (5).

¹⁶¹ **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:120-122). On the location of these places, see S Dhammika, *Middle Land, Middle Way*, 1999:97.

¹⁶² “Temporary release of mind,” *sāmayika ceto, vimutti*, which SA explains as the mundane meditative attainments (*lokiya samāpatti*), ie the absorptions and formless attainments, so called because at the moment of absorption the mind is liberated from the opposing states and is resolved upon its object. He fell away from this liberation on account of illness, being disposed to chronic illness due to (humours of) wind, bile and phlegm (SA 1:183).

¹⁶³ SA 1:183; DhA 1:431-433. A similar case of suicide is recorded of the monk Channa (M 144 = S 35.87) = SD 11.12.

¹⁶⁴ A similar case is recorded of Vakkali’s death, also at Isigili (S 22.87) = SD 8.8.

¹⁶⁵ *Apattiṭṭhitaṃ viññāṇaṃ avirulhaṃ anabhisāṅkhāraṃ ca vimuttaṃ*, S 22.53/3:53 f.

¹⁶⁶ Bodhi: “When the monk is said to attain final Nibbāna with consciousness unestablished, this should not be understood to mean that after death consciousness survives in an “unestablished” condition (a thesis argued by Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, [1995:]208-210); for enough texts make it plain that with the passing away of the arahant consciousness too ceases and no longer exists (see eg [Parivīmaṃsana S] S 12.51).” (S:B 421 n314): see SD 11.5.

Your question should not be phrased in this way: ‘Where do these four primary elements—earth, water, fire, air—cease without remainder?’ Instead, it should be phrased like this:

Where do earth, water, fire, wind, find no footing?
Here long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
Name and form totally cease?

And the answer to that is:¹⁶⁷

The consciousness is unmanifested [without attribute],¹⁶⁸ without end, radiant all around¹⁶⁹—
There earth, water, fire, wind, find no footing.
There long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
Name and form are totally stopped.
With the cessation of consciousness all this stop.¹⁷⁰ (D 11.85/1:222 f) = SD 1.7

The key line, “[t]he consciousness without attribute [non-manifesting], without end, radiant all around” (*viññāṇam anidassanam anantaṃ sabbato, pabham*) is also found in the Buddha’s definition of nirvana in **the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49).¹⁷¹ This sentence is, however, a difficult one and is often misinterpreted in post-Buddha times. The main problem lies in whether “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) here refers to nirvana or to the arhat’s mind.

Apparently, even Buddhaghosa has problems with this issue. The Majjhima Commentary takes the subject of the sentence to be *nibbāna*, called “consciousness” (*viññāṇam*) in the sense that “it can be cognized” (*vijānitabbam*). “This derivation,” says **Bodhi**, “is hardly credible, since nowhere in the Nikāyas is Nibbāna described as consciousness, nor is it possible to derive an active noun from the gerundive.” (M:NB 1249 n513)

The word *anidassana* means “without attribute, unpredicated, non-manifesting, signless, invisible.” The Majjhima Commentary explains *anidassana* as meaning “invisible,” because it (nirvana) does not come within the range of eye-consciousness—but again, notes Bodhi, “this is a trite explanation” (id). The word *anidassana* also occurs in **the Kakacūpama Sutta** (M 21.14):

“What do you think, bhikshus? Could a man draw pictures and make pictures appear on empty space?”

“No, venerable sir. What is the reason? Because space is formless (*arūpi*) and **unmanifesting [signless]** (*anidassano*). It is not easy to draw pictures there or make pictures appear there.”

(M 21.14/1:127)

¹⁶⁷ The first stanza line, *viññāṇam anidassanam anantaṃ sabbato, pabham*, as in **Brahma, nimantanika S** (M 49.25/1:329) = SD 11.7 Intro (8-9).

¹⁶⁸ “Without attribute [signless],” *anidassana*, “invisible.” Ñāṇananda renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59). See Bodhi’s important n at M:NB 1249 n513.

¹⁶⁹ “Radiant all around,” *sabbato, pabham*, where *pabham*, v1 *paham*. See Bodhi’s important n at M:NB 1249 n513. See also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

¹⁷⁰ The Buddha makes a similar statement by way of an Udāna (inspired utterance) on the parinirvana of Bāhiya Dārucīriya: “Where water, earth, fire and wind find no footing, / There neither brightness burns nor sun shines / There neither moon gleams nor darkness reigns. / When a sage, a brahmin, through wisdom has known this by himself / Then he is freed from form and formless, from joy and pain.” (U 9). A similar verse is found at S 1.69/1:15, and a similar teaching is given by Mahā Cunda to Channa 4.87/4:59. On this verse (D 11.85) see D:W 557 n242 & SD 9 (Mahā Parinibbāna S), Intro (9h).

¹⁷¹ M 49.25/1:329 = SD 11.7 Intro (8).

Here we see the statement that empty space is an unsuitable medium for painting pictures. Thus, concludes Bodhi, “the idea seems to be that of not making manifest” (id). **Ñāṇananda**, similarly, renders it as “non-manifesting.”¹⁷²

Another problem word here is *sabbato,pabham*, “radiant all around,” where *pabham* has the variant reading of *paham*, “abandoned.” **Ñāṇamoli**, in his Majjhima translation, takes *pabham* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati* (“to be able”)—*apabham*—the negative prefix *a-* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to “all,”’ or ‘not assuming of “all” that it is or is not in an absolute sense.’” (M:ÑB 1249 n513)

“But,” argues Bodhi, “if we take *pabham* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id).¹⁷³

- 1 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, but it is defiled by adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].
The uninstructed [ignorant] ordinary person does not understand things as they really are. Therefore there is no mental development for the uninstructed ordinary person, I say!¹⁷⁴
- 2 Bhikshus, this mind is radiant, and it is freed from adventitious impurities [that “arrive” through the sense-doors].
The instructed [wise] noble disciple understands things as they really are. Therefore there is mental development for the instructed noble disciple, I say!¹⁷⁵
(A 1.6.1-2/1:10; also 1.5.9-10/1:10)

In the **Pabbā Sutta 1 & 2** (A 4.141-142/2:139) the light of wisdom (*paññā,pabhā*) is called the best of lights.¹⁷⁶

In short, in this stanza, “[t]he consciousness without attribute, without end, radiant all around” refers not to nirvana (as suggested by the Commentaries) but to the nature of the arhat’s mind, that is, awakened consciousness (as commonly understood in the Suttas).

