

(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta
 Or, Upādāna Paripavatta Sutta
The Discourse on the Phases (of Clinging)
 [An examination of the five aggregates within this life]
 (Sāmyutta Nikāya 22.56/3:58-61)
 Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

1 The 5 aggregates

There are two ways of examining the five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*):¹ within the same life-time (synchronic or proximal model) and over many lives (diachronic or distal model).² Here, in the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta, we shall examine the first model for the aggregates, that is, the synchronic approach. **The Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57) gives the same synchronic model [3]. The other model, the diachronic, is found in **the (Upādāna) Samādhi Sutta** (S 22.5).³

We are all made up of parts and processes. Our “individuality” or personhood is a mere process of mental states and physical events arising from ignorance, beginning for time immemorial, and will continue indefinitely into the future. The parts and processes that constitute us are in Buddhism called “the five aggregates” (*pañca-k,khandha*), that is, form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitional formations or mental volitions (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These five groups do not, either singly or as a group, constitute any independent unchanging entity (*attā*)—usually called “soul” or “self”—since any notion of a permanent entity is ultimately an illusion.

A proper understanding of the aggregates provides with a view of physical and mental events (ie of “everything”) that brings one closer to reality. In the first place, we have five physical sense-organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body) and the sixth sense, the mind (the “sensing” organ: simply put, it makes sense of our physical experiences). Then there are the external sense-objects: physical forms, sounds, smells, tastes and touch. Thoughts or “mind-objects” are also external sense-objects in the sense that they arise through or are affected by contact with the external world (that is, by external stimuli).

In the Buddhist texts, the external physical world is called form (*rūpa*).⁴ As conscious beings, we have a basic awareness or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) of ourselves and our surroundings (living and non-living): we are aware of “a person,” “a colour,” “a fruit,” etc, depending on conceptions, preconceptions and awareness (or lack of it). When the mind is impinged by such external stimuli (sense-objects), we experience them as a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling (*vedanā*). We then go on to sort these experiences in ways that are recognizable by us in terms of our perception (*saññā*) of “friend (named Ānanda, etc),” “red,” “mango,” etc.⁵

Our experiences of the world⁶ arouse wishes, desires, tendencies, that is, volitional forces or formations (*sankhāra*). When we perceive a “friend,” we are likely to show a favourable disposition to him or

¹ For a detailed study of the 5 aggregates, see *Pañca-k,khandha* = SD 17.

² See S:B 1049 n30.

³ See SD 7.16.

⁴ On the primary elements, both external (the world) and internal (our body), see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-12/1:421-423).

⁵ M 1:138 f, 232 f; S 2:125, 249, 3:67 f, 88 f, 104, 105, 187 f. See Gethin 1986:43 f.

⁶ Here “world” (*loka*) refers to “formations” (*sankhāra, loka*). Commentarial literature speaks of the 3 worlds: (1) the world of formations (*sankhāra, loka*); the world of beings (*satta, loka*) and the physical world (of space-time) (*okāsa, loka*) (Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173; MA 1:397). See **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26/1:61 f) = SD 7.1 Introd (1). Buddhism is neither idealism (the world exists only in the mind) nor materialism (only the material world exists), but teaches “realism” in the sense of understanding things as they really are (*yathā, bhūta*). On the relationship of one’s senses and the existence of the external world, see **Samiddhi S 4** (S 36.58/4:39 f).

her. When we are hungry and perceive a “mango” or any food, we feel a desire to consume it. We are attracted to pleasant objects (we desire them), repulsed by unpleasant (we push them away), and simply disregard indifferent ones.⁷

In reality, the aggregates are not separately entities, but aspects of on-going conscious phenomena: it is a model for describing, understanding and liberating a living being, especially a human being. **Ñāṇa-vīra** gives a very apt imagery for the five aggregates: a solid (*form*) pleasant (*feeling*) shady tree (*perception*) “for lying under” (*formations*) visible to me (*consciousness*).⁸ In other words, the aggregates are dynamic moment-to-moment experiences that arise in us throughout our lives. They are ever changing and do not constitute any lasting state or permanent “self” or “soul.” The *Buddhist Dictionary* provides a useful clarification here:

Some writers on Buddhism who have not understood that the five Khandhas are just classificatory groupings, have conceived them as compact entities (“heaps,” “bundles”). Which actually, as stated above, the Groups never exist as such, ie they never occur in a simultaneous totality of all their constituents. Also those single constituents of a Group are present in any given body-and-mind process, are of an evanescent nature, and so also their varying combinations. Feeling, perception and mental formations are only different aspects and functions of a single unit of consciousness. They are to consciousness what redness, softness, sweetness etc, are to an apple and have as little separate existence as those qualities. (BDict: *khandha*)

Such experiences by way of the aggregates (in various compositions) occur in all beings, whether they are awakened or not.⁹ Awakened beings, like the Buddha and the arhats, do not cling to these aggregates, but unawakened beings cling to them. As such, the aggregates of the awakened beings are simply called “aggregates” (*khandha*), while those of the unawakened beings are called “aggregates of clinging” (that is, aggregates that are objects of clinging) (*upādāna-k,khandha*). In the case of the awakened beings, the experience of such aggregates only affect them “physically” or “bodily”—simply because they have a physical body—but not mentally. Their body is affected, but not their minds, which are not affected by the experiences of pain, pleasure or indifference. Unawakened beings are afflicted by both bodily pains and mental pains because of the aggregates of clinging.¹⁰

2 The aggregates of clinging

The aggregates of clinging (*upādāna-k,khandha*) are more fully called “the five groups of existence that form the objects of clinging” (Vism 14.214 f/477 f). **The Khandha Sutta** (S 22.48) defines the aggregates of clinging as follows:

And what, bhikshus, are the five aggregates of clinging?

