


AN  
Inward  
Wisdom  
BOOK

UNRAVELLING  
*the* MYSTERIES *of*  
**MIND**  
**& BODY**  
*through*  
**ABHIDHAMMA**

Sayalay Susīlā

Foreword by Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw Bhaddanta Āciṇṇa



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**APPAMADA VIHARI**  
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Sayalay Susilā's International Meditation Center  
in Penang, Malaysia.



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THROUGH ABHIDHAMMA  
Sayalay Susilā

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## P R E F A C E

This book was initially derived from a series of talks on ABHIDHAMMA which were presented on various trips around Canada and the U.S. in 2002. I was told how helpful these talks were, which gave me the incentive to first transcribe them and then put them together as a book. Over the past seven years I have felt the need to add additional materials and details resulting in this second edition. At first glance the ABHIDHAMMA may appear so complicated as to be impenetrable and may therefore seem dull and irrelevant. That it is largely ignored, then, comes as no surprise. My objective has been to make ABHIDHAMMA accessible by employing direct and concrete language, simple analogies, and clear anecdotes primarily based on the experiences of meditators.

The goal has been to draw out the essence of ABHIDHAMMA from its vast and complex matrix and, by doing so, to relate it to daily life in a way most will find meaningful, including concentration and insight meditation instruction to tie together practice and theory. In this way, analytical knowledge can be understood, experienced, and realized in meditation.



My hope is that this book will reach out to the many who are perplexed and searching for the path. By providing clarity, I hope practitioners will come to a knowledge and vision of ABHIDHAMMA as a path revealed by the Buddha and that its practice and realization will lead to happiness, both mundane and supramundane.

I attribute the practical approach to ABHIDHAMMA described in this book to my teacher the Venerable U Āciṇṇa, known more widely as Pa-Auk Sayadaw. It comes from his many years of experience teaching in Myanmar's Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. During my many years of association with him, he has taught and continues to teach me ABHIDHAMMA and meditation, patiently imparting his knowledge to me. May this book serve in some small measure as compensation for the wonderful gift he imparted to me.

I am grateful and pay homage to the Buddha to have been able to quote His words extensively from the PĀḶI CANON supporting and illustrating the ABHIDHAMMA with his teachings, stories and similies.

Acknowledgement is gratefully made to the many books I made use of (**see bibliography**), particularly Bhikkhu Bodhi's A COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL OF ABHIDHAMMA and the profound works of Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw.

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## PREFACE

and to Fran Oropeza, Tan Ai Poh, and others whose names are not mentioned but who have contributed in one way or another.

Despite my ongoing effort to correct and edit out inaccuracies and misrepresentations that inevitably arise in a work of this scope, no doubt some still remain or were reintroduced as I have kept adding content. For this I take full responsibility. May the merits accrued from this project benefit my teachers, parents, relatives, friends, supporters, readers, and all who have contributed to this book.

*May all beings be well and happy.*

*May all beings find the path to the end of suffering.*

*May they share in the merit of this offering.*

*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

Sayalay Susilā

2011, USA



ဖားအောက်တောရဆရာတော် ဘဒ္ဒန္တအာဇိဏ္ဍ

Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw Bhaddanta Āciṇṇa

# FOREWORD

*“Bhikkhus (Monks), I say that the destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see. For one who knows what, for one who sees what, does the destruction of the taints come about? The destruction of the taints comes about —*

1. For one who knows and sees:  
‘This is the Noble Truth of Suffering’;
2. For one who knows and sees:  
‘This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering’;
3. For one who knows and sees:  
‘This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering’;
4. For one who knows and sees:  
‘This is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering’.

*“It is for one who knows thus, for one who sees thus, that the destruction of the taints comes about.*

*“Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the Noble Truth of Suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.’”*

This is from the ĀSAVAKKHAYA SUTTA (THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TAINTS) of the SACCASAMĪYUTTA. In this sutta the Buddha taught that without having realized the Four Noble Truths, the destruction of the taints is impossible; but having realized the Four Noble Truths, the destruction of the taints is possible.

If a meditator wants to realize the destruction of the taints or to become a noble one (*ariya*), he must first realize the Four Noble Truths. Among these four, the Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkhasacca*) and the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*samudayasacca*) are the objects of insight knowledge (*vipassanā*).

First of all, a meditator should try to realize the Noble Truth of Suffering. What is the Noble Truth of Suffering? In the DHAMMACAKKAPAVATTANA SUTTA (THE SETTING IN MOTION OF THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA), the Buddha explains in brief that the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. In the MAHĀSATIPAṬṬHĀNA SUTTA (GREAT DISCOURSE ON THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS), he explains:

**“And what, *bhikkhus*, in brief, are the five aggregates of clinging? They are as follows:**

- 1. the materiality aggregate of clinging;**
- 2. the feeling aggregate of clinging;**
- 3. the perception aggregate of clinging;**
- 4. the mental formations aggregate of clinging;**
- 5. the consciousness aggregate of clinging.”**

In this book, the author compiles information from the Pāli texts to help the readers understand these five aggregates, which are equivalent to consciousness, mental factors, and matter, and thus lay a foundation for a basic understanding of ABHIDHAMMA.

The ABHIDHAMMA's function, on the other hand, is to provide a unified and detailed picture, or "map," of the five aggregates from the perspective of ultimate mentality and ultimate materiality. Without such a map to guide one's progress, one may easily fall prey to the numerous pitfalls of wrong view and never arrive at a correct understanding of the First Noble Truth.

Before one can realize Nirvana, the Third Noble Truth, one needs to know and see not only the First Noble Truth, but also the Second Noble Truth — The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. In the TITTHĀYATANA SUTTA (THE DISCOURSE ON SECTARIAN TENETS) of the AṄGUTTARA NIKĀYA, the Buddha explains the Second Noble Truth as follows:

**"And what, *bhikkhus*, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering?**

- with ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be];
- with volitional formations as condition, consciousness;
- with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality;
- with mentality-materiality as condition, the six sense-bases;
- with the six sense-bases as condition, contact;
- with contact as condition, feeling;
- with feeling as condition, craving;
- with craving as condition, clinging;
- with clinging as condition, becoming;
- with becoming as condition, birth;
- with birth as condition, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, grief, and despair come to be.

**This is the origin of the whole mass of suffering. This, *bhikkhus*, is called the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering."**

When one's insight knowledge (*vipassanā*) matures through the Fourth Noble Truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, one knows and sees the unconditioned element (*asañkhata-dhātu*), Nirvana. Thus, one realizes the Third Noble Truth. There are four levels of Path knowledge, which destroy the taints, or defilements, stage by stage. At each stage, the meditator's understanding of the Four Noble Truths grows clearer and clearer, gradually dispelling the clouds of ignorance that have shrouded the mind in darkness for so many lifetimes.

The author presents the Four Noble Truths from the ABHIDHAMMA's perspective — the most profound way to explain the Dharma — with practical examples from various angles, in great clarity that can be easily understood by the average person. It also enables one to make sense of the Buddha's teachings from another perspective. It is empowering and enlightening as it relates, links, and provides the rationale to one's life experiences, meditation practice experiences, and the intellectual understanding of the Dharma, regardless of what tradition and creed one is from.

I highly recommend this book to those who wish to gain a comprehensive understanding of ABHIDHAMMA and its benefits, not only in the practice of meditation, in the direction of one's life, but also in one's daily activities. The readers will find this book transforming since the author has clearly explained which types of activities are wholesome and which types are unwholesome. Furthermore, she gives the rationale for and the consequences of committing them.

## FOREWORD

For a Buddhist to understand which activities are wholesome (*kusala*) and which activities are unwholesome (*akusala*) is very important. Only endowed with this understanding will one be able to accumulate wholesome dharmas for one's own benefit as well as others, and avoid accumulating unwholesome ones.

Among the wholesome dharmas described in this book, the threefold training of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) is most vital. Without this threefold training, there is no Path. And without the Path, there can be no Path Knowledge. Without Path Knowledge, there can be no Cessation of Suffering, so one cannot possibly liberate oneself from the cycle of saṃsāric existence. Therefore this threefold training, in fact, is the one most essential Dharma for the attainment of Nirvana.

May all living beings find the opportunity to undertake this threefold training, and may they experience the timeless peace and happiness of Nirvana.

Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw  
Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, Myanmar





# UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES OF MIND & BODY THROUGH ABHIDHAMMA

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*  
Homage to Him, the Exalted, the Worthy, the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One

## INTRODUCTION

*Mind leads the world.*

Is it really true? Only when we understand how the mind works will we truly know. Mind is something so close to us, and yet so far away. Mind is the culprit behind all our unwholesome speech and actions, and it is also the director of our good behavior that soothes everyone's heart.

The study of ABHIDHAMMA helps us to gain an understanding of how the mind works, which is essential for us to lead a happy and blameless life. In ABHIDHAMMA, the ultimate realities of mind and matter, which make up this so-called being, are seen to be an impersonal stream of consciousness-moments and infinitesimal particles that continuously arise and pass away, dependent on causes and conditions. Thus, the study of ABHIDHAMMA helps to shed the painful illusion of an "I," or permanent self. Most of the problems in life spring from the ignorance and craving of this "I," and from the self-centredness that is its offspring. When we understand that there is no "I" in the ultimate sense, we will be able to let go of our intense clinging to it. Seeing truly sets

one free. Life's problems suddenly disappear. This can be accomplished through a thorough study of ABHIDHAMMA and practical meditation experience.

The ABHIDHAMMA PIṬAKA is one of the three baskets (TIPĪTAKA) that composes the sum total of the Buddha's teachings. ABHIDHAMMA is a combination of two words: *Abhi* and *Dhamma*. *Abhi* means higher, special, or sublime. *Dhamma* means universal truth or teaching. Hence, ABHIDHAMMA is the higher teaching of the Buddha, grounded in truth and experiential reality. It is not metaphysical theory, as some portray it, but rather a systematic explanation and guide of how it is possible for earnest meditators to directly know and see, finally culminating in enlightenment. All physical and mental phenomena are fully classified and explained in the system of ABHIDHAMMA. That is why the Theravāda tradition regards the ABHIDHAMMA as the most perfect exposition on the true nature of existence, realized by the penetrative wisdom of a Fully-Enlightened One.

According to ABHIDHAMMA philosophy, there are two types of truth:

### 1 Conventional Truth (*sammuti sacca*)

Conventional truth refers to ordinary concepts, such as "tree," "house," "table," "man," "woman," "you," "me," "person," "body," "being," etc. Such concepts are closely linked to our language, culture, and conditioning. We think that these concepts are something with an objective reality, that they actually exist. Yes, they seem to exist, but if we examine these concepts closely, we find that they in no way exist as

irreducible realities — they can still be broken down into smaller and smaller components. For example, if we discern the four elements (or characteristics of matter) in the body, the “body” breaks down into innumerable, infinitesimal particles. If we continue to analyze these particles, we find that each particle contains eight inseparable elements: earth (solidity), water (cohesion), fire (temperature), wind (movement), color, smell, taste, and nutritive essence. These elements are the final, irreducible components of existence. Thus, by penetrating conventional truth with wisdom, we eventually realize ultimate truth.

## 2 Ultimate Truth (*paramattha sacca*)

Ultimate truth, according to ABHIDHAMMA, means something that cannot be further broken down or subdivided into smaller parts. It is a final and irreducible component of existence, which exists by reason of its own intrinsic nature (*sabhāva*). For example, the earth-element in our bodies, as well as in other animate things, exists with its intrinsic nature of hardness, whereas the fire-element exists with its intrinsic nature of heat. While body is conventional truth, the elements that make up the body are the final, irreducible components of existence, and no amount of analysis can break them down any further.

Of these two types of truth, ABHIDHAMMA deals primarily with ultimate truth.

This book is divided into three parts.

**Part One** describes Ultimate Truths. In ABHIDHAMMA, ultimate truth is fourfold:

- |                          |   |                             |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. <b>Consciousness</b>  | } | <i>Conditioned Dharma</i>   |
| 2. <b>Mental Factors</b> |   |                             |
| 3. <b>Matter</b>         |   |                             |
| 4. <b>Nirvana</b>        | } | <i>Unconditioned Dharma</i> |

The first three of these ultimate truths comprise the totality of conditioned existence. Together, consciousness and mental factors are what we conventionally call the “mind,” and matter is what we conventionally call the “body.” The successive coming together of mind and matter is what we conventionally call “I,” a human being, man, woman, animal, or whatever the case may be. The concept “I” is conventional truth; whereas consciousness, mental factors and matter are ultimate truths. These three ultimate truths are conditioned dharmas, produced by causes and conditions, subject to change, dissolution and fading away. They are subtle and profound dharmas that cannot be seen with the ordinary eye. They can, however, be discerned by a mind well trained in concentration and wisdom. Nirvana, the fourth ultimate truth, is unconditioned. That is to say, it is not produced by any cause or condition. Therefore, it does not change. Nirvana can be experienced here and now. The path is one of undergoing gradual training in morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Perhaps an analogy might be helpful:

For example if we go to see a movie. As we watch the characters projected on the movie screen, we seem to see these characters speaking and moving about and may even identify with them to such an extent that we completely forget we are only watching imaginary characters on a screen. This is like the ordinary person, who delusively identifies with what she sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks in her life-drama to such an extent that she completely forgets that what is seen and heard has no more reality than the fleeting images on a movie screen.

As our mind develops through the practice of meditation, we become clear-sighted. We begin to realize the image on the movie screen in fact consists of thousands, perhaps millions, of individual pixels, each of which is a single color. This can be compared to a more advanced stage in our meditation practice, when we can actually see that our body (matter), as well as the bodies of other beings and inanimate matter, is composed of millions of particles, each of which contains eight inseparable elements.

Now, investigating the ultimate reality of our minds (consciousness and mental factors) is like the person who is watching the movie becoming aware of himself.

Turning inwardly into our mind, we begin to see that what we call consciousness is just the process of cognizing the objects (watching the movie). Mind is nothing more than a stream of consciousness-moments together with their associated mental factors, arising one after the other in an unbroken continuity. Within a snap of the fingers, billions, perhaps trillions, of consciousness-moments arise and pass away. When we investigate these consciousness-moments and the function of their various associated mental factors, we come to the realization that there is no one, permanent, unchanging self to call "I," only mere phenomena rolling on.

Gradually, as our wisdom reaches maturity, we eventually experience the fourth ultimate reality — Nirvana, unconditioned dharma — which transcends mind and matter.

**Part Two** describes Rebirth and Dependent Origination. Most of us understand the basic law of karma, or the law of cause and effect. What we generally do not understand is how karma acts as a link at the time of our death. In this section of the book, the near-death cognitive process is detailed, showing that at the moment of death, consciousness seizes a sign brought forth by a ripening karma, giving rise to the rebirth-linking consciousness in the next life. Every birth is linked by the karma that ripened at death, without a transmigrating soul crossing over from life to life. This process of death and rebirth is impersonal, merely the arising of suffering. How does this suffering arise, and how is it to cease?

The Buddha revealed the problem of suffering and its solution in a profound teaching called Dependent Origination. It was on account of not seeing Dependent Origination that, before his Enlightenment, he had gone on suffering for an inconceivably long time, bound to the wheel of death and rebirth — as we have also done. The two root causes of rebirth are ignorance and craving, which give rise to continuous suffering. With the cessation of these causes and conditions, effects cease, leading to the cessation of suffering which is Nirvana. Dependent Origination reveals the conditional arising of an “ego” or “individual” that, conventionally speaking, cycles through the beginningless rounds of rebirth, undergoing the relentless turning of the wheel of existence and death.