12 Viññāṇa, mano, and citta

12.1 DEFINITIONS. In the Nikāyas, we often find the terms *viññāṇa*, *mano* and *citta* appearing together as synonyms [1.2].¹⁷⁷ The Abhidhamma, too, generally regards the terms *viññāṇa*, *mano* and *citta* practically as synonyms. In **the Vibhaṅga**, for example, the “seven minds” (*satta citta*) are defined as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, the mind-element, and the mind-consciousness element¹⁷⁸ (*cakkhu,viññāṇaṃ sota,ghāna,jīvhā,kāya,-*

¹⁷² **Ñāṇananda**, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59. See also “Nibbāna Sermon 7” in 2004:138-159.

¹⁷³ See D:W 557 n241.

¹⁷⁴ *Pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathā,bhūtaṃ n’appajānati. Tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa citta,bhāvanā n’atthi ti vadāmi ti.* Qu at MA 1:167; DhA 1:23; NmA 1:22; PmA 1:242; DhsA 68.

¹⁷⁵ *Pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vipparamuttāṃ. Taṃ sutavā ariya,-sāvako yathā,bhūtaṃ pajānati. Tasmā sutavato ariya,sāvakassa citta,bhāvanā atthi ti vadāmi ti.*

¹⁷⁶ See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513; and also Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:100 f.

¹⁷⁷ Eg D 1:21; S 2:94 f: see below §12.4.

¹⁷⁸ **Mano,dhātu** (mind-element), is one of the 18 elements (*dhātu*) that constitute the cognitive process. Unlike *man’āyatana* (the mind-base, a collective term for all the different states of consciousness), it does not apply to the whole of consciousness, but refers only to that special element of consciousness which first, at the beginning of the perceptual process (*viññāṇa,kicca*), performs the function of advertence (*āvajjana*) to the sense-object and, then after twice having become conscious of it, performs the function of reception (*sampañicchana*) into mind-consciousness. The **mano,viññāṇa,dhātu** (mind-consciousness element) is also one of the 18 elements, but generally refers to that consciousness-element which performs the functions of investigating (*santīrana*), determining (*votthapana*),

viññāṇaṃ mano, dhātu mano, viññāṇa, dhātu) (Vbh 403 f). **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī** defines the “states of consciousness” (*dharmā citta*) in the same way (Dhs 209/1187). **The Visuddhi,magga** similarly states that *viññāṇa, mano* and *citta* are of the same meaning (*viññāṇaṃ cittaṃ mano ti atthato ekaṃ*, Vism 452).

One might well wonder why have three different words when they all mean the same thing? The reason is that, in the Nikāyas at least, we can sometimes see that there are different *usages* for each of the three terms. The three terms often overlap, but in certain contexts, one term applies better than the rest. In the Abhidhamma, too, where *viññāṇa* (consciousness) is the major focus, we see, for example, *viññāṇa* and *citta* are used synonymously.

The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, in defining *citta*, and **the Vibhaṅga**, in defining *viññāṇa*, use the same terms: *citta mano mānasam hadayam paṇḍaram mano man’āyatanam viññāṇam viññāṇa-k,khandho tadjā mano,viññāṇa,dhātu* (“the mind, mentation, mentality, the heart, the mind that is radiant [lucent],¹⁷⁹ the mind, the mind-base, consciousness, the consciousness aggregate, (and) depending on the aforesaid, mind-consciousness-element”).¹⁸⁰ **The Attha,sālinī**, the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī Commentary, gives a specific meaning to each of these terms,¹⁸¹ implying that they are not strictly synonyms. In fact, we begin to see the three terms being given specific meanings in the Commentaries,¹⁸² but also mutually inclusive, that is, as *pariyāya,vācanāni*, or terms that help define one another.¹⁸³

By the time of Vasubandhu (4th-5th century), the meanings of these three terms become more well defined, as evident in his **Abhidharma,kośa**:

Citta is so named because it accumulates (*cinoti*) [good and evil];¹⁸⁴ it is called *manas* because it knows (*manute*),¹⁸⁵ it is called *viññāṇa* because it distinguishes its object (*ālambanam vijānāti*). (Abhk 2.34ab) = Abhk:Pr 1:205

However, it should be remembered that such explicit technicalities are absent from the early Buddhist texts, but their senses and usages can be teased out from the context.

12.2 KĀYA AND KHANDHA. The Assutava Sutta 1 (S 12.61) gives this insight into how the uninstructed worldling or ordinary person views his body and his mind:

2 “Bhikshus, the uninstructed worldling¹⁸⁶ might be revulsed towards this body (*kāya*) composed of the four great elements, or he might be dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

3 What is the reason for this? Because, bhikshus, growth and decline is seen in this body composed of the four great elements, as it is seen being taken up or left aside.

Therefore, the uninstructed worldling might become dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

4 But, bhikshus, as regards that which is called “mentation [thought]” (*citta*), and “mind” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*)—the uninstructed worldling is unable to feel revulsed towards it, or is unable to be dispassionate towards it, nor be liberated from it.

registering (*tad-ārammaṇa*), etc. As such, in the perceptual process, the *mano,dhātu*, as it were, leads on to the *mano,viññāṇa,dhātu*. See Vbh 87-90. See BDict: *viññāṇa-kicca* & also above, §9.3 n on “registration.”

¹⁷⁹ “The mind that is radiant,” *paṇḍaram mano*, which is conjectural: this is the second *mano* mentioned in the list. Dhs:R apparently takes it as *mano man’āyatanam*, “ideation as the sphere of the mind” (Dhs:R 8).

¹⁸⁰ Dhs §6/10; Vbh §249/144; also at ItA 2:22 f.

¹⁸¹ DhsA 3:274-276.

¹⁸² See Rune EA Johansson 1965; Aloysius Pieris 1979.

¹⁸³ Cf NettA 254. See also Pieris 1979:6 f = 1980:214.

¹⁸⁴ Amplification is from the Vyākhyā. Here Tib has ‘*byed pas*, “because it distinguishes”; Attha,sālinī: *ālambanam cinteti ti cittaṃ*.

¹⁸⁵ Also at Dhātu,pāṭha 4.67.

¹⁸⁶ The uninstructed worldling (*assutava puthujjana*) is one who lacks learning, questioning and discerning of the aggregates. He may either be a crowd-follower or a highly opinionated individual guided by self-identity. For details, see **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61.2/2:94) = SD 20.2 n ad loc.

5 What is the reason for this?

Because for a long time, this has been held, cherished, and grasped by him, thus:

“This is mine; this I am; this is my self.”¹⁸⁷

Therefore, the uninstructed worldling is unable to feel revulsed towards it, or is unable to be dispassionate towards it, nor be liberated from it. (S 12.61/2:94 f) = SD 20.2 [1.2, 3]

The ordinary person finds it easier to be detached from *the body* because it can be easily seen to be impermanent, but not so *the mind* because he identifies with it.