Bhikshus, whatever kind of **form** there is, whether past, present, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near,¹¹ with mental cankers,¹² subject to clinging:¹³ This, bhikshus, is called the form aggregate of clinging.

⁷ See Gethin 1998:135 f.

⁸ 1987:70.

⁹ Here “awakened beings” or adepts (*asekha*) refer to the Buddha and the arhats who enlightened, living out their last lives. The “unawakened beings” are the “learners” (*sekha*), that is, those saints of the path other than the adepts, and the unenlightened beings.

¹⁰ See, for example, **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210) & **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/3:1-5).

¹¹ This “totality formula” classification of the Aggregates is explained in detail in **the Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **the Visuddhi,magga**. Briefly they mean: “internal” = physical sense-organs; “external” = physical sense-objects; “gross” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, fire, wind); “subtle” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “far” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable

Bhikshus, whatever kind of **feeling** there is, . . . with cankers, subject to clinging: This, bhikshus, is called the feeling aggregate of clinging.

Bhikshus, whatever kind of **perception** there is, . . . with cankers, subject to clinging: This, bhikshus, is called the perception aggregate of clinging.

Bhikshus, whatever kind of **formations** there are, . . . with cankers, subject to clinging: This, bhikshus, is called the formations aggregate of clinging.

Bhikshus, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, present, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, with cankers, subject to clinging: This, bhikshus, is called the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

These, bhikshus, are called the five aggregates of clinging. (S 22.48/3:47 f) = SD 17.1

3 The seven points

The *parivaṭṭa* in the sutta title refers to the “turning” of each of the five aggregates around each of the four noble truths.¹⁴ That is to say, the nature of each of the aggregate, its arising, its ceasing, and the path leading to its cessation, are to be fully understood. These are the tetrad or four phases (*catu,parivaṭṭa*) of full knowledge, forming the first portion of “the seven points” (*satta-t,thāna*). The last triad are found in **the Assāda Sutta 1** (S 22.26)¹⁵ and **the Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 13). The whole set of seven points are found in the **the Satta-t,thāna Sutta** (S 22.57),¹⁶ These “seven points” (*satta-t,thāna*) are necessary for the development of spiritual insight, that is, full comprehension (*pariññā*) of the following, namely:

- (1) the nature of the five aggregates (the body, feelings, perception, formations, consciousness);
- (2) their arising (*samudaya*) (due to conditions);
- (3) their ceasing (*nirodha*) (due to cessation of conditions);
- (4) the way to their ceasing (*magga*) (that is, the noble eightfold path);
- (5) the gratification (*assāda*) (that is, pleasure derived from them);
- (6) the dangers (*ādīnava*) (that is, suffering resulting from them); and
- (7) the escape from them (*nissaraṇa*) (that is, the putting away of the desire for the aggregates).

Both **the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56) and **the Satta-t,thāna Sutta** (S 22.57) present the aggregates in a synchronic (one life-time) manner and analyze the aggregates into their components, in a simpler way that later analyses, such as those found in the Visuddhi,magga and the Commentaries. They break down the aggregates as summarized here in this table:

variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995: 43-48. As regards the terms “internal” (*ajjhatta*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

¹² “Mental cankers,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “cankers”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints”, RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three cankers (omitting the canker of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsava*s is equivalent to arhatship. See BDict: *āsava*.

¹³ “That is tainted, that can be clung to,” *sāsavam upādānīyam*.

¹⁴ SA Porāṇa Ṭikā (S:B 1064 n80). See also S:B 1064 n81.

¹⁵ S 22.26/3:27 f.

¹⁶ S 22.57/3:61-65.

Table. The five aggregates according to the Suttas
(based on S 22.56-57)

Aggregate	Contents	Condition
form	the four primary elements and form derived from them	food
feeling	the 6 classes of feeling: feeling born of contact through eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind	contact
perception	the 6 classes of perception: perception of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental phenomena	contact
formations (volitional activities)	the 6 classes of volition: volition regarding forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental phenomena	contact
consciousness	the 6 classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness	name-and-form

(Following Bodhi, S:B 841)

4 “With cankers, subject to clinging”

According to the Abhidhamma, all physical forms (*rūpā*) are classified as “with cankers, subject to clinging” (*sāsava upādānīya*), and so too the resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) mental aggregates of the arhat (Dhs 1103, 1219). The only aggregates that are “without cankers, not subject to clinging” (*anāsava anupādānīya*) are the four mental aggregates occurring in the cognitive moments of the four supramundane paths and fruits (Dhs 1104, 1220). The reason for this is that *sāsava* and *upādānīya* do not mean “accompanied by cankers and by clinging,” but “capable of being taken as objects of the cankers and of clinging.”

In other words, even the arhat’s mundane aggregates can be taken as objects of the cankers and of clinging by *others* (DhsA 347).¹⁷ In his verses, the elder **Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya**,¹⁸ for example, declares:

469 Those people who have judged¹⁹ me by appearance and who follow me by voice,²⁰
Overcome by desire and passion, they know me not.