The profound teaching of Dependent Origination consists of 12 interrelated factors. These factors are links in a causal chain. The chain encompasses all three periods of time: past, present, and future. The arising of each factor is entirely dependent on the preceding factor as its support or condition; it in turn becomes the condition or support for the subsequent factor. The factors are merely mind and matter governed by causality. The final cessation of all suffering is brought about by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddha's threefold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom. This book is a guide along that path.

**Part Three** describes the actual Practice of Concentration and Insight that brings about the realization of the truths revealed by the ABHIDHAMMA. There are many ways to develop concentration, the most popular of which is mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), since it is one of the easiest serenity meditation subjects to learn and can be used to develop absorption (*jhāna*). The practice of mindfulness of breathing is systematically detailed in Chapter 10, and with it the antidotes to the five hindrances that obstruct the development of serenity and insight — sensual desire, ill-will, sleepiness, restlessness, and doubt. After successfully reaching the first level of absorption, one can directly proceed to the development of insight by discerning one-by-one the mental factors associated with the first absorption.

In order to realize that the body ultimately consists of four elements, two related meditations are introduced: the first is a meditation using the body's 32 parts as taught in the ancient discourses, and the second directly discerns the four elements in the



body as taught at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. Finally, a moment-to-moment insight practice is revealed that emphasizes mindfulness and wisdom to release one from clinging and suffering. The practice begins as sense-objects impinge on sense-bases and is useful both in formal meditation and in daily life.

Unravelling the mysteries of the human mind may seem like an overwhelming task. It is exactly for this reason that ABHIDHAMMA is studied as a useful, systematic path that produces immediate results. Combining philosophy and practice unravels the mystery and, with patience and effort, brings one to full comprehension.

Though this book may be approached lightly, it is mainly intended as a serious practice manual, requiring readers to be slow, exacting, and careful not to jump to unfounded conclusions. Its purpose is to present the subject in direct, simple, and straightforward language without assuming previous knowledge of Buddhism, enabling even beginners to understand deeply. The subjects are interrelated and in sequence. Evaluating, presuming, and concluding without actually reading and practicing are pitfalls. Without practice, the topic of ABHIDHAMMA seems ponderous and metaphysical, but with simple and consistent practice many of these intellectual pitfalls can be avoided. The ease with which one comprehends ABHIDHAMMA will of course vary from person to person, depending on the level of one's existing understanding of Buddhism. The mind, like a parachute, only works when it is open. It is up to each person to approach what the Buddha taught as a practice, not as a theory. Read, question, and apply the antidotes consistently, and you will accrue the utmost benefit from this book.

## INTRODUCTION

**“Those who understand the meaning and the Dharma and who practice in accordance with the Dharma are few, while those who fail to do so are many. Those who are stirred by things that are truly stirring are few, while those who are not so stirred are many. Those who properly strive are few, while those who do not properly strive are many.”** (AN I:19)

I wish you to be one of the few.

Sayalay Susilā

2011, USA

## AN EXPLANATION OF KEY TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

In order to facilitate the reading of this book and to reduce the need for repetitive footnotes, a short glossary of key terms is presented here.

**Arahant (*arahatta*):** literally “worthy one”; one who has eradicated all mental defilements and is fully liberated through final knowledge.

**Bhavaṅga:** “subconscious life-stream,” “life continuum,” or “factor of existence”; the indispensable condition for existence. *Bhavaṅga* is a resultant consciousness, the function of which is to preserve the continuity of the mental stream through the duration of any single existence, from conception to death.

**Dharma (*Dhamma*):** literally “that which upholds”; [1] the teaching or doctrine of the Buddha, universal law, ultimate truth; [2] thing, object of the mind, phenomenon.

**Elements (*dhātu*):** the four great elements (*mahā-bhūta*) — earth, water, fire, and wind. These are the primary properties of matter, but not matter itself. All four elements are present in every material object, though in varying degrees of strength. If, for instance, the earth-element predominates, the material object is called solid, etc. Along with these four elements are 24 types of derived materiality (see section on matter).

**Five Aggregates of Clinging:** the clinging or clung to aggregate of [1] materiality, [2] feeling, [3] perception, [4] formations, and [5] consciousness. These five constituents of what is conventionally called a living “being” are objects of clinging by way of craving and view.

**Heart-base (*hadaya vatthu*):** is to be found in the blood within the heart, which acts as the base for all other consciousnesses (other than the five sense-consciousnesses). In fact, the Buddha did not definitely assign a specific base for consciousness, as he did with the other senses. Historically it has been the dominant view, as it was at the time of the Buddha, that the heart is the base of consciousness. In the PAṬṬHĀNA, the “BOOK OF RELATIONS,” the Buddha refers to the base of consciousness as “depending on that matter...” without asserting that “that matter” is the heart-base. Commentators, having analyzed all forms of matter, came to the conclusion that “that matter” must refer to the heart-base.

**Javana:** means apperception, or impulsion. The literal meaning is “running swiftly” and *javana* consciousness is so-named because in the course of a sense-sphere cognitive process it runs consecutively for seven moments, hanging on to a single object. The consciousness occurring in each of these seven moments is of a similar type, but the karmic force of each would bear a different result.

**Jhāna:** means absorption, indicating “the state that deeply contemplates on” or “that burns the five hindrances.” In a *jhāna* state, there is a complete, though temporary, suspension of

fivefold sense activity (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching), while the mind deeply contemplates on a single object for the duration of the time.

***Kalāpa, Rūpa-Kalāpa***: literally “materiality-cluster”; tiny particles consisting of the eight basic elements of earth, water, fire, wind, color, smell, taste, and nutriment. These eight inseparable elements form an octad *kalāpa*. They are the fundamental units of matter, which come in to and out of existence many millions of times every second. Some *rūpa-kalāpa* have nine elements, called nonad *kalāpa*, others have ten elements, called decad *kalāpa*.

**Karma (*kamma*)**: action; correctly speaking, the wholesome and unwholesome volitions of body, speech, and mind, which underlie all conscious actions. These actions create an energy or force, called karmic potency, which remains inert and passive (but nevertheless connected with our life-stream) until such time as that force matures and produces its result (see “karma result”).

**Karma Result (*kamma vipāka*)**: the result of a particular karma, which corresponds to the volition that was present at the time the karma was originally performed; in other words, an unwholesome action produces an unpleasant result, and a wholesome action produces a pleasant result.

**Karma-process becoming (*kamma-bhava*)**: the karmically active side of existence, being the cause of rebirth and consisting in wholesome and unwholesome volitional actions.

**Nirvana (*Nibbāna*):** literally “blowing out” (as of a candle) or “departure from craving.” It is the cessation of mind and matter, and is sometimes called the “deathless element.” Descriptions include: “extinction of greed, hatred, and delusion” and “the characteristic of peace.” Nirvana is the ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirth, old age, disease, and death, and from all suffering and misery.

**Five Sense-Bases:** physical bases utilized in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The sense-bases are not the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body themselves. Rather, they are the “sensitivities” of the four elements in each respective organ: [1] eye-base (or eye-sensitivity), [2] ear-base, [3] nose-base, [4] tongue-base, and [5] body-base. These five sensitivities act as the actual bases for the five respective sense-consciousnesses.

***Samatha*:** concentration, calm and serenity meditation; a type of meditation where the mind holds a single object for a long time in order to develop deep concentration or meditative absorptions (*jhāna*). It is an unperturbed, peaceful, and lucid state of mind, having freed the mind from impurities and the five hindrances. Concentration gives subsequent insight greater penetrative strength. Many different *samatha* subjects were taught by the Buddha, such as mindfulness of breathing, the 32 parts of the body, and the four sublime abidings.

***Saṃsāra***: “round of rebirth,” or literally, “perpetual wandering”; a continuous process of being born, growing old, and dying again and again. *Saṃsāra* is the unbroken chain of the arising, ceasing, and rearing of the five aggregates, which are constantly changing from moment to moment and through inconceivable periods of time. A single lifetime constitutes only a tiny and fleeting fraction of this *saṃsāra*.

**The three characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*)**: The three marks or characteristics of all conditioned existence are:

1. **Impermanence (*anicca*)** — things are subject to radical change and constant alteration, conventionally and ultimately speaking. “Not having been, they come to be; once having been, they cease.” Everything is unstable and in a constant state of flux, arising and passing away from moment to moment.
2. **Suffering (*dukkha*)** — or unsatisfactoriness. The *dukkha* comes from being constantly oppressed by repeated arising and passing away. The term is said to be derived from the roots *du*, which means bad or vile, and *kham*, which means empty of happiness. It is called suffering because it is vile and empty of lasting happiness.
3. **Non-self (*anattā*)** — the absence, in an ultimate sense, of any permanent and enduring self (*atta*) or soul, substance or essence, owner or controller. All phenomena are not-self in the sense of not yielding to one’s own will. The doctrine of non-self is to be understood by way of Dependent Origination.

“Whosoever is not clear with regard to the conditionally arisen phenomena, and does not comprehend that all the actions are conditioned through ignorance, etc., he thinks that it is an ego that understands or does not understand, that acts or causes to act, that comes to existence at rebirth . . . that has the sense-impression, that feels, desires, becomes attached, continues and at rebirth again enters a new existence.” (Vis.M. XVII, 117)

**Vipassanā:** literally “seeing clearly” or “insight”; it is defined as the experiential knowledge that arises from direct meditative observation, seeing the three common characteristics of mind and body or five aggregates (**see above**) together with their causes. The culmination of *vipassanā* or insight practice leads directly to the four stages of enlightenment.

**Wise attention (*yoniso manasikara*):** attention that may be said to be on the right track. Mental attention, considering, or contemplating that accords with the truth, namely, attention to the impermanent as impermanent, suffering as suffering, non-self as non-self, and foulness as foulness.







**PART ONE**

**FOUR  
ULTIMATE  
TRUTHS**



# CONSCIOUSNESS

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## I

## WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

By not understanding the term, many of us identify consciousness as “I” or “myself.” For example, we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think: when eye-consciousness, which performs the function of seeing, arises, we say, “I see,” “You see,” “They see,” “We see.” Similarly, when ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, or mind-consciousness arises, we say *someone* is aware. In an *ultimate* and very real sense, however, these phenomena are only sequences of impersonal consciousnesses and associated mental factors (*cetasika*) that are arising and passing away. By examining experience in these terms, it becomes clear that ultimately there is no ego or self, nor is there an eternal soul exercising control over our body and mind. When we neither know nor see what is happening (due to a lack of insight knowledge), it is easy to falsely identify with the underlying impersonal material and mental processes as a permanent soul and self.

Consciousness, then, is *simply awareness of an object*. It is nothing more than the bare awareness of an object. The commentaries define it as *the process* of cognizing an object.

Every consciousness that arises does so by taking an object. No kind of consciousness can arise without one. Consciousness delights in and hangs on to six kinds of objects. These are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects. It does so through six distinct bases, namely, eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and heart-base. The Pāḷi words *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*

are all translated as “consciousness.” But for our purposes and for the sake of clarity, we will only designate consciousness using the term *citta*.

The ABHIDHAMMA uses the device of defining ultimate realities by way of four categories: characteristic, function, manifestation, and proximate cause. The characteristic of consciousness is to **know** an object. Its function is to act as the **forerunner** of its accompanying mental factors, presiding over them and always co-arising with them. Its manifestation in experience is as a **continuity of process** (*sandhāna*) rather than what it seems to be: as if an independent being (a compact rather than a composite entity) is experiencing phenomena. Its proximate cause is mind and matter, because it cannot arise without concomitant mental factors and a material base.

The time it takes for a single consciousness to arise and pass away is called a consciousness-moment. Defining this infinitesimally small fraction of time is difficult. But to make the point, let us say very generally that during a finger snap, millions or billions of consciousness-moments arise and pass away. This is the nature of psychophysical phenomena. One need not take this on faith or accept it as mere theory because this momentary arising and passing becomes directly knowable and visible in meditation when the mind has been purified, intensified, and made luminous through deep concentration and matured wisdom. Owing to the incredibly rapid succession of the rise and fall of consciousnesses, consciousness appears to be continuous. It seems as though one unchanging self is doing the experiencing — rather than what is really happening: discrete, rapidly succeeding mind

moments are operating in a fixed, ordered process to give rise to awareness. This impersonal process may be compared to motion pictures. The illusion of movement is in fact based on the orderly succession of many (motionless) individual frames.

An example may make this clearer. When we watch television, it seems as if seeing and listening are happening simultaneously. However, in reality, on an ultimate level this is not the case. Two consciousness-moments, in this case eye-consciousness and ear-consciousness, cannot occur at the same time, and a single consciousness-moment cannot take more than one object. What we do not realize — that is to say, what we are unable to see and know in the absence of knowledge — is that eye-consciousness only sees the visible object and ear-consciousness only hears the audible object.

Seeing occurs in a series of eye-door cognitive processes, followed by many reflective mind-door cognitive processes, one after another (see **next Chapter**). Hearing occurs in a series of ear-door cognitive processes, followed by many reflective mind-door cognitive processes. These sense inputs are interspersed and occur so rapidly that it appears they are happening at the same time. Not until one gains right concentration and insight knowledge will one know and see them as they really are.

Although consciousnesses arise and pass away at a tremendous speed, they nevertheless pass through the same three stages or phases: arising (*uppāda*), turning (*ṭhiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*). These phases are called the sub-moments of consciousness.

Arising is the birth of consciousness, turning is its decay, and dissolution is its death. To identify consciousness as "I" would be, in an ultimate sense, to live only for a moment rather than a conventional life span between our conception and demise. With each moment of consciousness, we are being born, aging, and dying.

The illusion of there being an experiencer behind experience is broken when the process is reflected on in meditation, which in effect slows it down. When the mind operates at its normal speed and is beset by mental hindrances and defilements, the mind becomes clouded, keeping the illusion in place until wisdom allows one to see things as they really are and reveals the hidden process.

Consciousness can be classified in two ways:

1. By way of its nature
2. By way of the planes of existence



## II

## CONSCIOUSNESS CLASSIFIED BY WAY OF ITS NATURE

While consciousness has the single characteristic of knowing an object, one way to classify consciousness is with respect to its nature<sup>1</sup> in the following four ways:

1. **Unwholesome** (*akusala*)
2. **Wholesome** (*kusala*)
3. **Resultant** (*vipāka*)
4. **Functional** (*kiriya*)

### 1 UNWHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESS

In Pāḷi, unwholesome<sup>2</sup> is called *akusala*. *Akusala* means unskillful, mentally unhealthy, morally blameworthy and productive of painful result. It refers to any action that leads to one's own affliction and the affliction of others.

Unwholesome consciousness is rooted in three unskillful roots: greed, hatred, and delusion. There are 12 types of unwholesome consciousness: eight rooted in greed, two rooted in hatred, and two rooted in delusion. (see Appendix 1)

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1 Please note the discussion here on these four categories of consciousness is limited to sense-sphere consciousness. Sense-sphere consciousnesses mostly occur in the mental stream of *devas*, humans, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell beings who live in sense-sphere planes, although they may also arise in the fine-material sphere.

2 Unwholesome: sometimes translated as bad or evil, but without the Western connotation of sin.

Consciousness rooted in greed has the two roots of greed and delusion.<sup>3</sup> It is divided into eight types, based on three factors:

- i. the associated feeling, which can be either joyful or equanimous,
- ii. the presence or absence of wrong view, and
- iii. whether that consciousness is prompted or unprompted.

Unprompted refers to the consciousness that arises spontaneously, without inducement by others. Prompted means induced or imposed by others. Unprompted unwholesome actions done joyfully with wrong view bear worse results than prompted actions done equanimously with wrong view.

The two consciousnesses rooted in hatred, one prompted and one unprompted, both have the two roots of hatred and delusion. They are always accompanied by a feeling of displeasure.