The Sutta then goes on to say that it is, however, “better” to identify the self with the body—since it appears to remain stable longer—rather than with the mind, and the reason is given in the monkey simile:

Bhikshus, that which is called “mind” (*citta*), or “mentation [thought]” (*mano*), or “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*), night and day, arises as one thing and ceases as another.

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, wandering through the forest, seizes one branch, lets go of that and grabs another—even so, bhikshus, that which is called “mind,” or “mentation,” or “consciousness,” night and day, arises as one things and ceases as another.

(S 12.61/2:95) = SD 20.2¹⁸⁸

In this famous passage, the term *viññāṇa* has both the generic or general sense of “mind,” as well as the specific sense of an aggregate (*khandha*). It is also interesting to note that when the body is mentioned in connection with the view of the “uninstructed worldling,” the word *kāya* is used (S 12.61.2). This is to reflect the worldly conventional view of the “body” as a sort of solid entity.

On the other hand, the instructed noble disciple (*sutava ariya, sāvaka*) views the body as it really, that is, conditionally or by way of dependent arising of the five aggregates, thus:

9 Therein, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple closely and wisely attends to dependent arising itself, thus:

‘When this is, that is, with the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that is not, with the ending of this, that ends.’¹⁸⁹ That is,

10 [The dependent arising and dependent ending formulas.]

11 REVULSION TOWARDS THE AGGREGATES. Seeing thus, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple is revulsed towards form;

he is revulsed towards feeling, too;

he is revulsed towards perception, too;

he is revulsed towards formations, too;

he is revulsed towards consciousness, too.

Being revulsed, he becomes dispassionate.

Through dispassion, (his mind) is liberated.

When it is liberated, there arises the knowledge: ‘Liberated!’

He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is no more of this state of being.’” (S 12.61.9-11/2:95) = SD 20.2¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ These are the 3 graspings (*gāha*): “this is mine” (*etam mama*) is the grasp of craving; “this I am” (*eso ‘ham asmi*), the grasp of conceit; and “this is my self” (*eso me attā*), the grasp of views. The noble disciple, on the other hand, reflects thus: “this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (S 3:18 f; cf 3:16). When this is applied to the 5 aggregates in turn, we have the 20 wrong views of the uninstructed worldling, who views form, etc, as the self, the self as possessing form, etc, form as in the self, the self as in form, etc (M 3:188, 227; S 3:3, 16, 96). Both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma def self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) as comprising these 20 wrong views (M 1:300, 3:17 f; S 3:102; Dhs 182). See Gethin 1985:44 f.

¹⁸⁸ Although this simile is often quoted to illustrate that the restless mind is like a monkey in a tree, neither the Sutta nor its commentary does so, but points to the fact that the mind is always dependent on a sense-object. See S:B 771 n157.

¹⁸⁹ This is the well known full specific conditionality (*idap.paccayatā*) formula: see **Dependent arising** = SD 5.16(2).

12.3 SA,VIÑÑĀNAKA KĀYA. Where *viññāna* is used in a generic sense opposite “body,” the expression *sa,viññānaka kāya*—“the body with its mind” or “the body with its consciousness”—is usually used. In the **Mahā Puṇṇāma Sutta** (M 109 = S 22.82), for example, a certain monk questions the Buddha thus:

“Venerable sir, how does one know, how does one see, so that in regard to this body with its consciousness and all external signs (*bahiddhā sabba.nimittesu*), there is no latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit?”¹⁹¹

“Bhikshu, whatever kind of **form** (feeling...perception...formations...consciousness) there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near¹⁹²—one sees all forms (all feelings...etc) as they really is with right wisdom, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’...” (M 109.13/3:18 f = S 22.82/3:101) = SD 17.11

It should be noted that although the body and consciousness (= mind) are separately mentioned here, this is not a dualism, because “the distinction between the bodily and mental *khandhas* in Buddhism is not intended to suggest that human beings consist of two ontologically distinct substances, one physical and the other mental” (1996a:149), like “ice and steam” (1996a:169).¹⁹³ In all such passages, where *sa,viññānaka kāya* is used, no other analysis of the person is given. As such, concludes **Sue Hamilton**,

So saviññāna[ka] kāya is a general expression which serves well in a situation where one wants to convey the meaning of the whole human being’s bodily and mental faculties. In contexts where it appears with *bahiddhā sabba.nimittesu*, the implication is that one should not think in terms of “I” or “mine” (that is, separate individuality) in anything at all, whether it be subjectively or objectively. So in such contexts *saviññāna[ka] kāya bahiddhā ca* also serves well to convey everything within *samsāric* existence as a whole. (1996a:103)

There was a time some scholars (like TW Rhys Davids) thought that the generic meaning of *viññāna* is its “simpler uneccelesiastical unscholastic popular meaning” and that its classification as a *khandha* is part of “ecclesiastical scholastic dogmatic” (PED 618, sv *viññāna*). The simplicity of the term *sa,viññānaka kāya* may well attest to its being early, or at least earlier than the *khandha* analysis. This may well be the case in some passages, such as the **Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) passage on the gem simile [4.1]. However, it should be noted that we often find both terms and analyses together, in many passages, such as the **Mahā Puṇṇāma Sutta** (M 109) passage quoted here.¹⁹⁴

12.4 CITTA AND MANO. As we have already see, the term *viññāna* sometimes refers to “the mind” in a generic non-technical sense [1]. In this sense, *viññāna* is synonymous with *mano*, as explained in the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the **Uṇṇābha Sutta** (S 48.42), where it is stated that the five physical sense-faculties, each have their own resort (*gocara*) and range (*visaya*)—or sense-data—and do not expe-

¹⁹⁰ See also Lily de Silva 1984:74 f & Brahmavamso 2006:201 f.

¹⁹¹ *Imasmiñ ca sa,viññānake kāye bahiddhā ca sabba,nimittesu ahaṃ,kāra,mamaṃ,kāra,mānānusayā na honti.* I treat the cpd *ahaṃkāra,mamaṃkāra,mānānusayā* as all referring to latent tendencies, ie, “the latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit,” rather than as “I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit” (S:B 927). “Conceit” (*māna*) here refers to measuring oneself against others (as better than, inferior to, or equal with) (Nm 80; Nc 226; Vbh 389). The **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6) mentions 3 latent tendencies (*anusaya*): the latent tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighānusaya*), and of ignorance (*āviññānusaya*) (S 36.6.8bcd = SD 5.5). It is clear here that the latent tendency of lust refers to “mine-making,” of aversion to “conceit,” and of ignorance to “I-making.” While the Pali version speaks of overcoming selfish tendencies, the Chinese version inquires how to practise so that “the complete destruction of the cankers is attained,” 盡得漏盡 jīndélóujīn (SĀ 58 = T2.15a6).