470 The foolish one, surrounded by mental hindrances, neither knows the inside
Nor sees the outside—he is indeed misled by voice. (Tha 469-472 ≠ A 2:71)

In the case of **Vakkali**, he was physically attracted to the Buddha’s external form, and became a monk just so that he could gaze upon the Buddha’s physical beauty.²¹

¹⁷ See S:B 1058 n65 & Bodhi, “Aggregates and Clinging Aggregates,” 1976. See also Boisvert, 1995:29 f.

¹⁸ For details, see “The Teacher or the Teaching?” in SD 3.14.6.

¹⁹ “Have judged,” *pāmiṃsu*, lit “(they) measured.”

²⁰ “Who follow me by voice,” *ye ca ghosena anvagū*, alt tr “who follow me by my voice.”

²¹ For Vakkali’s story, see DhA 25.11/4:118 f; cf **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124).

The Sāmyutta Commentary says that while the form aggregate is of the sense-sphere, the other four aggregates are of the other four spheres (sense sphere, form sphere, formless sphere, supramundane). Amongst the aggregates of clinging, stated in connection with the practice of insight, the form aggregate is of the sense sphere, while the others pertain to the three planes (sense sphere, form sphere, formless sphere) (SA 2:270).

5 Upādāna as fuel and fire

In his well-acclaimed work, *How Buddhism Began*, Richard Gombrich points out the relationship between the Buddhist conception of *upādāna* (clinging) and its early Indian roots in metaphors of fuel and fire:

The word *upādāna* has both a concrete and an abstract meaning. In the abstract, it means attachment, grasping; in this sense it is much used in Buddhist dogmatics. Concretely, it means that which fuels this process. The PED *sv*: “(lit that [material] substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive and going), fuel, supply, provision.” So when the context deals with fire it simply means fuel...

In my opinion, it is clear that the term *khandha* too was a part of the fire metaphor. (Gombrich 1996:67)²²

Gombrich goes on to discuss the historical problem related to **the Bhāra Sutta** (S 22.22/3:25 f), where the aggregates are said to be a burden (*bhārā pañca-k,khandhā*) to be put down. The metaphor is more historically correct and spiritually more urgent when *upādāna-k,khandha* is translated as “the aggregates that are fuelled” or “the aggregates that are on fire.” It is a burden for the early brahmins to daily collect fuel (wood, herbs, etc) to feed the sacred fire (Gombrich 1996:67). Moreover, the flaming burden of fuel that one carries around has to be immediately “put down” and “put out.”²³

This usage—*upādāna* as “fuel”—is found in the term, ***anupādā,nibbāna***, “the nirvana without clinging” or “fuel-free nirvana.” Here, *anupādā* is mostly used before nouns, like a substantive in a compound, while *an-upādāya* is preferred before finite verb forms.²⁴

(6) A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE 5 AGGREGATES²⁵

6.1 Form

“Form” (*rūpa*) [3, 7] refers to the four great elements, both internal (as the body) and external (as another’s body and as nature)—see eg **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62.8-12); also **(Upādāna) Pari-vaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56).²⁶ The Pali term *nāma* is rendered as “name,” which should not be taken literally. “*Nāma* is an assemblage of mental factors involved in cognition: feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra*, S 12.2)²⁷ [12]. These are called “name” because they contribute to the process of cognition by which objects are subsumed under the conceptual designations” (S:B 48). In other words, while *nāma* is centred on the mind (*citta*) and *rūpa* is centred on the four primary elements, notes Harvey, “there is no dualism of a mental ‘substance’ versus a physical ‘substance’: both *nāma* and *rūpa* each refer to clusters of changing, interacting processes.”²⁸ It should be noted in the Nikāyas that *nāma,rūpa* does not include *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which is actually its

²² Fire as a metaphor is also discussed by Gombrich 1987a:16-20.

²³ Similarly, in **(Khandha) Āditta S** (S 22.61/3:71) the aggregates are said to be on fire. Cf **Āditta,pariyāya S** (S 35.28/4:19 f) where the 6 sense-organs, and their respective sense-objects, sense-consciousnesses, sense-contacts, feelings arising from the contacts are all burning with the fire of greed, hate, delusion and suffering. See SD 1.3 & Hamilton 2000:81, 101.

²⁴ CPD; cf M 3:227,25 with 227,26. See **Paṭhama Kosala S** (A 10.29.17/5:65) = SD 16.15.

²⁵ For a more detailed analysis of each aggregate, see SD 17.

²⁶ S 22.56.7/3:59. On the 4 primary elements, see the sutta §7n.

²⁷ S 12.2.12/2:3.