It is important to note that greed and hatred cannot coexist in the same consciousness-moment, as their basic natures oppose each other. Greed has the nature of grasping and holding on, while hatred has the nature of pushing away and destroying. Delusion is always present in every unwholesome state as an underlying root even when such an action is dissociated from wrong view. Delusion is not only the mental blindness of being unable to discriminate between good and evil, but also in a more

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<sup>3</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, consciousness and mental factors always co-arise. Unwholesome consciousness always co-arises with its "root" mental factors, thus either with the pair of unwholesome mental factors greed and delusion, or hatred and delusion, or rooted solely in delusion.

universal sense, the ignorance of the true nature of all conditioned phenomena.

The remaining two types of unwholesome consciousness only have the root of delusion. They are always accompanied by equanimity. One is associated with doubt and the other with restlessness. The former, for example doubts the workings of karma and its results, that good begets good, and bad begets bad; or doubts the enlightenment of the Buddha. The latter allows one's mind to wander at will, without any effort to control it. Both types of consciousness are accompanied only by neutral feelings.

Every unwholesome consciousness has the potential to produce a painful result, whether it is in the present life or in some future life. With the exception of the one type of consciousness associated with restlessness, which is the weakest among all 12 types of unwholesome consciousness, the remaining 11 unwholesome consciousnesses are potent enough to lead to an unhappy rebirth in one of the four woeful realms.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 WHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESS

In Pāli, wholesome is called *kusala*. *Kusala* means mentally healthy, morally praiseworthy, and productive of pleasant results. It refers to any action that brings happiness to oneself and others. Wholesome consciousness is rooted in the three skillful roots: non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.<sup>5</sup> There are eight types

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<sup>4</sup> The four woeful realms: The animal kingdom, the realm of *petas* (hungry ghosts), the realm of *asuras* (titans or demons), and the hells — these are the lowest of the thirty-one realms.

<sup>5</sup> This foot note, see next page. >

of sense-sphere wholesome consciousness: four with two roots (non-greed and non-hatred) and four with three roots (non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion).<sup>6</sup> (see Appendix 2)

Wholesome consciousness is divided into eight types, based on three factors:

- i. the associated feeling, which can be either joyful or equanimous,
- ii. the presence or absence of knowledge, and
- iii. whether that consciousness is prompted or unprompted.

Let us take the first wholesome consciousness for discussion: ***One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, unprompted.*** A boy spontaneously and joyfully offers some food to a hungry dog, a hungry person, or if he lives in Southeast Asia, to a monk or nun on alms round. He understands that this is a wholesome action, sure to produce a pleasant result. Such a wholesome bodily action has three roots. Being able to spontaneously give up his food is a manifestation of non-greed, or generosity. The good will and kindness he has for the recipient is a manifestation of non-hatred, or loving-kindness. The knowledge of karma and its result is the manifestation of non-delusion or wisdom.

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<sup>5</sup> As will become clear in the next chapter, wholesome consciousness always co-arises with its corresponding wholesome “root” mental factors of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

<sup>6</sup> Non-delusion is also called wisdom, right view, and knowledge, which spans a wide range of meanings, including understanding karma and its result, insight into the individual characteristics of mind and matter and the three characteristics of existence.

Sometimes, the same good action may be performed with a neutral feeling, prompted, and dissociated from knowledge (only two roots, without wisdom). What will be the difference in the result it produces? The Buddha said the results coming from a good deed performed spontaneously with a joyful feeling and associated with knowledge are far superior to the deed done without these three factors, especially the factor of knowledge. The deed done without knowledge produces rebirth-linking consciousness devoid of wisdom.

All our good actions, such as charity, self-restraint, offering community service, taking care of our parents, talk of contentment, non-cruelty, meditation, and so on are performed by one of these eight types of wholesome consciousness.

### 3 RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESS

Both wholesome and unwholesome consciousness constitute karma.<sup>7</sup> When that karma ripens, the result is called “resultant consciousness” (*vipāka citta*). Resultant consciousness includes five types of sense-consciousness, namely eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness. There are 23 resultant consciousnesses. (see Appendix 3)

### 4 FUNCTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Functional consciousness does not constitute karma, nor is it the result of karma. It involves any activity that is not capable of producing a karmic result.

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7 This statement is true for all beings except *Arahants*.

Here we see that both resultant and functional consciousness are karmically indeterminate; in other words, these consciousnesses cannot be classified as either wholesome or unwholesome.

When *Arahants* perform an action, such as serving their teacher, preaching a sermon, teaching meditation, or practicing concentration and insight, which, of course, they do with the purest intentions, their consciousness is functional consciousness. An action will produce a result only when it is supported by craving. *Arahants* have uprooted all cravings, hence their actions are incapable of producing any results. There are 11 functional consciousnesses. (see **Appendix 4**)

III

## CONSCIOUSNESS CLASSIFIED BY WAY OF PLANE OF EXISTENCE

The teachings of Buddha see this planet as an almost inconsequential part of the orderly, harmonious world system, of which there are countless in the universe. According to Buddhist cosmology, sentient beings in this world system live on one of the 31 Planes of Existence. (see **Chart 1**)

There are three major divisions of the planes: 1) 4 immaterial-sphere planes, 2) 16 fine-material-sphere planes, and 3) 11 sense-sphere planes. The 11 sense-sphere planes are subdivided into two groups: i) 7 sensuous blissful planes that include 6 *deva* realms and 1 human realm, and ii) 4 woeful planes that include

the *asura*, *peta*, animal, and hell-being realms. The plane in which sentient beings live is the reflection and result of their minds.

In accord with these 31 planes of existence, consciousness can also be classified into four categories:

1. Sense-sphere consciousness (*kāmāvacaracitta*)
2. Fine-material-sphere consciousness (*rūpāvacaracitta*)
3. Immaterial-sphere consciousness (*arūpāvacaracitta*)
4. Supramundane consciousness (*lokuttaracitta*)

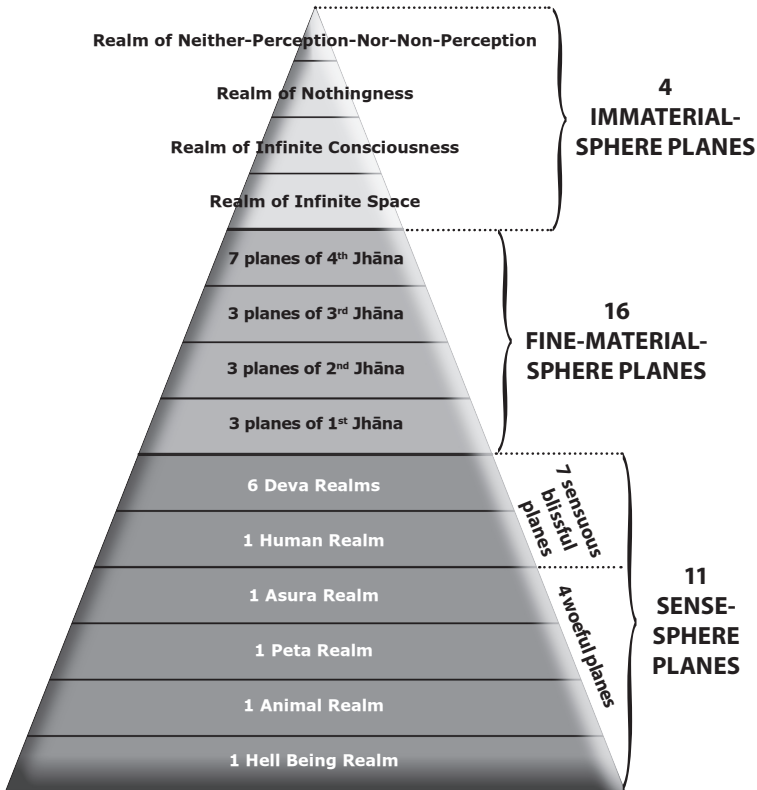


CHART 1 : 31 PLANES OF EXISTENCE

Please note that spheres of consciousness and planes of existence are not identical.

The former are categories for classifying types of consciousness, the latter are realms into which beings are reborn, live, and pass their lives.

## 1 SENSE-SPHERE CONSCIOUSNESS

Sense-sphere consciousness prevails in the 11 sensuous planes. In these planes, craving for sense pleasures, such as pleasant visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects, predominates. These include all 12 unwholesome consciousnesses, and eight sense-sphere wholesome, 23 resultant, and 11 functional consciousnesses.

## 2 FINE-MATERIAL-SPHERE CONSCIOUSNESS

Fine-material-sphere consciousness includes all consciousness that pertains to the fine-material plane of existence (*rūpabhūmi*), a realm in which gross matter is absent and only a subtle residue of fine matter remains. These consciousnesses are absorption or *jhāna* consciousness, achieved through the development of concentration from mindfulness of breathing, ten *kaṣiṇas*,<sup>8</sup> the four sublime abidings (*brahmavihāra*),<sup>9</sup> and so on. It is free from craving for sensual pleasures, with the five hindrances<sup>10</sup> that obstruct mental development having been suppressed.

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<sup>8</sup> *Kaṣiṇa*: a meditation device. The ten *kaṣiṇas* are earth, water, fire, wind, brown, red, yellow, white, light and space *kaṣiṇa*.

<sup>9</sup> The four *brahmavihāra*: Loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity.

<sup>10</sup> The five hindrances: Sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt.



There are fifteen types of fine-material-sphere consciousness: five wholesome fine-material-sphere consciousnesses, five resultant fine-material-sphere consciousnesses, and five functional fine-material-sphere consciousnesses.

The five types of wholesome fine-material-sphere consciousness are:

1. First *jhāna* wholesome consciousness together with initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
2. Second *jhāna* wholesome consciousness together with sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.<sup>11</sup>
3. Third *jhāna* wholesome consciousness together with joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
4. Fourth *jhāna* wholesome consciousness together with happiness and one-pointedness.
5. Fifth *jhāna* wholesome consciousness together with equanimity and one-pointedness. (see Chart below)

Wholesome Fine-material-sphere Consciousness	Initial application (Vitakka)	Sustained application (Vicāra)	Joy (Pīti)	Happiness (Sukha)	One-pointedness (Ekaggata)	Equanimity (Upekkha)
First Jhāna	x	x	x	x	x	—
Second Jhāna	—	x	x	x	x	—
Third Jhāna	—	—	x	x	x	—
Fourth Jhāna	—	—	—	x	x	—
Fifth Jhāna	—	—	—	—	x	x

CHART 2: Fine-Material-Sphere Consciousness with its Jhāna Factors

<sup>11</sup> The first *jhāna* and second *jhāna* in ABHIDHAMMA DIVISION are equal to first *jhāna* in SUTTANTA DIVISION.

These five types of consciousness are distinguished by way of *jhāna* factors. When progressing from the first *jhāna* to the second *jhāna*, the meditator discards the grosser *jhāna* factor of initial application of mind and retains sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness. Likewise, the grosser *jhāna* factors of sustained application and joy are discarded when the meditator reaches third and fourth *jhāna*, respectively. In the fifth *jhāna*, happiness is replaced with equanimity.

The ABHIDHAMMA divides attainment of *jhāna* concentration into five levels, contrary to the Suttas, in which four levels of *jhāna* are mentioned. Most meditators, when attaining second *jhāna*, discard the initial application of mind and the sustained application of mind altogether. Thus, their second *jhāna* is similar to the third *jhāna* of the ABHIDHAMMA division.

The five types of wholesome fine-material-sphere consciousness not only arise in the mental stream of beings who live in the 16 fine-material-sphere planes, but also in sense-sphere planes when humans and *devas* engage in their respective fine-material *jhāna* practices. When such a being is able to dwell in *jhāna* at the dying moment, as a direct result of such wholesome karma, he will be reborn in one of the realms within the fine-material sphere that corresponds to the *jhāna* he had attained. At that moment, the rebirth-linking consciousness of that being is called fine-material-sphere resultant consciousness. Thus the five types of fine-material-sphere resultant consciousness (see Appendix 5) are the direct results of the five types of wholesome fine-material-sphere consciousness. They are to be found in the fine-material planes only, as the rebirth consciousness of the beings who are born there.

The five fine-material-sphere functional consciousnesses are experienced only by *Arahants* who possess the five fine-material *jhāna*, whether they live in fine-material-sphere planes or sense-sphere planes. (see **Appendix 6**)

### 3 IMMATERIAL-SPHERE CONSCIOUSNESS

Immaterial-sphere consciousness is consciousness that “moves about” in the four immaterial planes of existence (*arūpabhūmi*). Rebirth into these four realms comes about through the attainment of the immaterial *jhānas*, which are more refined and subtle than the fine-material *jhānas*. Immaterial-sphere consciousness is not only free of desire for sensual pleasures, but also from the desire for fine-material existence. The beings living there have no material body whatsoever, only consciousness and mental factors remain.

There are altogether twelve types of immaterial-sphere consciousness: four wholesome immaterial-sphere consciousnesses, four resultant immaterial-sphere consciousnesses, and four functional immaterial-sphere consciousnesses.

The four types of wholesome immaterial-sphere consciousness are:

1. Wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space (*Ākāśānañcāyatana-kusalacitta*).
2. Wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite consciousness (*Viññāṇañcāyatana-kusalacitta*).
3. Wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of nothingness (*Ākiñcaññāyatana-kusalacitta*).

4. Wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*Nevasaññānasaññāyatana-kusalacitta*).

The meditator, having achieved the fifth *jhāna* with one of the *kaṣiṇas*, reflects on the disadvantages of materiality. One reflects that a physical body is subject to assault with weapons and can succumb to many different kinds of diseases, such as diseases of the eye, ear, heart, and so on. Having reflected in this way, the meditator becomes dispassionate towards materiality and develops the desire for a state without materiality — an immaterial *jhāna*. One then expands the sign of the *kaṣiṇa* to whatever extent one wishes. Thereafter one removes, for example, the earth *kaṣiṇa* by concentrating on the spaces or holes within the earth *kaṣiṇa*, mentally noting “space, space...” With the disappearance of the earth *kaṣiṇa*, all that remains is space. By concentrating repeatedly on that space, one reaches the first immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of infinite space. At that time, the mental stream is occupied with the wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space.

To proceed to the second immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of infinite consciousness, the meditator reflects on the peaceful nature of the base of infinite consciousness. One takes as one’s meditation object the consciousness that was present during the attainment of the base of infinite space, and notes “infinite consciousness, infinite consciousness.” By repeatedly concentrating on that consciousness, one reaches the second immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of infinite consciousness. At that time, the mental stream is occupied with the wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite consciousness.

To proceed to the third immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of nothingness, the meditator reflects that when the base of infinite *jhāna* consciousness is present, the base of infinite space *jhāna* consciousness is absent. Two moments of consciousness cannot, of course, arise in one consciousness-moment. So, taking the absence of the base of infinite space *jhāna* consciousness as object, one notes “nothingness, nothingness.” By repeated attention to that nothingness, one reaches the third immaterial *jhāna* called the base of nothingness. At that time, the mental stream is occupied with the wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of nothingness.

To proceed to the fourth immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one takes the base of nothingness consciousness as the object. One pays attention to it as “this is sublime; this is peaceful.” By repeated attention to that sign, one reaches the fourth immaterial *jhāna*, called the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. At that time, the mental stream is occupied with the wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. The name neither-perception-nor-non-perception is so-called because perception becomes so subtle it can no longer perform its decisive function, and thus this state cannot be said to have perception. Yet perception is not altogether absent but retains in a residual form.

The immaterial-sphere consciousnesses differ from the fine-material-sphere consciousnesses in that each immaterial *jhāna* has only two *jhāna* factors, namely one-pointedness and equanimity. They arise not only in immaterial planes of existence

but in sense-sphere planes when humans and *devas* engage in their respective immaterial *jhāna* practices. When such a being is able to enter an immaterial absorption, for example the base of infinite space, at the dying moment, he or she will be reborn in the plane of infinite space in the next life.