¹⁹² On this “totality formula,” see §8 above.

¹⁹³ See also 1996a:102 f, 123-125, 148 f, 169 f, 178. See also D Keown 1997:304.

¹⁹⁴ See Hamilton 1996a:103-105.

rience one another's resort or range. They all however "resort to the mind, and only the mind experiences all the sense-data" (*mano,paṭisaranam mano ca nesam gocara,visayam paccanubhoti*).¹⁹⁵ [4.4]

Like, *viññāṇa*, both *citta/ceto*¹⁹⁶ and *mano* are similarly sometimes used in the same generic non-technical sense to mean "the mind,"¹⁹⁷ for example:

(1) "Here, Kevaḍḍha, a monk reads the minds (*citta*) and mental states (*cetasika*), the thoughts and ponderings, of other beings and other individuals, thus: 'This is your mind (*mano*); this is how your mind (*mano*) is; such are your thoughts [mentation] (*citta*).'" (**Kevaḍḍha Sutta**, D 11.6/1:213;¹⁹⁸ also at (**Paṭihāriya**) **Saṅgārava Sutta**, A 3.60/1:170).¹⁹⁹

(2) "[O]ne declares: 'Thus is your mind (*mano*): this is in your mind (*mano*); such is your thought (*citta*).' ... one knows the mind (*ceto*) of another with his own, thus: 'By the way the mental formations of this good man are inclined, the depth of that mind (*citta*) will think such and such a thought (*vitakka*).'²⁰⁰ (**Sampasādaniya Sutta**, D 28.1.6/3:103)²⁰¹

(3) [On the perception of light (*āloka,saññā*):] "...then one should attend to the perception of light, determine the perception of daylight: just as day is, so is night; just as night is, so is day. Thus through a mind (*ceto*) that is open and unhindered, one should cultivate a mind (*citta*) of bright light." (**Pacalā Sutta**, A 7.58/4:86;²⁰² also at **Saṅgīti Sutta**, D 33.1.11(5)/3:223)

(4) Thereupon the venerable Moggallāna searched their minds (*citta*) with his own mind (*ceto*), and saw that they were released, without acquisitions. (**Moggallāna Sutta**, S 8.10/1:194)

(5) Lust and hatred have their source here; discontent, delight, hair-raising terror is born here | Here arisen here, the mind's thoughts toss one about like boys toss a crow about. (**Sūciloma Sutta**, S 10.3/1:207)

(6) "In this way, bhikshus, this son of family is one who has gone forth, but he is covetous, strongly lusting after sense-pleasures, with a mind (*citta*) of illwill, with a mind (*mano*) of corrupted intentions,²⁰³ muddle-headed, lacking concentration, scatter-brained (*vibbhanta,citta*), uncontrolled in faculty.²⁰⁴ (**Piṇḍolya Sutta**, S 22.80/3:93)²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁵ M 43.21/1:295 = S 48.42/5:218. Comy explains *mano* here (following the Abhidhamma tradition) as the mind-door impulsion (*javana*), which experiences the object by way of lust, hate or delusion (SA 3:245). **Bodhi**, however thinks, "In my view, this introduces an unnecessary ethical slant on the passage, which I take to be primarily epistemic [having to do with knowing] in import. I interpret the sentence simply to mean that mind-consciousness has access to the data provided by the five types of sense consciousnesses, which it collates, categorizes, and interprets with its own stock-in-trade, namely, concepts." (S:B 1936 n226). On what the mind resorts to, see 4.4 above.

¹⁹⁶ *Ceto* is effectively syn with *citta*, except that it is more commonly used as a prefix, eg, *ceto,pariya,ñāṇa* (D 1:79, 3:100), *ceto,vimutti* (V 1:11; D 1:156; M 1:197; S 2:165; A 1:124), *ceto,samādhi* (D 1:15; S 4:297; A 2:54). Other common forms of *ceto* are *cetasa* (adj), *cetaso* (gen sg), *cetasā* (ins), *cetasika* (adj). See Hamilton 1996a:106-110, 114.

¹⁹⁷ **Boisvert** says, "All the sense-organs except the mental organ (*mano*) belong to the six sense-doors, while the sense-objects along with the mental organ are included in contact (*phassa*)" (1995:147). **Harvey**, in his review of Boisvert, notes: "Here one can object: (a) *mano* is in fact the sixth of the six sense-doors, (b) *phassa* is part of *nāma*, and so cannot include physical sense-objects, (c) *mano* is not the same as *phassa*, though it can condition its arising." (JBE 3 1996:7)

¹⁹⁸ SD 1.7.

¹⁹⁹ SD 16.10.

²⁰⁰ *Yathā imassa bhoto mano,saṅkhārā paṇihitā imassa cittassa antarā amun,nāma vitakkaṃ vitakkissatī ti.*

²⁰¹ SD 14.14.

²⁰² SD 4.11.

²⁰³ *Paduṭṭha,mana,sankappo.*

²⁰⁴ *Pākat'indriyo.*

²⁰⁵ SD 28.9.

(7) “Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having seen an agreeable form with the eye, a monk does not covet it, nor is excited by it, or breed lust for it. His body is steady, and his mind (*citta*) is steady, inwardly well-composed and well liberated...” (Kuṇḍaliya Sutta, S 46.6/5:74)²⁰⁶

(8) And he dwells perceiving after and before: “As before, so after; as after, so before; as below, so above; as above, so below; as by day, so by night; as by night, so by day.” Thus, with a mind (*ceto*) that is open, with a mind (*ceto*) unhindered, he cultivates the mind (*citta*) of light. (Pure Sutta, S 51.11/5:263; cf (Iddhi,pāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta, S 51.20/5:278)

(9) This is nothing better than this for a brahmin,
When holds his mind (*mano*) back from lovable things.
The more he turns away a violent mind (*mano*),
The more suffering is truly stilled. (Dh 390)

(10) He should commit no theft, he should tell no lie,
He should suffuse with lovingkindness the moving and the still.
Whatever turbidity of mind (*mano*) he might know,
He should push it away, thinking, “(This is) the Dark One’s ally!” (Sn 967)

(11) Aged am I, feeble in strength.
As such, my body runs not there.
Always, I go on a mental journey (*saṅkapp’ayattāya*).
For, my mind (*mano*), brahman, is joined to him [the Buddha]. (Sn 1144)

The Suttas sometimes give the three terms—*citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*—in sequence to refer to one’s mental activities as a whole, such as in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61):

But, bhikshus, as regards that which is called “mentation” (*citta*), and “mind” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*)—the uninstructed worldling is unable to experience revulsion towards it, unable to become dispassionate towards it, and be liberated from it.