²⁸ Harvey 1993:11 digital ed.

condition, and the two are mutually dependent, like two sheaves of reeds leaning against one another (Nala, kalapiya Sutta, S 12.67/2:114; also Mahā Nidāna Sutta, M 12.21-22/2:63).²⁹

6.2 Feeling

“Feeling” (*vedanā*), according to Boisvert (1995:53), is more than mere “‘bare awareness’ or ‘anoetic sentience’ [sensing without knowing]” [Jayatilleke 1963:436], since it has some specific content: pleasure, pain, neutral feeling; and that *vedanā* is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for the arising of craving (the following link in the dependent arising cycle).³⁰ The **Kiṭṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70) speaks of 2 kinds of feelings: those of the householder (that conduce to unwholesome states), and those of the renunciant (that conduce to wholesome states) (M 70.6-7/1:475).³¹

6.3 Perception

In certain contexts, *saññā* may be rendered as “recognition” (Boisvert 1995:77 f), which, however, connotes that it is always a form of correct knowledge (when one “recognizes” someone or something, it means one has no doubt about this). Peter Harvey notes that

Saññā certainly is a form of classificatory, labelling, interpreting activity, but it includes both correct labelling (‘recognition’) and incorrect labelling (misinterpretation). For this reason, I prefer the more neutral ‘cognition.’ The more usual ‘perception’ is certainly too broad, as it covers the combined activity of *saññā* and *viññāṇa*, and in any case hardly covers *saññā* of a mental object.
(Harvey 1996:94)

G Bateson, in his well known work, *Mind and Nature* (1979) points out that “Perception operates only on difference. All receipt of information is necessarily the receipt of new of *difference*.” (1979:31). He goes on to compare the cognitive process to a simple electric switch:

the switch, considered as a part of an electric circuit, *does not exist* when it is in the on position. From the point of view of the circuit, it is not different from the conducting wire which leads to it and the wire which leads away from it. It is merely “more conductor.” Conversely, but similarly, when the switch is off, it does not exist from the point of view of the circuit. It is nothing but a gap between two conductors which themselves exist only as conductors when the switch is on. In other words, the switch is *not* except at the moments of its change of setting, and the concept “switch” has thus a special relation to *time*. It is related to the notion “change” rather than to the notion “object.”
(Bateson 1979:120 f)

In other words, the switch is only what it does: it only exists at the time of switching. Otherwise it is no different from the rest of the circuit. “Hence,” concludes Waldron, “even to speak of perception is necessarily to speak of events—and this is to speak in terms of dependent origination.” (Waldron 2002:144).

6.4 Formations

“Formation” (*saṅkhāra*) literally means “constructing, construction” (S 22.79/3:87).³² Due to its polysemy, *saṅkhāra* is perhaps the most difficult early Buddhist term. Boisvert (1995:91-112) identifies 5 meanings of *saṅkhāra*: (1) as *saṅkhata*; (2) as a *paccaya*; (3) as *āyu, saṅkhāra*; (4) as part of *sa, saṅkhāra* and *asaṅkhāra*, and (5) as a *khandha*.

(1) *Saṅkhāra* as *saṅkhata* (S 3:87), ie conditioned phenomena, refers to all the universe; Nirvana, however, is *asaṅkhata* (unconditioned). A conditioned phenomenon produces other conditioned phenomena in conjunction with *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *rūpa*. In this narrower sense, it is identical to (5).

²⁹ See S:B 48.

³⁰ On necessary and sufficient conditions, see SD 5.11(5).

³¹ See Boisvert 1995:74-76 for the Sutta passage with Comy.

³² See also BDict: saṅkhāra.

(2) While (1) is the “passive” conditioned state, *saṅkhāra*, as a *paccaya* (condition) or *nidāna* (link) (as well as (5) *khandha*), is the active “producing” or “generating” conditioner (S 2:5; Vbh 144, 173).³³

(3) *Āyu,saṅkhāra* (D 2:99, 108; A 4:312; Kvu 2:559) is the same as *bhāva,saṅkhāra*, ie as “fuel” to rebirth or the *bhava* link in dependent arising (2).

(4) *Sa,saṅkhāra* (with *saṅkhāra*) and *asaṅkhāra* (without *saṅkhāra*) are used in connect with *parinibbāyī* (S 5:70; A 1:233): a *sa,saṅkhāra parinibbāyī* is one who attains Nirvana “with effort,” who eradicates the mental fetters through striving (Pug 17); an *asaṅkhāra parinibbāyī* is one who attains Nirvana “without effort,” such as Bāhiya Dārucīriya who understands the truth instantaneously (A 1:24; U 1:10; DhA 2:209 ff).

(5) *Saṅkhāra* as a *khandha* (aggregate) (Vbh 72, 89) is an activity restricted to the mental realm, and refers to both karma as cause (*cetanā*) and as effect (*phala*), as exemplified by the cooking simile: one prepares the ingredients and cooks them (active), but the cooking takes its own effect (passive).

One might add category (6) general usage of the term *saṅkhāra*, for example, as the three kinds of **actions or karma-formations**: bodily (*kāya,saṅkhāra*) (M 118.24/3:83), verbal (*vacī,saṅkhāra*) (M 118.25/3:84) and mental (*citta,saṅkhāra* or *mano,saṅkhāra*),³⁴ and the three **volitional formations** (*abhi-saṅkhāra*): meritorious formation (*puññābhisāṅkhāra*), demeritorious formation (*apuññābhisāṅkhāra*) and imperturbable formation (*āneñjābhisāṅkhāra*).³⁵ Meritorious formations occur in the sense-sphere and the form sphere; demeritorious formations occur only in the sense-sphere; and the imperturbable formations occur in the formless sphere.

These three volitional formations are actually identical with the *saṅkhāra* link of dependent arising. There is also the “volitional formations of striving” (*padhāna,saṅkhāra*), a designation for energy that accomplishes the fourfold function of right striving (*samma-p, padhāna*), applied to the “four roads to spiritual power” (*iddhi,pāda*): desire or will power, energy, mind, investigation (S 51.13/5:5:268 f).