That being's rebirth-linking consciousness is the direct result of the karma generated by the wholesome consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space at the time of death, and is therefore called the resultant consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space. Because there are four types of immaterial-sphere wholesome consciousness, there are four types of immaterial-sphere resultant consciousness, respectively. (see **Appendix 7**)

Another four functional immaterial-sphere consciousnesses (see **Appendix 8**) are experienced only by *Arahants* who have the four immaterial *jhānas*.

Sense-sphere consciousness can be either wholesome or unwholesome, but there is no unwholesome fine-material-sphere, immaterial-sphere, and supramundane consciousness.

#### 4 SUPRAMUNDANE CONSCIOUSNESS

Supramundane consciousness is the noble consciousness (*ariya-citta*) that has gone beyond the five aggregates of clinging. This type of consciousness leads to liberation from *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, and to the attainment of ultimate peace, Nirvana, the complete cessation of suffering.

Supramundane consciousness is of two kinds:

1. The four types of wholesome path consciousness: stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and *Arahantship*, and
2. The four corresponding types of resultant fruition consciousness, which are their results.

Both the supramundane path consciousness and fruition consciousness take Nirvana as object. Supramundane consciousness is described in detail in Chapter 5, Nirvana.

## IV

### CONCLUSION

Up to this point, we have analyzed consciousness in two ways:

1. By way of its nature, and
2. By way of plane of existence.

Now I would like to discuss how consciousness operates according to the cognitive process in the following chapter.

## V

**MEDITATION  
EXERCISE**

There are two purposes in practicing this exercise:

1. To help understand the characteristic of consciousness, which is pure awareness of the object; and
2. To realize the non-self nature of consciousness.

Sit silently. Do not pay attention to any object. Since objects (for example, a sound, a feeling, or any bodily sensation) are there all the time, one of the many possible objects will pop up into consciousness. ***Let the object come to the mind.*** Consciousness will immediately become aware of it without you (a self) having to do anything. Notice: ***what is the mind doing now.*** While knowing that object, you will notice that another object will come to the awareness of consciousness. Watch how consciousness lets go of the previous object and is aware of the new object automatically. Then another object arises, for example, a thought; the mind again lets go of the old object and grasps the new one, the thought. The objects keep coming to the mind, one after the other, and the mind keeps knowing each object. You soon realize the process goes on without any director behind consciousness — ***as long as you do not react to the object,*** but purely observe. The observation is going on without the observer.





# COGNITIVE PROCESS AND PROCESS-FREED

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I

**COGNITIVE PROCESS  
(VĪTHI)  
AND  
PROCESS-FREED  
(VĪTHIMUTTA)**

**H**ow do all these different types of consciousness operate?  
Consciousness operates in two ways:

1. **As a cognitive process (*citta vīthi*)**
2. **As process-freed (*vīthimutta*), on the occasion of rebirth, *bhavaṅga*, and death, not within the cognitive process.**

What is cognitive process? According to ABHIDHAMMA, there is no moment when we do not experience consciousness of one kind or another — hanging on to an object. When consciousness arises cognizing an object at one of the five sense doors, it does not occur at random, but rather in a series of discrete consciousness-moments, leading from one consciousness to the next in a specific and uniform order. This order is in accordance with a fixed law of consciousness, called *citta niyāma*.

Cognitive Process occurs in two ways:

1. **Five-door Cognitive Process**
2. **Mind-door Cognitive Process**

## II

## FIVE-DOOR COGNITIVE PROCESS

The five-door cognitive process is:

1. Eye-door cognitive process
2. Ear-door cognitive process
3. Nose-door cognitive process
4. Tongue-door cognitive process
5. Body-door cognitive process

Each of the five-door cognitive processes takes its respective object of visible form, sound, smell, taste, or tangible object.

## III

## BHAVAṄGA

Before beginning the discussion of five-door cognitive process, we need to first understand *bhavaṅga* or life-continuum consciousness. *Bhavaṅga* is the combination of two words: *bhava* and *aṅga*. *Bhava* is existence, *aṅga* is factor, so *bhavaṅga* means “factor of existence,” which is the indispensable condition for existence. The function of *bhavaṅga* consciousness is to preserve the continuity of the mental stream through the duration of any single existence, from conception to death. (see Chart 3)

All *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses are resultant consciousness produced by previous karma. When there is no cognitive process

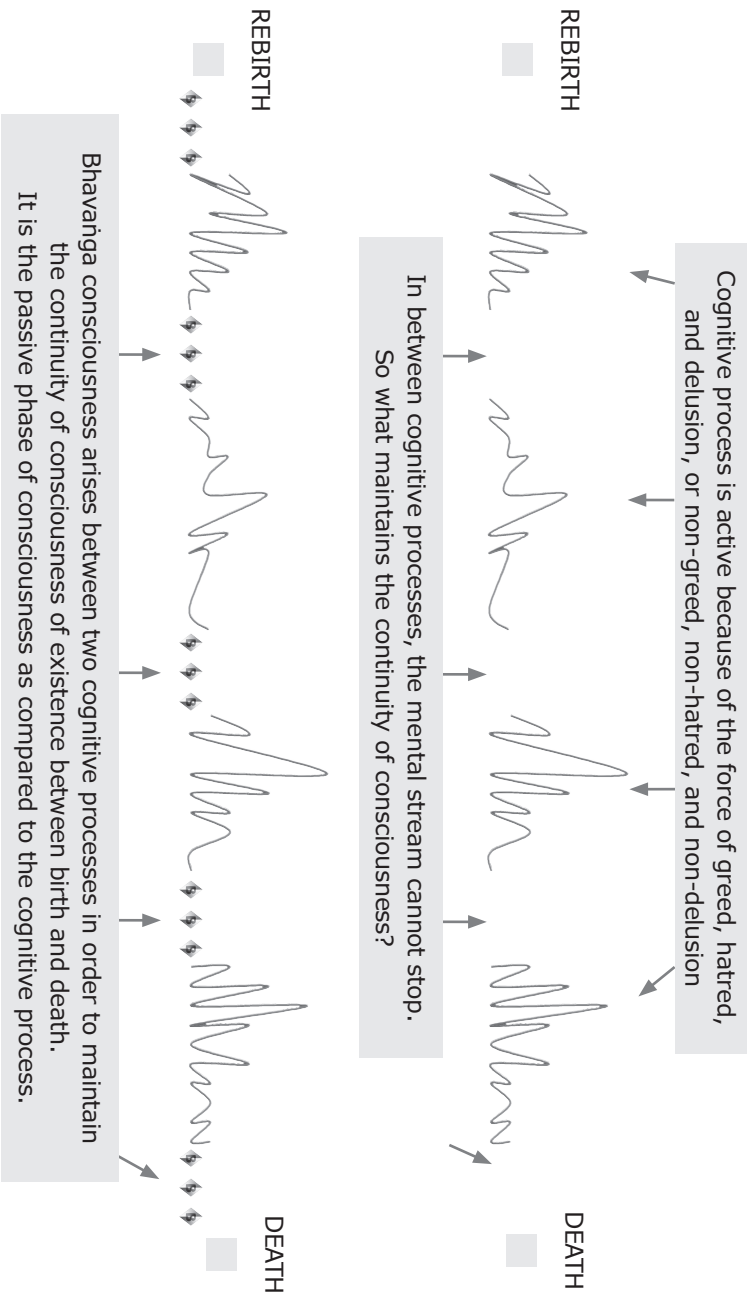


CHART 3 : Bhavanga Consciousness

taking place, a countless series of *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses, which are passive, or process-freed, arise and pass away, filling the gap between one cognitive process and another, and thus preserving the continuity of existence. The reason consciousness must arise every moment during life, either within a cognitive process or as *bhavaṅga*, is because the mental stream cannot stop flowing as long as the causes for its arising are still intact; in other words, as long as the karma that produced this life is not yet exhausted.

There is an occasion when the mental stream can be temporarily cut off: when a non-returner or *Arahant* enters into the attainment of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*). Sometimes they may feel weary of the constant arising and passing away of mind and matter, and so will enter into the attainment of cessation to stop the arising of mind and consciousness-born matter. The time spent in this attainment may be just a few moments, or perhaps one day, and can extend up to seven days, according to their determination prior to entering cessation. Emerging from that attainment, the stream of consciousness will continue flowing. The mental stream is permanently cut off only after the final cessation (*Parinibbāna*) of an *Arahant*, since the ignorance and craving that produce the mental stream have been completely uprooted by *Arahant* path knowledge.

Since the object of *bhavaṅga* consciousness is not a present-life object, one is not normally aware of it, because of its subtlety. When we are in deep dreamless sleep, *bhavaṅgas* arise and pass away every moment, flowing like a stream to maintain the continuity of existence. When practitioners are developing their concentration on a meditation object, owing to the weakness of

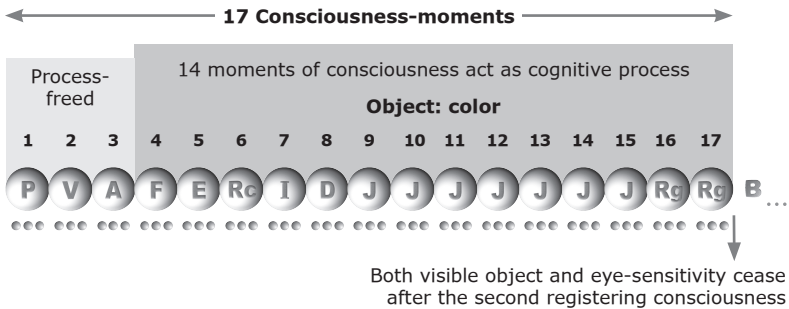
mindfulness, their minds may sometimes fall into a *bhavaṅga* state. At that time, they are not aware of anything, except feeling peaceful. Some mistakenly think that mind and matter have stopped. Actually, at that moment, *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses are still arising and passing away; however, due to the subtlety of *bhavaṅga* mind states, new practitioners are unable to discern this.

Now that we understand the function of *bhavaṅga*, let us go back to the five-door cognitive processes. We will take eye-door cognitive process for discussion.

**IV**

**EYE-DOOR COGNITIVE PROCESS**

When no active cognitive process is taking place, *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses flow on continuously, one after the other. The moment a visible object or color impinges on the eye-sensitivity and *bhavaṅga* simultaneously, a series of 17 moments of consciousness, called the eye-door cognitive process, runs as follows:



**NOTE:** Each circle represents one consciousness-moment.

**KEY:**

<b>P</b>	past bhavaṅga;
<b>V</b>	vibrating bhavaṅga;
<b>A</b>	arresting bhavaṅga;
<b>F</b>	five-door adverting consciousness;
<b>E</b>	eye-consciousness;
<b>Rc</b>	receiving consciousness;
<b>I</b>	investigating consciousness;
<b>D</b>	determining consciousness;
<b>J</b>	javana;
<b>Rg</b>	registering consciousness;
<b>B</b>	bhavaṅga.

**CHART 4: Eye-Door Cognitive Process — Cognizing a Color**

1. **Past bhavaṅga (atīta-bhavaṅga):** One *bhavaṅga* passes away, thus it is called past *bhavaṅga*.
2. **Vibrating bhavaṅga (bhavaṅga-calana):** Because of impingement on the eye-sensitivity by a visible object, the *bhavaṅga* vibrates.
3. **Arresting bhavaṅga (bhavaṅgupaccheda):** The *bhavaṅga* stream is cut off, allowing the active cognitive process to begin in the next mind-moment.

*These three bhavaṅga cittas constitute the process-freed portion of the eye-door cognitive process.*

4. **Five-door adverting consciousness (pañca-dvārāvajjana):** This consciousness initiates the active portion of the eye-door cognitive process. It causes the mind to attend to the color, as if inquiring, “What is this?” It is functional consciousness.



5. **Eye-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*):** This consciousness performs the function of seeing the color. It sees only color, but does not recognize the specific color nor the shape or form of the object at this moment. If the object is sound, ear-consciousness arises hearing the sound, but does not know the meaning of the sound; if it is odor, then nose-consciousness arises knowing the odor, but does not know what type of odor; if it is taste, then tongue-consciousness arises knowing the taste, but does not know whether it is bitter, sour, or sweet; if it is tangible then body-consciousness arises knowing the touch, but does not know whether it is soft, hard, or cold. The type of sense-consciousness that arises depends on the corresponding sense-object. Because trillions of consciousness-moments arise and pass away in a snap of the fingers, one mistakenly thinks that one understands a visible form as soon as one sees it; recognizes the meaning of sound as soon as one hears it; knows the good odor as soon as one smells it, etc. Actually, at this stage, where eye-consciousness arises seeing a color, our discrimination of the visible object is still rudimentary and the object is not clear yet. All five types of sense-consciousness<sup>1</sup> are resultant consciousness, i.e. consciousness produced by previous wholesome or unwholesome karma.
6. **Receiving consciousness (*sampaṭicchana*):** This consciousness receives the visible object. It is resultant consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> Eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness.

7. **Investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*):** This consciousness investigates the visible object. It is resultant consciousness.
8. **Determining consciousness (*voṭṭhapana*):** This consciousness determines the visible object. It is functional consciousness.

*Consciousnesses four through eight have their own specific functions of adverting, seeing, receiving, investigating, and determining. The arising of these types of consciousness cannot be controlled. Neither can they produce karma.*

9-15. **Seven *javanas***<sup>2</sup>: *Javana* literally means “running swiftly,” and it is so named because it runs seven times swiftly over a single object, in this case, color, in the act of apprehending it. The seven successive consciousnesses within the same *javana* series must be of the same type.<sup>3</sup> For example, among the eight types of unwholesome consciousness rooted in greed, if the first type of unwholesome consciousness has gained the right conditions to arise, it will arise and pass away successively seven times at the *javana* stage.

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2 *Javana* means apperception, or impulsion. Usually sense-sphere *javana* runs seven times. During the last cognitive process of one’s life, *javana* runs only five times due to the weakness of the heart. For fine-material-sphere *javana*, during the very first attainment of absorption, *javana* runs only once. During subsequent attainment of absorption, *javana* runs many or even millions of times, depending on one’s pre-determination. For the four supramundane path consciousnesses, only one moment of *javana* arises, then ceases, followed by two or three moments of fruition *javana* consciousness. When the noble one enters into fruition attainment, fruition consciousness functioning as *javana* runs as many times as that attainment endures.

3 See the previous chapter for classification of consciousness according to its nature.

It is at the *javana* stage that the object is fully experienced. It is also the most important stage from an ethical standpoint, since it is during these seven *javanas* that good or bad karma is performed. Unlike the preceding consciousnesses, which are rootless, *javana* consciousness has either the unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion or the wholesome roots of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. These six roots are the underlying sources of motivation that bring forth karma. Just as a tree with roots is more stable and firm, *javana* consciousness with roots is more stable and forceful compared with the rootless consciousnesses. Thus karma in fact means all wholesome and unwholesome consciousness with roots. The karma performed during a five-door cognitive process, however, is less powerful than the karma performed during a mind-door cognitive process, since five-door cognitive process cognizes only the color.

- 16-17. Registering consciousness (*tadārammaṇa*):** After the seven *javanas*, two registering consciousnesses arise and pass away, taking the same object as the *javanas*. *Tadārammaṇa* literally means “having that object [the one apprehended by the *javanas*].” Just as a man who is running quickly has to slow down for a few steps before coming to a stop, registering consciousness arises twice following the *javanas* in order to slow down their force before the mind lapses back into the *bhavaṅga*. At this point, the eye-door cognitive process, which consists of 17 consciousness-moments, comes to an end. This is because the life span or duration of matter lasts for 17 consciousness-moments. Color and eye-sensitivity are matter. When they both pass away, eye-door

cognitive process also ceases. Then the mind lapses into the *bhavaṅga* stream.