(S 12.61/2:94 f) = SD 20.2 [1.2, 3]

12.5 CLOSE INTERCONNECTION. In fact, the Suttas often use *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *citta* (mentation) and *mano* (mind) interchangeably to refer to what we call the mind. *Citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* are all synonyms here. Bodhi uses “mentality” for *mano*.²⁰⁷ However, here I am influenced by the Buddhist Dictionary’s definition of *citta*, where *adhicitta* is defined as “higher mentality.” Moreover, as Bodhi himself notes: “*Mano* serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects.”²⁰⁸

As such, “mentation” (a function) is clearly a better translation of *mano* than “mentality” (more of a state or a condition). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate *citta* and *mano* as “mind,” as most translators now do, too. On the other hand, in most contexts, the simple word “thought/s”²⁰⁹ would effectively translate *citta*, as above at *mano* (1).²¹⁰

The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43) explains the nature of the relationship amongst the three,²¹¹ and defines the characteristics of three closely connected aggregates as follows:

viññāṇa cognizes (*viñāṇāti*) the three feelings (pleasant, painful and neutral);
vedanā feels (*vedeti*) the three feelings, and

²⁰⁶ SD 35.3.

²⁰⁷ S:B 595 & 769 n154. *Mano* (Skt *manas*) is derived from the root √MAN, “to think, believe, imagine, suppose, conjecture.” *Manas* is cognate with Latin *mens*, “mind, reason, intellect,” and from this we get the English “mind, mentate,” and “to mean” (PED: *maññati* & *mano/mana(s)*; SED: *manas*).

²⁰⁸ S:B 769 n154.

²⁰⁹ Cf Hamilton 1996a:106.

²¹⁰ See **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61/2:95) = SD 20.2. See also A Pieris 1980:213.

²¹¹ M 43.4-6/1:292 f.

saññā notes (*sañjānāti*) various colours.

The Sutta then goes on to say that these three states (*dhamma*) should be regarded as being closely connected (*samsaṅgā*) since “what one feels, that one notes; what one notes, that one cognizes.” As such, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *viññāṇa* are seen here as working together as different aspects of the process of being aware of a particular object of consciousness. As such, concludes **Gethin**,

Viññāṇa can perhaps best be characterised as awareness or consciousness of things in relation to each other; this seems to relate both the notion of self awareness and that of discriminating [cognizing] various objects. (Gethin 1985:37)

Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit scholar of Buddhism, in his study of the commentarial usages of the three terms, gives a helpful summary, albeit based on mostly a commentarial context:

Semantically, *mano* is the most precise, while *viññāṇa* is the most elastic and elusive of the three. *Mano* denotes the “noetic²¹² awakening” of the *bhavaṅga*, or the subliminal consciousness, in response to an external stimulus (*bāhirāyatana*); or, more precisely, it is the noetic “opening” (*dvāra*) to the outside world, ie an act of advertence (*āvajjana*).²¹³ *Viññāṇa* would normally stand for the general undifferentiated (or, anoetic or “ontic”)²¹⁴ consciousness sometimes coinciding with the subliminal continuum (or *bhavaṅga*); it can also frequently mean apperception or full noesis (*mano-viññāṇa* or, simply, *viññāṇa*).

Citta, as it occurs most often in Pali exegesis, amounts to being an explanatory equivalent of both *mano* and *viññāṇa* described above. It is employed as a comprehensive term for the entire complex of consciousness (ie *viññāṇa* in the “ontic” sense) together with its potential or actual noetic center (ie, *mano*).²¹⁵ (Pieris 1979:6 = 1980:213 f)

Here is a summary of the main meanings of the three terms and their differences:

<i>viññāṇa</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>citta</i>
consciousness (continuity of life here and hereafter)	intention (manifestation of a latent tendency)	thought (mentation)
“the mind” (specific or technical sense)		centre of personal experience
particularizing awareness through a sense-faculty	the mind-door (3rd door of action & 6th internal sense-base, through which all the other senses operate)	the subject of thought, volition and emotion (this is what needs to be understood, trained and liberated)

Table 12.5 *Viññāṇa, Mano & Citta* (see Bodhi, S:B 770 n154 & Hamilton 1996a: ch 5).

²¹² “Noetic” is adj of “noesis,” which in **philosophy**, refers to a mental event grasped by pure intellect; in **psychology**, the general functioning of the intellect, or simply, cognition or “knowing.”

²¹³ *Sāvajjanam bhavaṅga mano, dvāram* (Pm 43). Cf ItA 1:101. [Pieris’ nn]

²¹⁴ “Ontic” means having to do with existence or being; “ontology” is the philosophical study or metaphysical inquiry into the question of existence apart from specific objects and events, incl the conceptual reality of categories, and the underlying conceptual systems of theories of mind.

²¹⁵ H Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidhamma*, Lucnknow, 1957:19, accuses the Pali scholiasts of extending the notion of *citta* to include also that of apperception. [Pieris’ n]

13 THE TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

13.1 VIÑÑĀNA LINK LIVES. *Viññāna* is not only the bearer and transmitter of karma, it is also the only process said to leave the body at death and enter another at conception. Karmic momentum takes over the last moments of life, conditioning it into a new one, but this is part of the same unbroken stream of consciousness that continues to feed the new life. This is the existential consciousness, the *viññāna* that links lives and feeds them, and provides them with a sense of continuity. But it is not a static form or abiding entity—for all that can exist can only do so in impermanence—but it is also *a transformative consciousness*, that is, it can either devolve, that is, fall into lower states of being, or it can *evolve*, spiral upwards, heading towards liberation.