6.5 Consciousness

Viññāna has been variously translated as “bare sensation” or “pure consciousness,” but Boisvert (1995) argues that far from being “bare sensations devoid of any content” (1995:117), it is “probably the faculty needed for the cognition of pure percept, of sensation and of conceptualisation as well” (118). Consciousness here is best understood in reference to the theory of *citta,vīthi* or “the mind-process,” “found fully developed in the commentaries, in skeletal form in the Paṭṭhāna, and even alluded to in seed form in the Suttas.” (Harvey 1996:95)

In this, what is known by “eye-*viññāna*” is less that what is known eg by following “mind-*viññāna*” performing the function of “determining.” The first is visual awareness which discerns the presence of a visual object, and also discerns its basic components, labelled by accompanying *saññā*. The second is discernment operating at a more abstract level, in unison with accompanying *saññā* labelling the aspects so made out. (Harvey 1996:95)

The key concept of the mind-process theory is the *bhav’āṅga*, which literally translates as “existence-factor” and is often rendered as “life-continuum” or “the subconscious.” It is “the resting state of consciousness which occurs uninterrupted in dreamless sleep, and which is momentarily reverted to in waking consciousness between each act of processing a sense-object.” (Harvey 1996:95). There is an allusion to the *bhavaṅga* in a passage in the **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama Sutta** (M 28):

...when the eye is intact³⁶ and external forms come into range and there is an appropriate engagement [of attention] (*tajjo samannāhāro hoti*),³⁷ then there is the occurrence of the appropriate class of consciousness. (M 28.27/1:190)

³³ See (Paṭicca,samuppāda) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.12) n in SD 5.10 (2004).

³⁴ M 1:301; S 12.2/2:3, 12.25.3/2:39 f, 41.6/4:293.

³⁵ D 3:217; S 12.51/2:82; Pm 2:206; Vbh 135.

³⁶ “Intact,” *aparibhinna*, lit “unhurt, unbroken,” ie undamaged and functioning.

The above passage describes how consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and its accompaniments arise when there is an intact sense-organ, an appropriate sense-object within range, and appropriate attention (*samannāhāra*). This is in fact a reference to *bhavaṅga* as “a mind ready-to-act (though it is replaced by the more active *cittas* which follow it in the ‘process of *cittas*’.” (Harvey 1996:95).

7 Sequence of the 5 Aggregates

At least one scholar, Boisvert (1995), has tried to explain the traditional sequence of the five aggregates. He sees this as mirroring the order of the links (*nidāna*) of dependent arising, as reflected in this diagram (based on his Table 12 in 1995:142):

Links of the <i>Paṭicca,samuppāda</i>	Corresponding Aggregate
<i>viññāṇa</i> (consciousness)	<i>viññāṇa</i>
<i>nāma,rūpa</i> (name-and-form)	the 5 aggregates
<i>saḷ'āyatana</i> (the sixfold sense-base)	<i>rūpa</i>
<i>phassa</i> (contact or sense-stimuli)	<i>vedanā</i>
<i>vedanā</i> (feeling)	<i>vedanā</i>
	← <i>saññā</i>
<i>taṇhā</i> (craving)	<i>saṅkhāra</i>
<i>upādāna</i> (clinging)	<i>saṅkhāra</i>
<i>bhava</i> (existence)	<i>saṅkhāra</i>

In his review of Boisvert’s work, Peter Harvey (1996) comments that

A key point here is his idea that *viññāṇa*, as the first *khandha*, completes a circle by going on to condition the first *khandha* by allowing the arising of sensory contact (*phassa*). In general, this is acceptable, though one could argue... that *bhava*, at least in part, includes the operation of *viññāṇa*. One can, in any case, explain the logic of the *khandha* ordering as follows:

<u>Conditioning sequence in perceptual process</u>	<u><i>khandha</i></u>
Dependent upon eye and visual form: arises eye- <i>viññāṇa</i> ;	<i>rūpa</i>
the meeting of the three is <i>phassa</i> ;	<i>vedanā</i>
from <i>phassa</i> arises <i>vedanā</i> ;	<i>saññā</i>
<i>saññā</i> then processes the visual object;	<i>saṅkhāra</i>
the <i>saṅkhāras</i> respond to it;	<i>viññāṇa</i>
mind- <i>viññāṇa</i> takes in the fully labelled and responded-to object	

In his review of Boisvert’s analysis, Harvey comments that while it is true in some commentarial passages that the *nāma,rūpa nidāna* are equivalent to all five aggregates [Boisvert 1995:129],

it is not true in the Suttas, where *rūpa* in it is equivalent to the *rūpakkhandha*, and *nāma* is ‘*vedanā, saññā, phassa, manasikāra*’ (S 2:3 f): more or less equivalent to *vedanā, saññā* and *saṅkhāra khandhas*...

Boisvert is right to see *saññā* as implied as operating between the *vedanā* and *taṇhā nidānas* [Boisvert 1995:136-142], though one can also see (unwholesome) *saññā* as equivalent to spiritual ignorance (*avijjā*), the first of the twelve *nidānas*. This can be seen from Sn 732,³⁸ which says “all

³⁷ “Engagement [of attention]” (*samannāhāra*) here is syn with *manasikāra*, “attention” (M 1:445; Vbh 321). See Harvey 1996:95.