V

## FOURFOLD PRESENTATION OF OBJECTS

At this point in the process, 17 consciousness-moments are completed. The first consciousness up through the third are process-freed. The fourth consciousness through the seventeenth belong to the actual cognitive process. The two registering consciousnesses only occur when the visual object has impacted the eye-sensitivity with great intensity, in which case the cognitive process is called a course ending in registration (*tadārammaṇavāra*). Sometimes when the object is not very prominent to the senses, the two moments of registering consciousness do not arise. The cognitive process then stops at the end of the *javana* stage. This kind of cognitive process is known as a course ending with *javana* (*javanavāra*). Since the duration of matter (color and eye-sensitivity) lasts for 17 consciousness-moments, three *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses will arise and pass away before vibrating *bhavaṅga* consciousness.

### 17 Consciousness-moments of a Course Ending with Javana



**KEY:** P past bhavaṅga; V vibrating bhavaṅga; A arresting bhavaṅga;  
 F five-door adverting consciousness; E eye-consciousness;  
 Rc receiving consciousness; I investigating consciousness;  
 D determining consciousness; J javana.

When the impact of the visual object on the mind is weaker, many past *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses will arise and pass away before vibrating *bhavaṅga* consciousness. This cognitive process stops at determining consciousness. In this case, even *jāvanas* do not arise, but determining consciousness arises for two or three moments, and then the mind lapses into *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses. This type of process is called a course ending with determining (*votthapanavāra*).

**17 Consciousness-moments of a Course Ending with Determining**



When the impact is extremely weak, there is no cognitive process at all — the *bhavaṅga* vibrates for a few moments, and that is all. During the 17 moments of the matter’s lifespan, ten to 15 moments will be occupied by past *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses, and two moments by vibrating *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses. This type of process is termed the futile course (*moghavāra*).

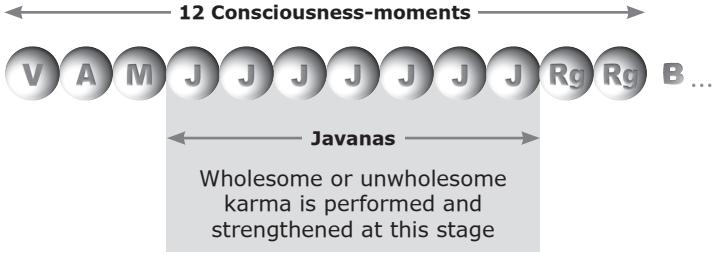
**17 Consciousness-moments of a Course Ending with Vibrating Bhavaṅga**



After every sense-door cognitive process, *bhavaṅgas* arise and cease one after the other until a mind-door cognitive process arises in order to apprehend the sense-object more clearly. It is a fixed law that *bhavaṅgas* must arise after each cognitive process. How many moments of *bhavaṅga* arise and pass away in between two cognitive processes depends on the stage of mental development. The fewer, the better, since it shows alertness of mind.

VI

**MIND-DOOR  
COGNITIVE PROCESS**



- KEY:**
- V** vibrating bhavaṅga;
  - A** arresting bhavaṅga;
  - M** mind-door adverting consciousness;
  - J** javana;
  - Rg** registering consciousness;
  - B** bhavaṅga.

**CHART 5 : Mind-Door Cognitive Process — Cognizing a Mental Object**

The mind-door cognitive process is somewhat different from the five-door cognitive process. Normally, the mind-door cognitive process has only 12 consciousness-moments. After completing an eye-door process, many *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses arise and pass away. This is followed by a mind-door cognitive process, which takes the mental image of the previous visible object, i.e. color, as its object.

The mind-door cognitive process runs as follows:

1. vibrating *bhavaṅga*;
2. arresting *bhavaṅga*;

3. mind-door adverting consciousness, which adverts the mind to a mental image of the past object, in this case, color;
4. seven *javana* consciousnesses arise in succession, in order to apprehend the color;
5. two moments of registering consciousness occur, then the mind-door cognitive process finishes, and the mind again lapses into *bhavaṅga*.

In the case of an obscure object, the two moments of registering consciousness do not occur.

Many mind-door cognitive processes follow, one after the other, in order to cognize the color, form, shape, and name of the visible object, and the reaction towards it.

Here is the sequence of a five-door cognitive process followed by many mind-door cognitive processes:

1. A five-door cognitive process cognizes the object; in the case of the eye-door cognitive process, it cognizes only its color.
2. A mind-door cognitive process perceives the mental image of the past object's color, which has already ceased with the ending of the five-door cognitive process.
3. A second mind-door cognitive process recognizes which color it is, such as "blue," "white," etc.
4. A third mind-door cognitive process recognizes the shape or form of that object. It sees the whole image and the "meaning" of the object, which has already been

determined by past perception. Perception has the function of recognizing what has been previously perceived.

5. A fourth mind-door process passes judgment on the visible object, which has already been clearly defined as conceptual reality, such as “man,” “dog,” “car,” etc. At this point, we begin to react to it with like or dislike, and fall prey to the habit of mental proliferation (*papānca*).
6. Starting with the fifth mind-door process, the karma performed is more powerful than in the previous cognitive processes. From this point on, many mind-door processes may continue to react to the same mental object, because the object becomes clearer and our reactions towards it also become stronger.

How we react towards an object depends primarily on the karmic tendencies<sup>4</sup> that we have accumulated over countless past lives. If someone has accumulated a great deal of greed, consciousness rooted in greed is likely to arise at the *javana* stage when the object is pleasant. On the other hand, if someone has accumulated a great deal of hatred, consciousness rooted in hatred is likely to arise at the *javana* when the visible object is unpleasant. If we react with the same karmic pattern all the time, its force is gradually reinforced, and the pattern will become second nature and may even begin to dominate our lives, like a snowball that keeps getting bigger and bigger as it rolls down a hill.

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4 Karmic tendencies: patterns of behavior that develop due to certain related actions, either wholesome or unwholesome, and the force of habit.



## VII

## KARMA POTENCY OF JAVANA CONSCIOUSNESS

Every reaction leaves behind its karmic force. Suppose one gets angry at a person or another object. *Javana* consciousness rooted in anger in the mind-door cognitive process will swiftly run over that object seven times, gaining momentum with the fifth mind-door process and continuing to develop with each repetition of the series, until one finally gets over the anger. In the time it takes to snap our fingers, trillions of consciousness-moments rooted in anger can arise and pass away, leaving behind an unwholesome karmic potency in the stream of consciousness. Imagine the end result if one gets angry for five minutes, much less an hour, a day, or a year, as happens with some people. The same is true if we react with jealousy, meanness, or cruelty towards an object.

Every *javana* starting with the fifth mind-door cognitive process has the potential to produce a result either in the present life or a future life; in fact, uncountable trillions of latent effects lie waiting to emerge when conditions permit. So one needs to be careful in all actions, since even the smallest unwholesome acts, like molehills, have a way of turning into mountains. As it says in the DHAMMAPADA:

**“Do not think lightly of evil, saying, ‘It will not come to me.’  
Even a water-pot is filled by the falling of water drops. Likewise  
the fool, gathering [evil] drop by drop, fills himself with evil.”**

Nevertheless, one has choice or free will to not react negatively to difficult persons or situations. For example, when I am being abused and cursed, I reflect that these abusive words I now receive are the echo of words I myself previously uttered. "I am just reaping what I sowed." Reflecting wisely, not only can I remain calm, but I am also able to arouse compassion towards that person. "How pitiful that he is unable to control his evil thoughts and utters such wrong speech." I feel his anguish. I am moved by compassion. I wish him to be free from all bad consequences that will surely come back to him in the future. Instead of getting upset by his abusive words, I choose to fill myself with the beautiful mental factor of compassion for him.

Thus, if we train our minds to develop the habit of always responding to difficult conditions (or people) with compassion, loving-kindness, patience, forgiveness, endurance, honesty, and truthfulness, these will produce countless wholesome consciousnesses at the *javana* stage of the mind-door cognitive process, leaving countless beautiful karmic potencies in our stream of consciousness. The energy of those good karmas will follow us like a shadow that never departs.

Further still, if one reflects wisely upon the impermanence and impersonal nature of whatever situation one encounters, one grows in wisdom and gains a deeper understanding of life and the nature of existence. As a result, mental stability, equanimity, and detachment develop. Thus, it is said in the DHAMMAPADA:

**"Do not think lightly of good, saying, 'It will not come to me.' Even as a water-pot is filled by the falling of water drops, so the wise man, gathering [wholesome qualities] drop by drop, fills himself with good."**

VIII

**WHOLESOME AND UNWHOLESOME  
BODILY, VERBAL, AND MENTAL  
ACTIONS OF JAVANA**

At the sense-sphere *javana* stage, unwholesome or wholesome karma is performed through body, speech and mind. There are twenty kinds of action in all, ten unwholesome and ten wholesome.

The ten unwholesome karmas are divided into three categories:

**UNWHOLESOME BODILY ACTION**

1. Killing — killing living beings, being given to blows and violence, being merciless to living beings.
2. Taking what is not given — taking by way of theft the wealth and property of others.
3. Sexual misconduct — adultery, rape, having intercourse with those who are betrothed, protected by law, under the guardianship of a parent or relative, or a ward of the state.

*Wholesome bodily action is action that abstains from these three.*

**UNWHOLESOME VERBAL ACTION**

4. Telling lies — speaking falsehood for one's own or another's benefit.

5. Slander — speaking maliciously; repeating elsewhere what has been heard, in order to divide people.
6. Harsh speech — uttering words that are rough, hard, hurtful or offensive to others.
7. Frivolous talk — speaking at the wrong time; speaking what is not factual, what is useless, unreasonable, immoderate, and unbeneficial; speaking what is not in accord with dharma.

***Wholesome verbal action is action that abstains from these four.***

### **UNWHOLESOME MENTAL ACTION**

8. Covetousness — the mental factor of greed, arising with the wish to acquire another person's property.
9. Ill-will — the mental factor of hatred, arising with the wish that another being meet with harm and affliction.
10. Wrong view — any view that denies the workings of karma and karma's results.

***Wholesome mental action is action that abstains from these three.***

In short, the ten wholesome karmas are the actions that abstain from the above-mentioned ten unwholesome karmas.

Another set of ten wholesome karmas is: [1] giving, [2] virtue, [3] meditation, [4] reverence, [5] service, [6] sharing of merit, [7] rejoicing in others' merit, [8] hearing the Dharma, [9] teaching the Dharma, and [10] straightening out one's views.

## IX

**CONSCIOUSNESS IS  
NOT A SELF**

Every consciousness operates either within the cognitive process or is process-freed, according to the fixed law of consciousness. Consciousness arises, performs its function, and then ceases, becoming the pre-nascent condition for the next consciousness to arise in an unbroken continuity. This happens at tremendous speed. Without seeing consciousness in this state, stripped of all its illusions and vanities, how can we presume to know who and what we really are? And whether there is any basis for our belief in a permanent and abiding self?

Eye-consciousness arises dependent on causes and conditions: a visible object, light, eye-base, eye-contact, and attention. If the visible object does not impinge on the eye-base, eye-consciousness cannot arise. If there is a visible object and eye-base, but it is dark, eye-consciousness cannot take place. Even if there is a visible object, eye-base, and light, but one does not pay attention to the visible object, eye-consciousness cannot arise.

Similarly for ear-consciousness to arise, a sound, space, ear-base, ear-contact, and attention are necessary. If the sound does not impinge on the ear-base, ear-consciousness cannot arise. If there is a sound and ear-base, but it is blocked by a wall, ear-consciousness cannot arise. Even if there is a sound, ear-base, and space, but one does not pay attention to the sound, ear-consciousness cannot arise. So, besides the coming together of various causes and conditions, there is nothing associated with

our sense activities or the act of cognition that one can call a self or soul, and no one who is exercising control over this process.

Eye-consciousness, which performs the function of seeing, is not a self. The Buddha said:

**“If anyone says, ‘Eye-consciousness is self,’ that is not tenable. The rise and fall of eye-consciousness are discerned, and since its rise and fall are discerned, it would follow: ‘Myself rises and falls.’ That is why it is not tenable for anyone to say, ‘The eye is self.’”**  
(MN 148)

Thus, the eye-consciousness is not self. The same applies to other sense-consciousnesses.

Then, how does one develop the wrong view of a self or an identity? Consciousness occurs in a series of cognitive processes one after the other. Unable to break down the compactness of continuity (*santati-ghana*) of consciousness and see the individual consciousnesses of this ever-unfolding process, we think there is just one consciousness, and that this same consciousness performs all our actions of seeing, hearing, tasting, thinking, experiencing the result of actions, and so on. During Buddha’s time, there was a monk called Sāti, who held this wrong view that the same consciousness wandered through the round of rebirths. The Buddha reprimanded him and preached a discourse to him on dependently arisen consciousness (MN 38).

We must understand that when eye-consciousness ceases, it cannot re-arise as ear-consciousness or nose-consciousness. When ear-consciousness ceases, it cannot arise as nose-consciousness or tongue-consciousness. The same is true of all the other consciousnesses. To say that the same consciousness sees, then later hears, smells, or tastes is wrong view.

Once this wrong perception of self is developed, it establishes itself very firmly, and consequently, one has to exert great effort to remove this wrong view. To see consciousness in its true state, we have to be able to analyze the mind with enough clarity so as to: [1] discern the different individual consciousness-moments that make up the stream of consciousness, and [2] understand that each consciousness can take only one sense-object and cannot multi-task in the way that we previously imagined. And the only way to accomplish this is through the development of wisdom based on concentration.

When each consciousness-moment is examined with concentration and wisdom, one realizes that consciousness is like clouds passing in the sky, without any enduring substance or nature. If we can see these phenomena as they really are, our vision is called right view and is void of anything that can be called a permanent “self.”

# KARMA AND ITS RESULT

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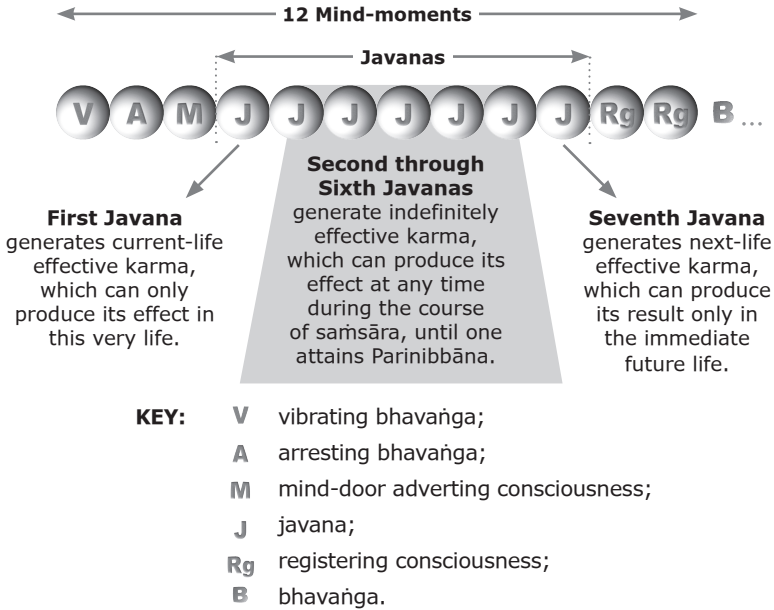
**K**arma means volitional action. When throwing a ball at the wall, the ball rebounds. Throwing the ball at the wall is karma, the ball rebounding and hitting you is karma's result. There is a gap of time for the karmic effects to take place.