This transformative process is directly influenced by the perceptual process, that is, the outcome of the dynamics between the “objective” biases of the six types of perception,²¹⁶ and the “subjective” influence of the six types of sense-impressions. **Ñānamoli** aptly describes the internal sense-faculties (*ajjhakkāyatana*) as “the organization of experience,” and the external sense-fields (*bahiddhāyatana*) as “the experience as organized.”²¹⁷ **Analayo** makes this observation:

Supposedly objective perceptual appraisal is in reality conditioned by the subject as much as by the object.²¹⁸ One’s experience of the world is the product of an interaction between the “subjective” influence exercised by how one perceives the world, and the “objective” influence exercised by the various phenomena of the external world. (2003:218 f)

This understanding is highly significant in meditation and mindfulness practice, where in satipatthana practice we are instructed to direct the attention to each sense-organ and apply “**the Bāhiya teaching**,” as recorded in **the Māluṅkyāputta Sutta** (S 35.95), thus:

Here, Māluṅkyāputta, regarding things²¹⁹ seen, heard, sensed²²⁰ and cognized [known] by you:
 in the seen there will only be the seen;
 in the heard there will only be the heard;
 in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
 in the cognized there will only be the cognized. (M 35.95.12/4:73) = SD 5.9²²¹

This verse is the crux of the Māluṅkyāputta Sutta and of satipatthana. In sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as “This is mine” (*etaṃ mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as “This I am” (*eso’ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (**Anattā, lakkhaṇa Sutta**, S 3:68). In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality.²²²

In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of reality (*param’attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings us suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, we would in due course see the

²¹⁶ For details on the perceptual process, see **Saññā** = SD 17.4.

²¹⁷ *The Thinker’s Notebook*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:159. See also Analayo 2003:218 f, esp fn 8.

²¹⁸ Cf eg Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, Kandy, 1984:16; Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, London, 1977:21; H Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*, Delhi, 1974:16; C Naranjo et al, *On the Psychology of Meditation*, London, 1971:189. (Analayo’s fn)

²¹⁹ “Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized,” *diṭṭha, suta, muta, viññatabbesu dhammesu*, lit “in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be sensed, to be cognized.” See foll n.

²²⁰ *Muta*, that is, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

²²¹ See also **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/6-9) = SD 34.3.

²²² See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.²²³ This is how mindfulness training becomes the most effective path of spiritual evolution—because it deals directly with the cognitive process.

13.2 THE DEPENDENT ARISING OF CONSCIOUSNESS. Suffering arises for the unawakened worldling simply because he views the aggregates as his self or as a permanent entity (*attā*), and is attached to them through his “desire, lust, delight, craving, engagement, and mental standpoints, inclinations and latent tendencies.”²²⁴ As a result, the aggregates continue to manifest themselves. Only when we do not cling to the aggregates in this manner, as pointed in **the Hālidakāni Sutta 2** (S 22.4), that they cease to bring about spiritual suffering.

The Mahā Hatthi, padopama Sutta (M 28) gives a practical guideline on how to deal with the aggregates. If the four primary elements—earth, water, fire and wind—great as they are, “are seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, subject to disappearance, subject to change—what more of this body that lasts but for a short while, but which is clung to by craving? There can be no considering that (earth element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am,’”²²⁵ or as ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’²²⁶ This is the practice of “disowning the elements.” The Sutta describes the benefit of such a practice—that of noting the aggregates as being impermanent—thus:

So, then, friends, if others abuse, revile, scold, harass a monk (who has seen the elements as they really are),²²⁷ he understands thus:

‘This painful feeling born of **ear-contact** has arisen in me. It is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact.’²²⁸

Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, those formations are impermanent, that consciousness is impermanent.

And his mind plunges into that very object that is the element [earth, water, fire, wind],²²⁹ brightens with faith, becomes steady, and is resolute.²³⁰ (M 28.8/1:185 f) = SD 6.16

The Mahā Hatthi, padopama Sutta goes on to state that the manifestation (*pātubhāva*) of any class (or type) of consciousness (*viññāṇa, bhāga*) is to be regarded as the result of three conditions, that is,

- (1) the sense-faculty is intact (*aparibhinna*),
- (2) the corresponding sense-object comes within the sense-faculty’s range (*āpātha*), and
- (3) that there is appropriate attention (*samannāhāra*), thus:

²²³ See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta*, tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

²²⁴ *Yo chandā yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā ye upāyūpādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhīnivesānusaṃyā, Hālidakāni S 2* (S 22.4/3:12 f).

²²⁵ “‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’,” *ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f).

²²⁶ M 28.6b/1:185. *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmī, na mēso attā ti*. This threefold formula is the contrary of “the 3 graspings” (*ti, vidha gāha*), that is, of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*), of view (*ditṭhi*) (MA 2:111, 225). A brief version of this is given below: “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ [wrong view] or ‘mine’ [craving] or ‘I am’ [conceit]” [7]: also at §§11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22 below. These three graspings are syn with the three kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) and of self-view (*sakkāya ditṭhi*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). In **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:68), the formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pāriyeyya S** (S 22.81/ 3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements: see SD 6.16 Intro (5).

²²⁷ Cf **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22), where the Buddha instructs the monks not to feel negative when others abuse them, and not to be elated when others praise them (M 22.39/1:140).

²²⁸ Comy: This passage shows the strength of the mind of the monk meditating on the elements in applying his understanding to undesirable objects that arise at the ear-door [the organ of hearing]. By regarding such experiences by way of conditionality and impermanence, he transforms the potentially negative situation of being subjected to abuse, etc, into an occasion for insight. (MA 2:226)

²²⁹ *Tassa dhāt’ārammaṇam eva cittaṃ pakkhandati*. See SD 6.16 Intro (2).

²³⁰ See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 28), where Rāhula is taught the meditation of the 4 “element-like” meditations (M 28.13-17/1:424 f = SD 3.11.13-17).

26 Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber, creepers [for binding], grass and clay, it is reckoned as a ‘house,’ even so, when a space is enclosed by bones, sinews, flesh and skin, it is reckoned as ‘form.’

27a ²³¹If, friends, internally ⟨the sense-faculty⟩ is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention], ²³² then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness. ²³³

27b If, friends, internally ⟨the sense-faculty⟩ is unimpaired [intact] and external forms come into its range, but there is no appropriate conscious engagement [attention], then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness.

27c If, friends, internally ⟨the sense-faculty⟩ is unimpaired [intact] and external forms come into its range, and there is a appropriate conscious engagement, then there is the appearance of that class of consciousness.

28 The form in what has thus come into being is grouped into the form aggregate of clinging. ²³⁴

The feeling in what has thus come into being is grouped into the feeling aggregate of clinging.

The perception in what has thus come into being is grouped into the perception aggregate of clinging.

The formations in what has thus come into being are grouped into the formations aggregate of clinging.

The consciousness in what has thus come into being is grouped into the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

He understands thus:

“This, indeed, is how there comes into being the grouping, gathering and accumulation of things into these five aggregates of clinging.”