³⁸ *Sabba,saṅkhāra.samathā saññānaṃ uparodhā.*

saṅkhāras are calmed from the stopping of *saññā*,” ie the second *nidāna* is transcended by the transcending of the first. (Harvey 1996: 96)

8 Connected suttas

The central teaching of this Sutta is a stock meditation formula on the five aggregates found in the two **Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22.14/3:301 f = M 10.38/1:61) and in several places in **the Sāmyutta Nikāya** (S 12.21, 12.23, 22.78, 22.89, 22.101). Here, and in **the Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57/3:61-65) the aggregates are examined from the standpoint of synchronic (“a point in time” or proximal) conditionality (ie within a single life-time). The arising (*samudaya*) and the passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of the aggregates are explained from the perspective of diachronic (“across time” or distal) conditionality (ie over many lives) in **the Samādhi Sutta** (S 22.5/3:13-15).³⁹

The five aggregates—although form (*rūpa*) is not directly mentioned—are discussed in some detail in **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43/1:292-298) and **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44/1:299-305). This sutta should also be studied with **the Khandha Sāmyutta** (S 22/3:1-278). The title of other suttas related to the five aggregates can be found in the footnotes here.

For a detailed study of the individual aggregates, see SD 17.

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³⁹ See S:B 743 n58, 1065 n81 & also in the Sutta Discovery 2003 series. Cf **Parivimānsana S** (S 12.51/2:80-84), where dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) is presented synchronically (within a single lifetime).

The Discourse on the Phases (of Clinging)

(S 22.56/3:58-61)

[3:58]

1 At Sāvattṭhī...

2 There (the Blessed One) said:

The 5 aggregates of clinging

3 Bhikshus, there are these **five aggregates of clinging**. What are the five?

They are as follows:

the form aggregate of clinging; [59]

the feeling aggregate of clinging;

the perception aggregate of clinging;

the mental formation aggregate of clinging;

the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

4 Bhikshus, as long as I did not directly know these five aggregates of clinging in (their) four phases⁴⁰ as they really are, I did not claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening in this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers⁴¹ and people.

5 But, bhikshus, when I have directly known the five aggregates of clinging in (their) four phases as they really are, I claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening in this world with its gods, ...and people.

6 What are the **four phases**?

(1) I directly knew form,

its arising, its ending, the way leading to its ending.

(2) I directly knew feeling,

its arising, its ending, the way leading to its ending.

(3) I directly knew perception,

its arising, its ending, the way leading to its ending.

(4) I directly knew volitional formations,

their arising, their ending, the way leading to their ending.

(5) I directly knew consciousness,

its arising, its ending, the way leading to its ending.

(1) Form⁴²

7 And what, bhikshus, is **form**?

The four great elements⁴³ and forms derived⁴⁴ from the four great elements—this, bhikshus, is called “form.”

⁴⁰ That is, each of the aggregate in terms of the four noble truths [6].

⁴¹ *deva*, here in the sense of “devas by convention” (*sammatti,deva*), i.e. kings. The other 2 types of *deva* are “gods by rebirth” (*upapatti,deva*) and “gods by purification” (*visuddhi,deva*), i.e. the Buddhas, Pratyeka Buddhas and Arhats. (CNid 307 KhA 123).

⁴² Each of the sections on the 5 aggregates follow the framework of the threefold essential teaching (*saddhamma*) (VA 225; AA 5:33), viz, theory (*pariyatti,dhamma*) [7], practice (*paṭipatti,dhamma*) [8] and realization (*paṭi-vedha,dhamma*) of the True Teaching [9].

⁴³ “The four great elements,” (*cattāro mahā,bhūtā*). The **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 11.8-11, with §12 on “space”) (SD 3.11) and **Mahā Hatthi,pādōpama S** (M 28.6) (SD 6.16) define them as follows: (1) **Earth** or the “solid element” (*paṭhavī,dhātu*), ie solidity or “extension.” Whatever in one’s own body there is of karmically acquired hardness or firmness, such as head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, mesentery, excrement and so on—this is called one’s own solid element. (2) **Water** or the “fluid element” (*āpo,dhātu*), ie fluidity or cohesiveness. Whatever in one’s own body there is of karmically acquired liquidity or fluidity, such as bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine, and so on—this is called one’s own fluid element. (3) **Fire** or the

With the arising of food,⁴⁵ there is the arising of form.

With the cessation of food, there is the cessation of form.

This noble eightfold path⁴⁶ is truly the way to the ending of form, 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.

- 8 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,
 having directly known form,
 having directly known the arising of form,
 having directly known the ending of form,
 having directly known the way to the ending of form,

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards form, for its fading away, for its cessation—they are well practised.⁴⁷

“heating element” (*tejo,dhātu*), ie heat, incl decay. Whatever in one’s own body there is of karmically acquired heat or warmth, such as that whereby one is heated, consumed, scorched, whereby that which has been eaten, drunk, chewed, or tasted, is fully digested, and so on—this is called one’s own heating element. (4) **Wind** (or air) or the “vibrating (air) element” (*vāyo,dhātu*), ie motion and pressure. Whatever in one’s own body there is of karmically acquired wind or air, such as the upward-going and downward-going winds, the winds of stomach and intestines, the wind permeating all the limbs, the in-breath and out-breath, and so on—this is called one’s own vibrating element. In each case, it may be internal (one’s own) or external, and in either case, they are both merely the (earth, water, fire, or wind) element. And one should understand each according to reality and right wisdom, “This does not belong to me; this I am not; this is not my self.” (M 28.6-22/1:185-189). See Introd (6.1).