I

## KARMA BY TIME OF RIPENING

We have mentioned that each *javana* in the mind-door leaves its karmic potency. There are four kinds of karma with respect to the timing of the result:

1. **Current-life Effective Karma**
2. **Next-life Effective Karma**
3. **Indefinitely Effective Karma**
4. **Defunct Karma**



**CHART 6: Mind-Door Cognitive Process — Each javana generates its own karmic potency**

## 1 CURRENT-LIFE EFFECTIVE KARMA (*diṭṭhadhammavedanīyakamma*)

The mind-door cognitive process, like the five-door cognitive process, contains a series of seven *javanas*; each is the same type of wholesome consciousness or unwholesome consciousness, running over the same object. The first *javana* is the weakest one, because of lack of repetition prior to it. It generates current-life effective karma, which can produce its result in the current life only (if it meets the proper supporting conditions). If it does not produce its result in this life, it becomes defunct karma. At the time of the Buddha, Mallikā, the daughter of a garland maker, joyfully offered all her food to the Buddha when she saw him coming on alms round. Because of this wholesome karma, she

became the Queen of Kosala on that very same day.<sup>1</sup> This karma, which was generated by the first *javana*, produced its effect in the same life, in the same continuity of mind and matter.

There are many examples of current-life effective karma producing an obvious result in one's life. Many generous Buddhist devotees told me that since they started performing charity, their businesses have become prosperous and they have gotten back more money than they gave away. As Buddha said, generosity begets wealth. Those who frequently practice loving-kindness meditation become very happy people, loved by many. Their complexion becomes radiant, they sleep well and wake up well without having to depend on sleeping pills. This is the result of current-life effective karma.

## 2 NEXT-LIFE EFFECTIVE KARMA

*(upapajjavedaniya kamma)*

The seventh or last *javana* is the second weakest, because the karmic force has faded. However, with the reinforcement by repetition of the previous six *javanas*, this seventh *javana* is able to generate next-life effective karma, which can produce its result in the immediate future life if it meets with the right conditions. If it cannot produce its result in the next life, it becomes defunct karma.

At Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, one of the meditators traced his mind and matter back to his immediate past life. With insight knowledge, he saw he had been an elephant who at some point in that life had offered a lotus flower at a pagoda. At the time of his offering, countless wholesome mind-door *javanas* arose

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1 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

and passed away successively. Out of all these many trillions of wholesome *javanas*, only one seventh-stage *javana* was able to generate the next-life effective karma that produced his rebirth-consciousness as a human being in his current life.

### 3 INDEFINITELY EFFECTIVE KARMA

*(aparāpariyavedanīya kamma)*

The second through sixth *javanas* are the most powerful, owing to reinforcement by repetition. These *javanas* generate indefinitely effective karma, which can produce its result from the second future life onward, whenever the conditions for the ripening of that karma are fulfilled. When that ripening occurs, it will produce mind and matter at the rebirth-linking moment, regardless of how long that ripening takes. As long as that karma does not give its result, its force will underlie the continuity of mind and matter. Such karma never becomes defunct as long as the rounds of rebirth go on. Not even a Buddha or an *Arahant* is free from experiencing its result. Only at the time of one's final cessation (*Parinibbāna*) is the karmic potency of those previous *javanas* finally extinguished.

Take, for example, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, who was one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, and foremost in psychic power. In one of his previous lives, he beat his blind parents to death. Because of that heavy unwholesome karma, he was reborn in hell and suffered there for millions of years. When the karma that brought him to hell had finally expired, he was reborn as a human being for two hundred successive lifetimes, dying each time as a result of having his skull crushed.



In his last birth, a gang of bandits was hired to kill him in order to tarnish the reputation of the Buddha. Using his psychic powers, Mahā Moggallāna was able to escape many times, but finally, due to the ripening of his past unwholesome karma, he lost his psychic powers and was unable to escape. The bandits entered his meditation hut, knocked him down, and “pounded his bones until they were as small as grains of rice.” But still he was not dead. After being beaten, he was able to resume his psychic powers, reassemble his body and appear before the Buddha, in order to pay his last respects. Then he went to Kālasia and entered into final Nirvana. Only at the time of his *Parinibbāna* was he finally freed from the balance of his previously accumulated karma. How fearsome and dreadful is the result of unwholesome karma! With this understanding, one should try to avoid committing any unwholesome karma, which may result in painful consequences that are indeed hard to endure.

In another story, during the Buddha’s time, a monk named Cakkhupāla became an *Arahant*, but afterwards became blind. Some people asked the Buddha the cause of his blindness. The Buddha told them that in a past life, this monk had been a physician. A woman asked him to restore her eyesight, promising that if he could restore it, she and her children would become his servants. His remedy actually worked, but the woman was unwilling to keep her promise and told him that her eyesight was getting worse. Prompted by anger, he gave her a “remedy” that permanently blinded her. Due to that evil action, he lost his eyesight for many lifetimes, even in his last life, after becoming an *Arahant*.<sup>2</sup> This is how the second through the sixth *jāvanas*

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2 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

generate indefinitely effective karma during the course of the rounds of rebirth, until the attainment of *Parinibbāna*. From this, we can see that defilements are our greatest enemy. As long as we are still subject to greed, anger, and delusion, we will continue to commit unwholesome deeds and experience their painful results. Only when we conquer our own defilements do we conquer the ultimate foe.

I would like to quote another true experience of a female meditator at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. When she was meditating on dependent origination and reached the knowledge of discerning cause and condition, she was able to trace from her most recent past life to her fourteenth past life. At that time, she was a brave and fearless man, a Commander in Chief of the army. This Commander in Chief had killed thousands of people. Nevertheless, after many years, he felt disgusted with the countless killings. One day when passing by a village, the Commander saw a group of women happily plucking flowers. They were so full of joy. That incident caused him to think that life as a woman must be much happier than life as a man. He therefore had an inclination to become a woman. Despite the previous cruel actions, the Commander was a faithful, caring son who always took good care of his aged mother. Before his death, he told his wife to continue taking care of her. Owing to the good volition of this last thought, his bad karmas of killing found no opportunity to ripen. Instead, his good karma ripened first and produced his life as a human being. After his death, he was born as a happy village woman as he had wished.

You may ask, didn't he have to pay for his many killings? Yes, he did! At the time when she was a village woman, she fell in love with a poor young man. This was much against her mother's wishes, as she wanted her to marry a wealthy man, and consequently her mother insulted her in many ways. Due to extreme humiliation, the young village woman harbored ill-will and committed suicide. Hence, the karma of killings while being the Commander bore fruit and cut short her life.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of her death, her last thought was an unwholesome thought of hatred. Her past karma of killing many human beings met with the right conditions to produce a bad result. She was cast into hell in her next existence. As a hell being, she was punished ruthlessly by being battered with an iron bar and her body was "splintered into pieces." She suffered and was tormented for a long time. During her meditation in her current life she could see clearly that her karma of killing as the Commander had resulted in a bitter atonement. Having passed through the worst of the consequences, she was next reborn as a pig. The fate of a pig would be none other than mercilessly waiting to be slaughtered, just as the Commander had done to others in a previous life. At the end of her life as a pig, as the bad karma was still operating, she was reborn as a mouse. The same karma will continue to produce its result in various ways when conditions are fulfilled. Such karma is called indefinitely effective karma, generated by the second to sixth *javanas*.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the law of karma, when the result of killing ripens, it will produce rebirth consciousness in the four lower realms. But if instead a good karma ripens at the time of death, one will be reborn in the happy realm as a human being; however, that unwholesome karma of killing will make the life short.



#### 4 DEFUNCT KARMA

*(ahosi kamma)*

If current-life effective karma and next-life effective karma do not produce their effect according to their own time, they become defunct karma or non-operative karma, but this is not true for indefinitely effective karma.

You may wonder why an action that is performed only once does not simply produce its effects only once, but instead does so over incalculable lifetimes. This is because of the repetition and reinforcement of trillions of second to sixth *javana* moments. Therefore, to understand the workings of karma, it is necessary to understand the workings of the mind.

As the Buddha states in the DHAMMAPADA, verse one:

**“Mind is the forerunner of states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the ox. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one’s shadow that never leaves.”**

Due to the many different types of wholesome and unwholesome consciousness, a diversity of karma and its results are experienced by all beings. We should not think lightly of evil. Even if we perform a bad action only once, it is able to produce its effect countless times during the course of the rounds of rebirth. Consequently, one may have to undergo painful results for a long time. The same is true for a good action one performs: it is able to produce its good effects countless times.

*"Mind delights in evil"* says the DHAMMAPADA. Just as water naturally flows from the mountains down to lower places, so it is the untrained mind has a tendency to flow in the direction of evil. If we do not want to undergo painful results, we have to make a strong effort to prevent unwholesome mental states from arising and to cultivate more wholesome mental states. Only when we are able to see the danger in such mental states as anger, craving, jealousy, conceit, avarice, selfishness, and cruelty, and to see the security in such mental states as faith, shame of wrongdoing, generosity, kindness, appreciative joy, compassion, patience, tolerance, and wisdom, will we be willing to make the necessary effort.

One should know that wholesome mental states not only enable us to abide in comfort and happiness during our many lifetimes, but also to interact and assist others in a trusting, safe, protective manner, making the world a happier place to live. Indeed, such virtues will ultimately lay the foundation for our journey to liberation.

II

## FOURFOLD RIGHT EFFORT

Thus, we can see that Right Effort is a necessary prerequisite for the development of virtue. Right Effort is fourfold:

1. **The Effort to Prevent**
2. **The Effort to Discard**
3. **The Effort to Develop**
4. **The Effort to Maintain**

### 1 THE EFFORT TO PREVENT

#### THE ARISING OF UNARISEN EVIL

Unarisen evil includes any unwholesome course of action that one might perform at a future time, such as killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, taking intoxicants, etc. One can prevent the arising of unarisen evil by observing the five training rules<sup>4</sup> and by guarding the five sense-doors, since unwholesome thoughts are frequently associated with our reaction to sense-objects.

In the discourse on THE SIMILE OF THE TORTOISE (SN 35.240), the Buddha advises us how to avoid evil by guarding our sense-doors. A tortoise was searching for food along the bank of a river one evening. On that same evening, a jackal was also searching

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<sup>4</sup> The five training rules: [1] abstaining from killing, [2] abstaining from taking what has not been given, [3] abstaining from sexual misconduct, [4] abstaining from telling lies, and [5] abstaining from taking intoxicants.

for food at the same place. When the tortoise saw the jackal in the distance searching for food, it drew its limbs and neck inside its shell and passed the time keeping still and silent. The jackal had also seen the tortoise, so he approached and waited close by, thinking, “When this tortoise extends one or another of its limbs or its neck, I will grab it right on the spot, pull it out, and eat it.” However, the tortoise did not extend its limbs or neck outside the shell and the jackal finally lost interest and departed.

Defilements, like the jackal, are continually waiting close by for an opportunity to grab our mind through one of the unguarded sense-doors. How can one guard one’s sense-doors? By fixing the mind on a meditation object or being mindful of what is happening in our body and mind at all times. When the mind thus engages in the meditation object, the five sense-doors are closed, like the tortoise with its limbs withdrawn, and defilements are kept at bay. Instead of unwholesome consciousness, a series of countless wholesome consciousnesses will arise and leave behind an incalculable wholesome karmic force in the mental stream.

## **2 THE EFFORT TO DISCARD EVIL THAT HAS ALREADY ARISEN**

When evils have arisen in the mind, we should arouse the effort to discard them. In the discourse on *THE REMOVAL OF DISTRACTING THOUGHTS (MN 20)*, the Buddha describes five ways to remove evil thoughts that have already arisen:

1. When unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hate, and delusion arise, one should give attention to the opposite

mental state, connected with the wholesome. For example, when thoughts of desire for the opposite sex arise, one should meditate on the impurity or repulsiveness of that person's body. How can we do this? In the SATIPAṬṬHĀNA SUTTA (THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS) (MN 10) the Buddha instructs us to review this body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the head, enclosed by skin, and full of many kinds of impurities, such as: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membrane, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal discharge, synovial fluid, and urine. Once our attention reaches the urine of the person one is attracted to, one's desire for them will probably disappear. The purpose of paying attention to the impurity of each of these 32 parts of the other person's body is to develop a strong sense of repulsiveness so as to let go of our desire for their physical attributes. If one contemplates one's own 32 parts in the same way, one is also able to remove thoughts of attachment to one's own body.

Another way to dispel the unwholesome thoughts connected with lust is through development of the perception of repulsiveness using skeleton meditation. When I was in Malaysia, a Deputy Minister who was a good Buddhist approached me and asked me for spiritual help. He told me very often when he went for a haircut, the charming hair stylists wearing very short skirts would move around in front of him. His mind would be beset by lustful thoughts. Unwilling to break his morality, he abstained from

performing sexual misconduct with the stylists but admitted it was a hard struggle. I recommended he use skeleton meditation and taught him to look at the image of a skeleton first, then holding the perception of the repulsiveness of the skeleton in his mind, for him to mentally note: “repulsiveness, repulsiveness...” or “skeleton, skeleton....” Then, once the perception of the skeleton is firmly established in the mind through persistent effort, he should project that perception of skeleton onto the stylists. I never thought he would take my words seriously! Two years later, when we met again, he was extremely delighted. He told me now when he sees the hair stylists, they are mere skeletons moving about. He could now enjoy his haircut without feeling lust.

This skeleton meditation was frequently practiced by the ancient monks. In Sri Lanka, there was a monk called Tissa, who habitually practiced skeleton meditation. One day, while going on alms round, he heard a woman’s laughter and looked up. As he was practicing skeleton meditation at that time, all he saw was her set of teeth. By force of habitual practice, he quickly contemplated externally her teeth as part of her skeleton, then contemplated internally his own skeleton, and he achieved the first *jhāna*. After that, he proceeded to *vipassanā* and attained *Arahantship* on the spot. A few minutes later, her husband came along in search of his wife, and asked the monk if he had seen a beautiful woman walk by. Venerable Tissa replied that what he had seen walking by was not a woman, but only a skeleton. If Venerable Tissa had not kept skeleton meditation in his mind, he might have been beset by lust in response to the woman’s enticing laughter.

Another example of skeleton meditation was related to me by an Italian meditator at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. One day, she went out to purchase something at the market. While she was there, she continued to contemplate the perception of repulsiveness of the skeleton, and her perception of skeleton was so strong that all she could see were skeletons walking about in the street. This may sound impossible to you, but it's true. Try it out for yourself!

When greed arises for inanimate objects, one can contemplate the impermanence of those objects. If even the waters of the great oceans will one day dry up and vanish, and the majestic mountains will one day crumble and disappear, how much more so is this true of our home, car, money, jewelry, and clothing, which last only for a brief moment by comparison. Thus, by contemplating impermanence, one can remove attachment to objects and reduce one's possessiveness.

When thoughts of hatred arise towards persons whom we do not like, we can replace anger with thoughts of loving-kindness, wishing others to be well, happy, and peaceful. Two mind moments cannot arise at the same time, so when the mind is engaged in sending thoughts of loving-kindness, anger finds no opportunity to creep in.

Radiating loving-kindness to one's enemy may appear difficult for someone who has not yet mastered their mind. They may end up in their loving-kindness meditation wishing to give their enemy a blow! If loving-kindness meditation does not work, there are other ways to overcome anger. One

can try to divide the object of our anger into 32 parts. How? When one is angry with someone, what is it one is angry with? Is it the person's head hairs one is angry with? Or bones or snot? Or is it the person's feces one is angry with? Alternatively, one can develop understanding of the body as composed of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. Is it the earth-element in his body one is angry with, or the water-element, or the fire-element, or the wind-element? Or when viewing the person using the ultimate truth of five aggregates, which of the five aggregates is one angry with? Is it the materiality aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the formations aggregate, or the consciousness aggregate? If one can resolve the object of one's anger in terms of the ultimate truth as elements or the five aggregates, not a being or person, one's anger gains no foothold, like a painting in the air.