Now this has been said by the Blessed One: “**One who sees dependent arising sees the Dharma; one who sees the Dharma see dependent arising.**”²³⁵

²³¹ The **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18) has a similar analysis of the 18 elements (6 sense-organs + 6 sense-objects), beginning with: “Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. **The meeting of the three is contact.** 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. What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.” (M 18.16/1:111 f)

²³² “Appropriate conscious engagement,” *tajjo samannāhāro hoti*, or “an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind” (Jayatilleke, 1963:433). *Tajjo* (*tad + ya*), “this like,” appropriate; “engagement [of attention]” (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasikāra*, “attention” (M 1:445; Vbh 321). Comy explains it here as attention arising in dependence on the eye and forms. It is identified with the “five-door adverting consciousness” (*pañca, dvāra, vajjana, citta*), which breaks off the flow of the life continuum (*bhavaṅga*) to initiate the process of cognition (MA 2:229). Even when a sense-object (external stimulus) comes within the range of the sense-organ, if attention is not directed towards the object (because one is occupied with something else), there is still no appearance of “the corresponding class of consciousness.” Here [27a], meaning that no eye-consciousness would arise. See Harvey 1996:95.

²³³ “Class of consciousness,” *viññāna, bhāga*. Comy: This section introduces form derived from the 4 great elements. Derived form, according to the Abhidhamma analysis of matter, includes the 5 sense-faculties (*pasāda, rūpa*) and the first 4 kinds of sense-object, the tangible object being identified with the primary elements themselves (MA 2:229). This passage is qu at Kvu 620; cf Miln 56 ff. **Peter Harvey** renders *viññāna, bhāga* literally as “share of discernment [consciousness]” (1995:129-133), where he also argues against **N Ross Reat**’s rendition of it as “type of consciousness” (1987:19) and **REA Johansson**’s interpretation of the dependence of *rūpa* on consciousness (1979:32).

²³⁴ This section shows the four noble truths by way of the sense-doors. “What has thus come to be” (*tathā, bhūta*) refers to all the states and conditions that arise by way of eye-consciousness. Sāriputta analyzes these states and conditions to show that any sense-experience or factors related to it would fall under the truth of suffering.

And these five aggregates are dependently arisen.

The desire, indulgence, inclination and clinging²³⁶ based on these five aggregates of clinging is **the arising of suffering**.

The removal of lustful desire, the abandonment of lustful desire,²³⁷ for these five aggregates is **the ending of suffering**.

To that extent, too, friends, much has been done by that monk.²³⁸ (M 28/1:190 f) = SD 6.16

The sutta instructions here illustrate dependent arising, and it declares that what dependently arises is nothing but the five aggregates. The point here is to understand how the aggregates arise and stand in relation to each other, how they are conditioned and sustained within a particular cognitive process.

13.3 WHAT IS REBORN? The Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38) records an important teaching explaining that viññāṇa does not pass over into a new life unchanged, it is not the same consciousness that moves on life after life.²³⁹ The Sutta also defines cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness. **The Papañca,sūdanī**, the Majjhima Commentary, says that the monk Sāti, a fisherman's son, was not learned. He was a Jātaka Reciter, so he thinks that, although the other aggregates (*khandha*) cease now here, now there, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) runs on from this world to the beyond and from the beyond to this world. As such, he concludes that consciousness has no condition (*paccaya*) for arising.

The Buddha however teaches that where there is a condition, it arises, and with no condition, there is no arising of consciousness. Sāti therefore professes what the Buddha does not teach, giving a blow to the Conqueror's Wheel, and was a "thief" in his dispensation. (MA 2:305)

"What is this consciousness, Sāti?"

"Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels here and there; it feels the results of good and evil deeds."²⁴⁰

"O hollow man,²⁴¹ to whom have one ever known me to have taught the Dharma in that way? O hollow man, have I not stated in many ways that consciousness is dependently arisen,²⁴² that without a condition there is no arising of consciousness?

But you, O hollow man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured²⁴³ yourself, and stored up much demerit—for, this will bring one harm and suffering for a long time."

(M 38.5c/1:258) = SD 7.10

The Buddha then lists the six kinds of consciousness, follows up with the fire simile, showing how a fire is named after its fuel, "even so, too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent

²³⁵ This quote is untraced in the Pali Canon as we have it and possibly belongs to some lost texts. Comy glosses the statement thus: "One who sees conditionality (*paccaya*) sees dependently arisen states (*paṭicca,samuppanne dhamme*); one who sees dependently arisen states see conditionality" (MA 2:230).

²³⁶ *Chanda, ālaya, anumaya, ajjhosanā*. These are syns for *taṇhā* ("craving").

²³⁷ The prec two phrases are syns for nirvana (MA 2:230).

²³⁸ Although only 3 of the 4 noble truths are explicitly elaborated in the Sutta, the fourth truth—the path—is implicit. Comy says that this refers to the penetration of these truths by the development of the eight factors of the path (MA 2:230).

²³⁹ M 38/1:256-271 = SD 7.10, esp Intro (1-4).

²⁴⁰ As in **Sabb'āsava S** (M 2.8/1:8) where it is one of a number of examples of *diṭṭhi,gata*. This statement by Sāti is his second wrong view, the first being stated at M 2.8.3/1: of the Sutta = SD 17.10.

²⁴¹ *Mogha,purisa*, lit "empty person"; often tr as "misguided one." However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, "misguided" connotes more of psychosocial errancy. I'm unflinched by TS Eliot's "Hollow Men" (where "empty men" is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem.

²⁴² "Consciousness is dependently arisen," *paṭicca,samuppannam viññāṇam*. Cf **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28): "These five aggregates of clinging are dependently arisen." (M 28.28/1:191 = SD 3.13).

²⁴³ "Injured," *khaṇasi*, 2nd p sg of *khaṇati*: (1) hurts, injures; impairs (V 2:26 = M 1:132; D 1:86; S 1:27; A 1:89, 3:350; Tha 1173); (2) digs; digs upl excavates (V 3:48, 76, 4:32; M 2:51; S 1:127; A 4:159; Dh 247, 337; U 15). There is a wordplay here: Sāti harms himself with wrong view, and also dig up his wholesome roots.

upon which it arises.” (M 38.8b/1:259 f). This is **cognitive consciousness**, the rudimentary awareness that is the basis of our daily experience.