⁴⁴ Although the “derived (or derivative) forms” (*upādāya rūpā*) are mentioned here, their analysis first appears in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Dhs 596, 980; Tikap 3, qu at Vism 535; Tikap 89, 109; Vism 444), according to which there are **24 “derived forms,”** namely: the five sense faculties (*pasāda,rūpa*): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, body; the four sense objects: form, sound, smell, taste (touch being identical with three of the great elements, viz earth, fire and air); femininity (*itth’indriya*); masculinity (*puris’indriya*); physical base of the mind (*hadaya,-vatthu*); bodily intimation (*kāya,viññatti*), verbal intimation (*vacī,viññatti*); physical life (*rūpa,jīvitā*); the space element (*ākāsa,dhātu*), physical agility (*rupassa lahutā*), physical elasticity (*rūpassa mudutā*), physical adaptability (*rūpassa kammaññatā*), physical growth (*rūpassa upacaya*); physical continuity (*rūpassa santati*); and food (*āhāra*). See BDict: Khandha & also *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhds:NB 6.2-5). For a useful discussion, see Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); also Karunadasa 1967:38 f & Boisvert 1995:37-42.

⁴⁵ There are **4 kinds of food or nutriment** (*āhāra*): solid food, contact (sense-stimuli), volition, consciousness (D 3:228; M 1:48, 1:261; S 2:13, 48, 98-105; Vbh 401). Comys: They are so called because they nourish (*aharanti*) their own effects. Although there are other conditions for beings, these four alone are called “food” because they serve as *special conditions* for the personal life-continuity (*ajjhatika,santatiyā visesa,paccayattā*) (MA 1:209; SA 2:26; DhsA 153). For edible food (*kabalinkāra āhāra*) is a special condition for the physical body of those beings who subsist on edible food. In the mental body, contact is the special condition for feeling, mental volition for consciousness, and consciousness for name-and-form. **The products of food** (what it nourishes): (1) Edible food put into the mouth produces the groups of form with nutritive essence as the eighth (*oja’atthamaka,rūpāni*, an Abhidhamma term for the simplest cluster of material states); (2) contact as food (*phass’āhāra*) produces the three kinds of feeling [pleasurable, painful, neutral]; (3) mental volition as food (*mano,sañcetanāhāra*) produces the three kinds of existence [sense-world, form-world, formless world]; and (4) consciousness as food (*viññāṇ’āhāra*) produces name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*) at rebirth (MA 1:207 ff; SA 2:22-27; KhA 75 ff). See also Vism 11.1-3/341. In **Āhāra S** (S 46.61/5:102-107) & **Abhisāṇḍa Ss** (S 55.31-33/5:391-392) *āhāra* is used in a broader sense of “special condition” without reference to the four kinds of food. See also S:B 731 n19 (*These four kinds of nutriments have craving as their source.*)

⁴⁶ For canonical defs of the limbs of the noble eightfold path, see eg **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.21/ 2:312).

Those who are well practised gain a firm footing in this Dharma-Vinaya [Teaching and Discipline].⁴⁸

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

Those who are well liberated are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round⁴⁹ to describe them.

(2) Feeling

10 And what, bhikshus, is **feeling**?

There are these six classes [60] of feeling.⁵⁰

Feeling born of eye-contact	(visual feeling).
Feeling born of ear-contact	(aural feeling).
Feeling born of nose-contact	(olfactive feeling).
Feeling born of tongue-contact	(gustative feeling).
Feeling born of body-contact	(tactile feeling).
Feeling born of mind-contact	(mental feeling).

This, bhikshus, is called “feeling.”

With the arising of contact,⁵¹ there is the arising of feeling.

With the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of feeling.

This noble eightfold path is truly the way to the ending of feeling, that is to say:

(1) right view, ... (8) right concentration.

11 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,
 having directly known feeling,
 having directly known the arising of feeling,
 having directly known the ending of feeling,
 having directly known the way to the ending of feeling,

⁴⁷ *Ye hi keci bhikkhave samaṇā vā brahmaṇā vā evaṃ rūpaṃ abhiññāya evaṃ rūpa, samudayam abhiññāya evaṃ rūpa. nirodham abhiññāya evaṃ rūpa, nirodha, gāminim paṭipadam abhiññāya rūpassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipannā te supaṭipannā.*

⁴⁸ *Ye supaṭipannā te imasmim dhamma, vinaye gādhanti.* This sentence refers the “learners” or “trainees” (*sekha*) who have directly known the four noble truths and are working towards Nirvana, the ultimate cessation of the aggregates. The Arhats are “non-learners” or “adepts” (*asekha*) since they have completed their training.

⁴⁹ This para refers to the Adepts (*asekha*), the Arhats. Comy: They are well liberated (*svivimutta*) by the liberation of the fruit of Arhathood; consummate (*kevalina*), complete, having done all their duties. There is no round for describing them (*vaṭṭam tesam n’atthi paññāpanāya*) [also at S 4:391]: there is no remaining round (of rebirths) for the description of them. Or else, “round” means “basis” (*karaṇa*); so there is no basis for description. On *kevalina*, see S:B 446 n446. On the Arhat as beyond description, see **Aññatra Bhikkhu S 1** (S 22.35/3:35 f) & S:B 1053 n47. See also D 2:63 f.