Further still, we can take the aversive situation as an opportunity to contemplate impermanence, as clearly presented by the Venerable Sāriputta in *The GREAT DISCOURSE ON THE SIMILE OF THE ELEPHANT'S FOOTPRINT (MN 28)*. The Venerable Sāriputta advises us to contemplate the impermanence of painful feeling when one is abused or reviled. One sees that painful feeling is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on ear-contact. Contact is the cause, painful feeling is the effect. They are mere cause and effect. What is dependently arisen is impermanent. Then one sees that contact is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, momentary



anger (volition) is impermanent, and consciousness of knowing the abusive sound is also impermanent, and one is able to turn one's painful feelings into penetrative wisdom. At that time, countless mind-door processes associated with insight knowledge will arise, leaving behind powerful wholesome karmic potency in the stream of consciousness. If one overcomes defilements through the methods above, this will bring great joy, satisfaction, and confidence in one's ability to progress on the path.

2. If, however, one fails to achieve the objective by using the first method, and unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hatred, and delusion are still present in the mind, one can examine the danger in these thoughts: "These thoughts are unwholesome, they are reprehensible, and are productive of painful results for uncountable lifetimes according to the law of karma." For example, when getting angry, one should reproach oneself thus: "By getting angry, am I not like a man who wants to hit another and instead picks up a burning ember or a piece of excrement and by doing so first burns myself or makes myself stink? Oh! Am I not a foolish person?"
3. If unwholesome thoughts continue to dominate the mind, one can try to forget these thoughts and not pay any attention to them, just like people do when they do not want to see something. The nicest way of doing this is to close one's eyes or move one's attention to another more beneficial object.
4. If, however, while trying to forget unwholesome thoughts they continue to arise, one can inquire into the cause of those

unwholesome thoughts. As one continues inquiring, the flow of unwholesome thoughts may slacken and eventually cease.

5. If, after inquiring into the causes of the unwholesome thoughts, those thoughts continue to arise, Buddha then admonishes that with teeth clenched and the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, one should beat down, constrain, and crush the unwholesome mind with the wholesome mind.

To practice the teachings of the Buddha, one engages in a momentous battle within. Greed, anger, and delusion are our prime enemies. Our main concern is to conquer them, and not to let them extend to verbal and physical actions which harm ourselves and others. As the Buddha states in the DHAMMAPADA:

**“Whatever harm an enemy may do to his enemy... a wrongly directed mind can do far greater harm.”**

If we conquer our own greed, hatred, conceit, jealousy, stinginess, worry, delusion, and cruelty, who else can bring us harm? To remain unshaken under any circumstance, this is true freedom of the heart.

### **3 THE EFFORT TO AROUSE UNARISEN WHOLESOME STATES**

Human beings have great potential to cultivate wholesome states of mind. Unarisen wholesome states may include the basic task of attending to our parents and elders, observing the five or eight precepts, giving and sharing what one has with the needy, radiating love and compassion for others, and so on. In essence, one can say that arousing Right Effort consists of arousing

the previously unarisen factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, summarized as the threefold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom. If one has not yet undertaken some aspects of the threefold training, one should arouse the effort to do so, together with the understanding of its benefit.

#### **4 THE EFFORT TO DEVELOP AND BRING TO PERFECTION THE WHOLESOME STATES THAT HAVE ALREADY ARISEN**

Once one arouses the effort to undertake the threefold training, one then applies persistent effort until one's morality becomes impeccable, concentration is well established, and wisdom is fully matured.

As we know, one good action can multiply the effects. Having Right Effort, one is like a smart investor who invests a small amount of money and eventually reaps a fortune. A single ear of corn, when properly cultivated and tended, eventually produces many fields of corn. We reap what we sow. By guarding our actions in the present moment, the future will be full of hope and happiness.

III

CONCLUSION

Through this analysis, one comes to understand how wholesome and unwholesome consciousness operates and influences our present life and lives thereafter.

This understanding helps us unravel the mystery of mind and its mental processes, which will continue to affect us as long as we remain in the cycle of birth and death.

We are now ready to examine the second ultimate reality, mental factors.



## MENTAL FACTORS

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I

**MENTAL FACTORS AND  
CONSCIOUSNESS CO-ARISE  
TO FORM “MIND”**

Consciousness, the first ultimate reality, cannot arise without the second ultimate reality, mental factors. They must co-arise, one always accompanying the other. This relationship, according to the law of Conditional Relations (*Paṭṭhāna*), is called “association relation” (*sampayutta paccayo*).

These two realities function interdependently. Nevertheless, consciousness is said to be the forerunner, with mental factors assisting in the cognition of the object. The combination of both is called “mind” (*nāma*). The relationship between consciousness and mental factors is compared to that of a king and his royal ministers: a king does not travel alone but always travels accompanied by ministers. The ministers assist the king in governing the country. Although consciousness functions as the forerunner of mental factors, its characteristic is only pure awareness of an object. In other words, it cannot by itself be wholesome or unwholesome. It only becomes so depending on its associated mental factors. In chapter one, we classified consciousness into wholesome and unwholesome based on its roots, nevertheless, since consciousness and mental factors must co-arise, the wholesomeness of consciousness is, in fact, referring to its associated wholesome mental factors. Similarly, this applies to unwholesome consciousness and its associated unwholesome mental factors.



Mental factors may be compared to different dyes and consciousness to clear water. When yellow dye is put in clear water, the water becomes bright and golden. Black dye makes it become as dark and dull as dross. Similarly, mental factors influence the mind to become either luminous or benighted, profitable or unprofitable, wieldy or unwieldy, compassionate or cruel, beautiful or ugly. Therefore, to cultivate good and avoid wrongdoing, it is essential to study the different types of mental factors and their characteristics.

Defilements arise in the form of mental factors. They always arise owing to unwise attention. By studying and understanding their characteristics, we can learn to stop them by applying Right Effort.

On the other hand, when beautiful mental factors such as mindfulness, wisdom, effort, non-hatred or compassion arise, if we recognize them through wise attention, we can learn how to develop them to a higher degree.

## II

### FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF MENTAL FACTORS

Mental factors associated with a specific consciousness arise in one mind-moment, perform their specific functions, and perish along with that consciousness. These mental factors have four characteristics:

## MENTAL FACTORS

1. They arise together with consciousness (*ekuppāda*).
2. They cease together with consciousness (*ekanirodha*).
3. They take the same object as consciousness (*ekālambaṇa*).  
For example, if eye-consciousness takes a visible object then the associated mental factors must take that same object.
4. They have the same base as consciousness (*ekavatthuka*).  
If eye-consciousness arises dependent on the eye-base then the mental factors must also arise dependent on the eye-base.

### III

## FIFTY-TWO MENTAL FACTORS

The ABHIDHAMMA lists 52 mental factors, which can be divided into four groups:

1. **7 Universals** (*sabbacittasādhāraṇa*)
2. **6 Occasionals** (*pakiṇṇaka*)
3. **14 Unwholesome Mental Factors** (*akusalacetasika*)
4. **25 Beautiful Mental Factors** (*sobhaṇacetasika*)

## IV

## SEVEN UNIVERSALS

1. **Contact (*phassa*):** Because it touches it is contact. Contact mentally “touches” the object of perception that has appeared, initiating the entire cognitive process. It manifests as the coming together of consciousness, a sense-object, and the corresponding sense-sensitivity. Contact is primarily a mental factor rather than a physical one. For example, when we see someone eating pineapple, we may start to salivate as if we were actually able to taste it even though there is no physical contact between pineapple and tongue.
2. **Feeling (*vedanā*):** Feeling experiences the “taste” of the object, whether desirable or undesirable. The feeling that experiences the desirable aspect of the object is called pleasant feeling (*sukha-vedanā*). The feeling that experiences the undesirable aspect of the object is called unpleasant feeling (*dukkha-vedanā*). The feeling experienced with objects that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant is called neutral feeling (*upekkhā-vedanā*). There is no “I,” no person who feels. Rather, feeling itself “feels” the desirability and undesirability of objects.
3. **Perception (*saññā*):** Perception perceives the qualities of an object and produces a sign regarding those qualities so as to be able to recognize or perceive them again in the future. For example, the first time a bird is seen, its wings and flight are noted. The wings and flight become conditions for

recognizing it as a bird when it is seen again. Perception also takes wrong to be right. Owing to perverted or distorted perception (*saññā vipallāsa*), humans perceive whatever phenomena that arise to be permanent, satisfactory, and a manifestation of self. Once phenomena are perceived in a distorted manner, the misperception is imprinted deeply in the mind and becomes very difficult to correct. Therefore, perception becomes one of the principal factors prolonging *samsāra*, the cycle of repeated births.

4. **Volition (*cetanā*):** Volition wills or intends, thereby accumulating karma. The Buddha explained why he assigned volition, among the 50 mental formations, the key responsibility:

**“It is volition I call karma, for having willed, one performs an action through body, speech, or mind.”**

It is volition that imparts to actions a moral quality, an underlying motivation that is wholesome or unwholesome, and the ability to bring about pleasant or unpleasant results. Volition also organizes and urges its associated mental factors into acting on an object. For example, when consciousness is aware of an object, volition is what urges contact to perform its function of being impinged upon by the object; it urges perception to make a mark of the object; it urges feeling to enjoy or experience the sensation of the object; it urges other associated mental factors to perform their respective functions thoroughly in regard to the object. The marshaling force that urges and prompts consciousness and mental factors to engage together on the object is none other than volition.

Thus, volition has two tasks. First, it accomplishes its own function of accumulating karma (whenever it associates with wholesome or unwholesome consciousness). Second, it urges its associated mental factors to do their job. Volition is like a general in battle who not only himself fights but leads an army to fight as well. Moreover, when volition is weak, karma is weak; when it is strong, karma is strong, as in the story of Sāmāvati and Māgandiyā. This tale demonstrates how strong volition from a previous life can give rise to a corresponding result in a separate life.

Queen Sāmāvati, the wife of King Udena, was a faithful disciple of the Buddha and a stream-enterer. She had such a great love of beings that she was able to suffuse them with loving-kindness and compassion. In fact, among the Buddha's female lay disciples, she was foremost in extending loving-kindness.

Queen Māgandiyā, King Udena's other wife, harbored a deep resentment towards the Buddha and a bitterness towards Sāmāvati for being his pious disciple. Prompted by hatred, she decided to kill Sāmāvati by setting ablaze her palace and making it look like an accident. The entire palace was razed to the ground. All of the women residing there, including Sāmāvati, were burned to death.

How could a kindhearted and faithful disciple meet with such a terrible death? The Buddha was asked and explained that Sāmāvati had committed a grave deed many lifetimes before, when she was queen of Benares. She had just finished bathing in the river with her ladies-in-waiting and was

feeling cold. She asked that a bush be burned to provide some warmth. After the bush had burned out, however, it was discovered that a Paccekabuddha had been meditating inside the bush. They were unaware that he was completely unharmed, as he was in a deep concentration known as the attainment of cessation, which completely protected him. Because it was simply an unintentional mistake, no unwholesome karma was produced.

However, she and her entourage did not know that he was unharmed by virtue of his impenetrable meditation. They feared they would be blamed for lighting a fire without taking the proper precautions. Therefore, to get rid of the evidence, they gathered more kindling, placed it around his body, poured oil over him, and set him ablaze. This time they set fire to him with intention, and thus accumulated karma in the process. Many unwholesome *javanas* were produced in their mental streams, which left behind the potential for very painful results in the future.

Any *Arahant* who enters into the attainment of cessation cannot be killed during that attainment. However, *Sāmāvati*'s unskillful intention of attempting to murder had to bear fruit. Again, in the present life, her past karma found the opportunity to produce its result.

With the sole exception of those who attain final cessation, no one can escape the ripening of unwholesome karma. *Māgandiyā* also had to bear the fruit of the unwholesome karma of killing *Sāmāvati* and the others when it was discovered that she was the culprit. King Udena, who was a

very volatile monarch, devised a clever ruse to establish her guilt. He then angrily ordered the torture and execution of Māgandiyā and her relatives, who were complicit in the crime. This cruelty was simply a foretaste of the results they would meet with in the future. He had them burned alive in public, then had the earth plowed under to destroy every remaining trace of their ashes.

The way she had treated others came back to her. This was current-life effective karma since it ripened in the same life. She not only died with intense pain but was reborn in a great hell to exhaust the unwholesome karma by experiencing even greater torment. This was next-life effective karma bearing its result in the following birth. Uncountable *javanas* of indefinitely-effective karma generated by the second to the sixth *javanas* may still lie dormant in her mental stream waiting for the right conditions to cause that karma to ripen and cause her still further suffering.

This is why volition is karma. Having willed, one performs an action through body, speech, or mind. When volition is forceful, the action is forceful. Whether wholesome or unwholesome, if the karma is strong, the result is heavy.

5. **One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*):** One-pointedness unifies the mind on the object by collecting it there. It is with the help of one-pointedness that consciousness can be aware of an object continuously and for an extended period of time. When developed, it becomes concentration. One-pointedness is one of the *jhāna* factors in each of the five *jhānas*. It opposes distraction. It is regarded as mental steadiness likened to

the steadiness of a lamp flame when there is no wind. One-pointedness accompanies every consciousness. Its quality is different when it arises with different consciousnesses. When it accompanies unwholesome consciousness, it is called “wrong concentration.” When it accompanies wholesome consciousness, it is called “right concentration.” Although both are mental factors of one-pointedness, their qualities are different. There are many degrees of concentration — neighborhood, first *jhāna*, second *jhāna*, and so forth.

6. **Life-faculty (*jīvitindriya*):** Life-faculty sustains the vitality of consciousness and mental factors in each mind-moment. Without it, they cease before the task of knowing the object is complete. Consciousness and mental factors are sustained by life-faculty just as lotus flowers are sustained by water. They can actively function because of life-faculty.
7. **Attention (*manasikāra*):** Attention adverts, turning towards and directing the mind to the object. It is only because of the power of attention that an object is constantly present in the mind.

These seven universals arise with every consciousness, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, resultant or functional. For without these mental factors, awareness of an object would be impossible.



## SIX OCCASIONALS

1. **Initial application of mind (*vitakka*)** places the mind on the object.
2. **Sustained application of mind (*vicāra*)** repeatedly places the mind on the object. After *vitakka* has placed the mind on the object, *vicāra* holds the mind in place.
3. **Decision (*adhimokkha*)** has the characteristic of conviction, an unwavering state of mind that determines how volition proceeds by adhering to a particular course of action. It determines whether to engage in skillful deeds such as giving, observing precepts, listening to the Dharma, and so on, or unskillful ones such as lying, sexual misconduct, idly chatting, and so on. It is often compared to a stone pillar owing to its unshakeable resolve with regard to the object.
4. **Energy (*vīriya*)** is the state of one who is vigorous. Its characteristic is exertion, supporting, and marshaling. As an old house stands when supported by new pillars, so a diligent meditator does not fall away from meditation when supported by energy. It does not allow its associated states to recede or retreat by uplifting them so that they will not collapse. Its proximate cause is a sense of urgency born of such motivating factors as recollecting birth, aging, and death. When well initiated, it should be regarded as the root of all achievements.

5. **Joy or Rapture (*pīti*)** is a very pleasurable interest in the object such that the mind is satisfied and delighted. Joy refreshes consciousness and its associated mental factors. It is similar to a weary traveler through a desert coming across water, and feeling delight and satisfaction on account of it. Its function is to pervade and thrill. Its manifestation is evident when a meditator develops concentration and experiences a lightness of body, as if the body were being lifted into the air.
6. **Desire (*chanda*)** is the proclivity or wish to act or achieve some result. It can be either wholesome or unwholesome, whereas greed is only unwholesome. For example, when one has the proclivity to realize Nirvana, or to become a chief disciple like Venerable Sāriputta, a Buddha, a ruler, a rich person, a deva, a monastic, a hermit, or to give charity, observe precepts, do meritorious deeds, and so on — all such wishes are its manifestation. When it is developed to the highest degree, it becomes one of the four means of accomplishment (*iddhipāda*).