In the following sections (M 38.9-21), the Buddha expounds how “this being” arises, how we come into being, through “food” (*āhāra*) and dependent arising. This means that **rebirth** occurs because, by clinging to various things, consciousness becomes dependent on them. In due course, the Buddha makes this remarkable declaration:

“Monks, no matter how pure and clear this view may be, if we stick to it, prize it, be acquisitive about it,²⁴⁴ treat it as a possession,²⁴⁵ would we then understand that the Dharma has been taught **as being comparable to a raft**²⁴⁶ that is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping?” (M 38.14/1:260 f) = SD 7.10

We can turn to **the Cetanā Sutta 2** (S 12.39) for an elaboration. The Sutta first says, “When consciousness is established (*patiṭṭhite*) and grows, there is descent (*avakkanti*) of name-and-form,”²⁴⁷ that is, a new being arises in the womb.²⁴⁸ Conversely, the Sutta declares at the end:

But, monks, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is no mental basis for the support for consciousness.

When there is no mental basis, there consciousness is not established.

When consciousness is not established and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth.**

When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.²⁴⁹ (S 12.38.4/2:65 f) = SD 7/6b

Bodhi interprets the phrase “**when consciousness is not established**” (*appatiṭṭhita viññāna*) here to refer to “a consciousness without the prospect of a future rebirth through the propulsive power of ignorance, craving, and the volitional formations” (S:B 760 n114). The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87). Let us now examine this point a little more closely.

14 The after-death consciousness of an arhat

In both **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.23) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87), Māra is said to be looking for the rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi, cutta*) of the dead arhat monks. Both **the Godhika Sutta** (S 4.3) and **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87) close with this same passage:²⁵⁰

Now on that occasion a mass of smoke and darkness was moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between.²⁵¹

²⁴⁴ “Be acquisitive about it,” *dhanāyati* (denom of *dhana*, “treasure”) lit “make a treasure of it,” he desires (like money), wishes for, strives after. Also read as *vanāyati*, he hankers after.

²⁴⁵ This verse up to here qu in Comy to **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22) (MA 22.21/2:109).

²⁴⁶ “Being comparable to a raft,” *kullūpamaṃ*. The whole phrase can be alt tr as “would you then understand the Dharma as taught in the parable of the raft...?” See **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.13/1:134). “This is said to show the bhikkhus that they should not cling even to the right view of insight meditation” (M:ÑB 1233 n406).

²⁴⁷ S 12.39/2:66 = SD 7.6b. On the question of conception and when does life begin, see SD 7.10 Intro (8).

²⁴⁸ See Harvey 1995:96.

²⁴⁹ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See Intro (5) for detailed nn.

²⁵⁰ S 4.23/1:122 & S 22.87/3:24 respectively. The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122) and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24). See SD 7.6b Intro (4) for more details.

The Blessed One then addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, do you see that mass of smoke and darkness moving to the east, then to the west, to the north, to the south, upwards, downwards, and to the directions in between?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“That, bhikshus, is Māra the evil one seeking the consciousness of the son of family *Godhika* (Vakkali), wondering, ‘Where now has the consciousness of the son of family *Godhika* (Vakkali) established itself [for rebirth]?’

But, bhikshus, with consciousness unestablished, the son of family *Godhika* (Vakkali) has attained nirvana.” (S 4.23/1:122 = 22.87/3:124) = SD 8.8

Elsewhere, it is said that Māra finds the rebirth-consciousness of normal dead people, for example, as mentioned in **the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49).²⁵² However, he fails to do so here, since the arhat’s consciousness (or rebirth-consciousness) is unestablished (*appatiṭṭhita*), that is, finds no footing for a new life. It is clear here that the rebirth-consciousness (= death consciousness) does not survive in an “unestablished” condition, since the texts (here and at S 1:122) state that with the passing away of the arhat, his consciousness ceases, too.²⁵³

This conclusion to the two Suttas is instructive in countering the wrong view that some form of “unsupported” consciousness remains after the passing away of an arhat (as proposed, for example, by Peter Harvey).²⁵⁴ It is probable that Harvey arrived at his thesis from translating *appatiṭṭhita* as “unsupported” rather than “unestablished,” which would then not support his thesis. Here it helps to think in Pali, rather than in English.

15 Closing remarks

Some contemporary scholars explain the aggregates as the Buddhist analysis of man. Correct as this may be, it is only one aspect of the five aggregates, and this should not be treated at the expense of the others. As **Rupert Gethin** notes,

the five *khandhas*, as treated in the *nikāyas* and early *abhidhamma*, do not exactly take on the character of a formal theory of the nature of man. The concern is not so much the presentation of an analysis of man as object, but rather the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject. Thus at the most general level *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* are presented as five aspects of an individual being’s experience of the world; each *khandha* is seen as representing a complex class of phenomena that is continuously arising and falling away in response to processes of consciousness based on the six spheres of senses. They thus become the five *upādānakkhandhas*, encompassing both grasping and all that is grasped. As the *upādānakkhandhas* these five classes of states acquire a momentum, and continue to manifest and come together at the level of individual being from one existence to the next. For any given individual there are, then, only these five *upādānakkhandhas*—they define the limits of his world, they are his world. This subjective orientation of the *khandhas* seems to arise out of the simple fact that, for the *nikāyas*, this is how the world is experienced; that is to say, it is not primarily as having metaphysical significance. (Gethin 1986:49 f)

Viññāṇa is impermanent [3], but provides a continuity of experience [4, 9], which is often mistaken by the unawakened to be some sort of abiding entity [5]. We have discussed the two kinds of conscious-

²⁵¹ *Tena kho pana samayena dhumāyitattaṃ timirāyitattaṃ gacchat’eva purimaṃ disaṃ gacchati pacchimaṃ disaṃ gacchati uttaraṃ disaṃ gacchati dakkhiṇaṃ disaṃ gacchati uddhaṃ gacchati adho gacchati anudisaṃ.* (**Godhika S**, S 1:122 = **Vakkali S**, 3:124).

²⁵² M 49.5/1:327 = SD 11.7; cf S 4:38 f.

²⁵³ See also **Parivīmaṇṣana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84) = SD 11.5. See also S:B 421 n314 where Bodhi disagrees with Harvey’s view.

²⁵⁴ 1995a:208-210.

ness (cognitive and existential) [6]; *viññāṇa* as “subjective consciousness,” that is, as “consciousness of” [7]; *viññāṇa* as a factor in the cognitive process [8]; *viññāṇa* and karma [10]; and as evolving [11], transformative [13] and liberating [14]. We have also discussed various terms related to *viññāṇa*, namely, *kāya*, *mano*, and *citta* [12]. This has given us a an overview of *viññāṇa* as taught in early Buddhism and as understood in modern scholarship, with the hope that such a study will be of practical help in our spiritual development.

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[For other titles, see SD 17.1a, Biblio.]

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