⁵⁰ “**Feelings**” (*vedanā*) are complex states of mind, not simply “pure” feelings or emotions. They arise through contact with external sense-objects, viz: the seen, the heard, the sensed (smelling, tasting, touching), and the known (*diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*, D 3:134=Nc276=It 121; D 3:232; Sn 1080, 1122). According to the Abhidhamma, all feelings may, according to their nature, be classified into 5 kinds: bodily pleasant feeling (*sukha = kāyikā sukhā vedanā*), bodily painful feeling (*dukkha = kāyikā dukkhā vedanā*); mentally pleasant feeling (*somanassa = cetasikā sukhā vedanā*); indifferent feeling (*upekkhā = adukkham-asukhā vedanā*). See Introd (6.2).

⁵¹ “**Contact**,” *phassa*, that is, the meeting of the sense-object and consciousness by way of a sense-faculty. When this occurs, the other mental factors arise, especially feeling, perception and volition. All experienceable phenomena occur only at the sense-doors (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind): this is the “all” (*sabba*) (**Sabba S**, S 4.23/4:15). **Bodhi**: “It is significant that while contact is the proximate condition for feeling, perception, and volitional formations [*saṅkhāra*], name-and-form in its entirety is the proximate condition for consciousness. This ties up with the idea, as stated in [**Hāliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9 f)], that the other four aggregates are the ‘home’ of consciousness. See too in this connection [**Nagara S**, S 12.65/2:104-106] and [**Naḷa, kalāpiya S**, S 12.67/2:112-115].” (S:B 1065 n86)

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

12 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known feeling, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending*, practise for the sake of revulsion towards feeling, 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.

(3) Perception

13 And what, bhikshus, is **perception**?

There are these six classes of perception:⁵²

- the perception of forms.
- the perception of sounds.
- the perception of smells.
- the perception of tastes.
- the perception of touches.
- the perception of mind-objects.

This, bhikshus, is called “perception.”

With the arising of contact, there is the arising of perception.

With the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of perception.

This noble eightfold path is truly the way to the ending of perception, that is to say:

- (1) right view, ... (8) right concentration.

14 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,

- having directly known perception,
- having directly known the arising of perception,
- having directly known the ending of perception,
- having directly known the way to the ending of perception,

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards perception, 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.

15 And, bhikshus those ascetics or brahmins, *having directly known perception, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending*, practise for the sake of revulsion towards perception, 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.

(4) Volitional formations

16 And what, bhikshus, are **volitional formations**?

There are these six classes of volition:⁵³

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Volition ⁵⁴ regarding forms | (visual volition). |
| Volition regarding sounds | (aural volition). |
| Volition regarding smells | (olfactive volition). |
| Volition regarding tastes | (gustative volition). |
| Volition regarding touches | (tactile volition). |
| Volition regarding mind-objects | (mental volition). |

⁵² See n on “consciousness” [19] below & also Introd (6.3).

⁵³ “**Classes of volition**,” *cetanā, kāya*. “The fact that there is a difference between the name of the aggregate (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*) and the term of definition (*sañcetanā*) suggests that this aggregate has a wider compass than the others. In the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the commentaries, the *saṅkhāra-k, khandha* is treated as an ‘umbrella category’ for classifying all mental factors other than feeling and perception. Volition is mentioned only as the most important factor in this aggregate, not as its exclusive constituent.” (S:B 1065 n84)

⁵⁴ “Volition,” *sañcetanā*.

This, bhikshus, is called “volitional formations.”

With the arising of contact, there is the arising of volitional formations.

With the cessation of contact, there is the cessation of volitional formations.

This noble eightfold path is truly the way to the ending of volitional formations, that is to say:

(1) right view, ... (8) right concentration.

17 Bhikshus, those ascetics or brahmins,
 having directly known volitional formations,
 having directly known the arising of volitional formations,
 having directly known the ending of volitional formations,
 having directly known the way to the ending of volitional formations,

practise it for the sake of revulsion towards volitional formations, for their fading away, for their cessation —they are well practised.

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

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

Those who are well liberated are the consummate ones, for whom there is no round to describe them.

(5) Consciousness

19 And what, bhikshus, is **consciousness**?

There are these six classes of consciousness:⁵⁵

Eye-consciousness	(visual awareness,	consciousness of seeing).
Ear-consciousness	(aural awareness,	consciousness of hearing).
Nose-consciousness	(olfactory awareness,	consciousness of smelling).
⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷

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 is truly 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,

⁵⁵ “**Classes of consciousness**,” *viññāṇa, kāya*. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) here is the general awareness that a particular sense-organ has a sense-object, and an awareness of parts of the object. **Perception** (*saññā*) is more outward-oriented, and gives an interpretation of *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. In simple terms, it can be said that *viññāṇa* “splits” (*vi-*) any sense-object that impinges on the sense-doors, deciding whether it is a visual object, a sound, a smell, a taste or a touch. See Introd (6.5).

⁵⁶ Here “existential consciousness,” ie, the consciousness of this life is meant: see SD 17.8a(6.1).

⁵⁷ “It is significant that while contact is the proximate condition for feeling, perception, and volitional formations [*saṅkhāra*], name-and-form in its entirety is the proximate condition for consciousness. This ties up with the idea, as stated in [**Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9 f)], that the other four aggregates are the ‘home’ of consciousness. See too in this connection [**Nagara S**, S 12.65/2:104-106] and [**Naḷa, kalāpiya S**, S 12.67/2:112-115].” (S:B 1065 n86)

(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.

— evaṃ —

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