One example of it occurred at the time of the Buddha. Pakkusāti, the King of Takkasilā, owing to a strong desire to realize the Dharma, abandoned his kingdom, put on the yellow robe, and roamed in search of the Buddha. Another example is the spreading of Buddhism to the West. When Westerners discover the precious teachings of the Buddha, many develop a strong desire to practice. They do so on their own or join meditation centers. If the desire is strong enough, they may even ordain as a monastic and move to a forest monastery in Asia, Europe, or America.

These six occasional mental factors can only arise with certain types of consciousness, so they are not universal. For example, initial application and sustained application are excluded from the third and higher *jhāna* consciousnesses because of their grossness. Decision is excluded from a doubting consciousness because a decision cannot be made while the mind is obstructed by doubt. Joy is excluded from the fourth and higher *jhānas* because of its emotional quality. Desire is excluded from delusion-rooted consciousness. Desire here is a will to act, to achieve a purpose, but the two consciousnesses rooted in delusion are so dense that they exclude purposeful action.

The seven universals and six occasionals are ethically variable factors (*aññasamanā-cetasika*). They can become either wholesome or unwholesome depending on their associated consciousness. In wholesome consciousness they become wholesome; in unwholesome consciousness they become unwholesome; in resultant consciousness they become resultant; in functional consciousness they become functional.

VI

FOURTEEN UNWHOLESOME  
MENTAL FACTORS

The fourteen unwholesome mental factors can be divided into four unwholesome universals and ten unwholesome occasionals.

1 FOUR UNWHOLESOME UNIVERSALS

1. **Delusion (*moha*)** has the characteristic of mental blindness or non-knowing. Its function is to conceal the true nature of an object. It manifests as mental darkness that conceals the Four Noble Truths. The inability to discern between what is wholesome and unwholesome is a gross form of it.
2. **Shamelessness (*ahirika*)** is absence of disgust or revulsion at bodily and verbal misconduct. Just as a pig does not feel that it is loathsome to eat feces, so a person overcome by delusion does not feel shame when doing unwholesome deeds. When delusion arises, it leads to shamelessness. Even if the wise do wrong it is done shamelessly due to momentary delusion.
3. **Fearlessness of wrongdoing (*anottappa*)** is being unafraid of the consequences of committing unwholesome actions. Just as a moth attracted to a flame burns itself up, a person without moral dread is attracted to wrongdoing and suffers the consequences in this life and the future.

4. **Restlessness (*uddhacca*)** has the characteristic of being unsettled and disquieted, like water stirred up by wind. The mind is unable to settle on a single object but instead flits about here and there like a heap of ashes hit by a stone.

These four unwholesome universal mental factors arise together with a total of twelve types of unwholesome consciousness. Every unwholesome consciousness involves [1] mental blindness towards the danger inherent in misconduct, [2] a lack of shame about performing such deeds, [3] a lack of fear of the consequences of such deeds, and [4] an underlying current of restlessness.

## 2 TEN UNWHOLESOME OCCASIONALS

1. **Greed (*lobha*)** lusts for an object, grasps, and does not want to give it up. Its function is to stick, similar to the way meat sticks to a hot pan. Its proximate cause is seeing enjoyment in things that lead to bondage, such as pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects.

The nature of greed and attachment is powerfully illustrated by the simile of the monkey-trap: a hole just large enough for a monkey to slide its hand in is cut into a hollowed-out coconut. Sweet food is placed inside, and the coconut is then tied to a tree with a rope. Although the opening of the coconut is big enough for the monkey to put its extended hand in, it is not big enough to allow its fist to be pulled out. Attracted by the pleasant smell,

the monkey reaches in, grasps the food, and becomes trapped by its own clenched fist. It would immediately be freed *if it lets go*, but greed prevents it from opening its hand. The monkey-catcher easily captures it. The monkey needs only let go. In just the same way, living beings are caught in the cycle of births and deaths due to craving and attachment.

2. **Wrong View (*ditṭhi*)** has the characteristic of unwise interpretation, rooted in greed. Wrong view manifests as a variety of mistaken beliefs. One might adopt the view that self and others actually exist in an ultimate sense. With wrong view, one might believe that there is a creator of the world and universe when there is not. One might deduce that everything must persist (eternally) or perish (be annihilated) after death. Wrong view should be regarded as the most reprehensible of all unwholesome factors.
3. **Conceit (*māna*)** has the characteristic of haughtiness, rooted in greed. It is wrongly grasping mind and matter as “I” and forming ideas of superiority, equality, or inferiority according to caste, family, education, birth, or other marks. It is easy to fall prey to when one regards oneself as superior or equal to others. But how does an inferior person develop conceit? That person considers in the following way: “I am self-sufficient. Why should I show respect to others?” Conceit should be regarded as madness.

4. **Hatred (*dosa*)** is aversion, annoyance, irritation, resentment, and anger. It is a violent striking of the mind at an object, with a destructive element that burns oneself and others.
5. **Envy (*issā*)** is jealousy of others, wishing to have what they have, and manifests as a lack of appreciation for their success and achievement. Envy easily arises when one regards others as superior in beauty, education, wealth, or reputation. It is rooted in hatred.
6. **Avarice (*macchhariya*)** is the concealment of one's own success and wealth. Its function is not sharing achievements and wealth with others. Avarice also means wishing that others get nothing. It is rooted in hatred.
7. **Worry or Remorse (*kukkucca*)** consists of two kinds of regret one worries about, namely, over what has been done and has been left undone. For example, one may have killed, engaged in sexual misconduct, uttered false or harmful speech, or been heedless under the influence of intoxicants. Or one may have failed to practice virtue (abstention or restraint) or neglected to be generous when one had the means to give, or one may have neglected to care for one's parents when they were alive. No matter how much we worry or regret our past wrongs, such preoccupation will not help our condition or deliver us from unwelcome consequences. Therefore, it should be regarded as a form of slavery, rooted in hatred. If we let remorse obsess our mind, unwholesome consciousnesses will arise successively and repeatedly. It may even

recur in our mental stream during our dying moments, as happened to Queen Mallikā.

Shortly before her death Queen Mallikā, a great supporter of the Buddha, felt remorse as she kept recalling how she had passively been unfaithful to her husband with an animal. Unfortunately, this memory recurred just at her dying moment. As a result, she was reborn in hell for seven days. This is next-life effective karma, generated by the seventh *javana*. The king, grieving over her death, approached the Buddha, wanting to know where she had been reborn. Unwilling to tell the truth, and yet, as a fully enlightened being, unable to tell lies, the Buddha performed a feat of psychic power to make the king forget to ask this question for seven days. The unwholesome karma that Queen Mallikā had done was not very severe. So after only seven days, due to the fortunate ripening of Queen Mallikā's previously accrued good karma, she was reborn in one of the heavens.<sup>1</sup> Only then did Buddha tell the good news to the king.

The best way to overcome remorse is, of course, to refrain from unwholesome actions in the first place or, once they are done, by making a firm and decisive resolution never to perform the same misdeed again. If one's deeds are not too serious, it is possible to lessen their painful consequences by virtue of restraint, as happened with Aṅgulimāla.<sup>2</sup> Through the outrageous demands of a

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1 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

2 Ibid



jealous spiritual teacher, Aṅgulimāla killed 999 innocent people. The Buddha interceded out of compassion for this misguided man with so much potential to become enlightened going to waste, seeing that he was about to commit a heinous and weighty offense that would ruin him — matricide. Aṅgulimāla had a great deal of merit stored up even as he approached ruin. Realizing his faults, he was able to alter his course, giving up cruelty and choosing a completely different life course by becoming a monk under the Buddha. Thereafter, he practiced self-restraint and non-violence with determination, never again harming any living being even though he was insulted and assaulted by angry family members of those he had killed.

So diligent was his practice of meditation, together with keeping his remorse in check, that he achieved *Arahant* path and fruition knowledge. In that very life, he brought to an end the round of rebirths and was able to escape from the unimaginably painful results that would otherwise have awaited him in the future. In regard to the time of ripening of his next-life effective karma and indefinitely effective karmas, these now became defunct through the attainment of *Arahant* path knowledge. Nevertheless, he still had to face the maturing of current-life effective karma. This often happened during alms-round: he was frequently struck by sticks and stones causing serious injuries to his head. The Buddha urged him to bear these injuries, reminding him that this was simply the residual result of his previous deeds as a killer.

It is unwise to lament over good deeds left undone. After all, it is still possible to make amends. We can do wholesome things now! To live in regret only compounds our faults. Unrestrained worry or remorse is a tremendous hindrance, blocking our progress on the path.

8. **Sloth (*thīna*)** is sluggishness or dullness of consciousness towards an object. It has the characteristic of lacking power or driving force. It has the function of removing energy.
9. **Torpor (*middha*)** is sluggishness or dullness of mental factors. It has the characteristic of unwieldiness. It manifests as laziness or drowsiness.
10. **Doubt (*vicikicchā*)** is perplexity and indecisiveness, not believing what ought to be believed, such as the three-fold training in morality, concentration, and wisdom or the three guiding jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

These ten unwholesome occasionals arise with particular types of unwholesome consciousness, not with all of them. Wrong view and conceit, for example, are found only with consciousnesses rooted in greed, for they involve some degree of holding to the five aggregates as oneself. However, wrong view and conceit cannot coexist in the same consciousness-moment because the two display contrary qualities. Conceit arises in the mode of self-evaluation with regard to wealth, social status and beauty, while wrong view misapprehends there is eternal self when in actuality there is not.

Envy, avarice, and remorse are found only in consciousnesses rooted in hatred. But because they exhibit different qualities and take different objects, they only arise in different cognitive processes: envy involves resentment over the success of others; avarice involves disdain for others and an unwillingness to share one's property with them; remorse involves regret over what has been done or been left undone. Doubt is found solely in consciousnesses rooted in delusion.

These four unwholesome universals and ten unwholesome occasionals constitute the fourteen unwholesome mental factors that contaminate consciousness. Although they are few in number, they occur frequently in ordinary uninstructed worldlings (*puthujjana*). In Pāḷi, *puthujjana* means "produces many defilements" (*puthu kilese janetīti, puthujjano*). The untrained mind produces many defilements. It is easy to notice this as we read the newspaper. News about sensual pleasures, sexual abuse, rape, crime, fraud, war, violence, and so on dominate the headlines. How often are articles written about people who are kind, compassionate, helpful, or quietly charitable? How many headlines are there about people who are virtuous, concentrated, or mindful? These topics are so rare that one is tempted to believe that what is wholesome is going the way of the dodo.

If we examine our daily lives to see just how we spend our time, we will notice how often we are obsessed with and indulged in sensual pleasures. Most of us cannot live without distractions and base forms of entertainment like television, radio, sex, music, alcohol, and even perversions that boggle the mind with their cruelty and vulgarity.

Pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and sense impressions engender greed. Moreover, they leave behind a corresponding tendency in one's mental stream. Excessive indulgence in them causes one to have the same kind of temperament full of greed and lust in the present life, as well as the future. Certain people whose desires and selfish motives are not fulfilled turn to rage and violence. When such anger finds expression in words and actions, they engage in lying, slandering, sexual abuse, stealing, killing, and so on without mercy or compassion for the suffering being inflicted on others. So people caught in the whirlpool of greed, hatred, and delusion bring suffering on themselves as well as others.

One way to keep unwholesome mental factors from dominating our lives is by cultivating more beautiful mental factors. There are twenty-five of them. Although greater in number, they occur less frequently in ordinary uninstructed worldlings. By learning ABHIDHAMMA, we raise our awareness, and with right effort, increase that frequency. We can thereby increase our happiness and make the world a pleasant place to live.

VII

TWENTY-FIVE BEAUTIFUL  
MENTAL FACTORS

These Beautiful Mental Factors can be divided into four groups: nineteen beautiful universals, three abstinences, two illimitables, and one non-delusion.

1 NINETEEN BEAUTIFUL UNIVERSALS

1. **Faith (*saddhā*)** is “verifiable confidence” in what is virtuous and beneficial, believing in what ought to be believed, for example, believing in the efficacy of the workings of karma, the three trainings, and the three guiding jewels. Faith is compared to the hands of a man. A man without hands, entering a cave full of jewels, cannot grasp the jewels. Similarly a person of no faith cannot grasp the essence of the teachings. Faith has the ability to purify doubt. It is like a water-clearing gem which, when placed in churned up water, causes muddy impurities and sediments to settle out, leaving crystal clear water. In just the same way, as faith arises, hindrances are discarded, mental corruptions subside, and the mind becomes purified and undisturbed.

Faith’s proximate cause is hearing the good Dharma, which is necessary for the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment, stream-entry.

2. **Mindfulness (*sati*)** comes face to face with the object. It keeps the object in view. Mindfulness has the characteristic of sinking into the object rather than floating away. This difference can be likened to a stone and a pumpkin thrown in water. While the first sinks to the bottom, the other floats away. The experience of this difference becomes clear in concentration practice. Mindfulness makes the mind hold, and sink deeply into the breath when practicing mindfulness of breathing. Then concentration develops. Mindfulness is constant wakefulness and conscientiousness regarding good things, without neglecting or forgetting to perform acts of generosity, observing the precepts, regularly practicing concentration and insight, listening to the Dharma, and so on.

Mindfulness is purely a wholesome mental factor. Unlike wrong concentration and wrong view, there is no such thing as “wrong mindfulness.” It may be likened to a gatekeeper guarding the six sense-doors so that defilements cannot enter. It is unique among the five controlling faculties, for although it is necessary to balance faith with wisdom and to balance concentration with energy, mindfulness cannot be overdone. It is desirable under all circumstances: it protects the mind from becoming agitated due to excessive effort and from laziness due to excessive concentration. Because of its necessity under all circumstances, it is compared to salt as a seasoning in food, it is useful in all sauces. It is mindfulness that protects the object of meditation from being lost and keeps the mind of the meditator from straying to other subjects.

3. **Shame (*hiri*)** has the characteristic of disgust with bodily and verbal misconduct. By reflecting on the value of one's birth, reputation, education, social status, or age one feels ashamed at the prospect of wrongdoing. For example, a person born in a good family reflects, "I belong to a good family, so it is not fit and proper for me to steal or utter untrue or harsh words." Or a well-known person might reflect, "I am well respected by others, so if I engage in any wrongdoing like sexual misconduct, slander, or drunkenness, people will lose respect for me and even I will lose respect for myself." They reject what is unwholesome out of respect for themselves. They recoil from wrongdoing the way a feather shrinks from fire. Its proximate cause is self-respect.
4. **Fear of wrongdoing (*ottappa*)** has the characteristic of dreading or being fearful of wrongdoing. One considers the painful consequences of performing unskillful deeds, which may include self-blame, blame from others, punishment by the law, and future suffering in the four woeful planes. One might reflect, "If I engage in wrongdoing, I will be reproached or blamed by my parents and teachers. If my actions are revealed, I might be put in prison." By such reflection one refrains from such acts. Its proximate cause is respect of others.

A simile describes shame and fear of wrongdoing. If there were an iron rod heated at one end and smeared with feces at the other, one would not touch the end smeared with feces due to disgust, and would not touch the hot

end due to fear. So it is with shame and fear of wrongdoing. One may regard these two states as the “guardians of the world” insofar as they inhibit beings from engaging in unwholesome deeds. If humans develop these two beautiful qualities, the world would become a more beautiful and peaceful place to live. These two qualities are two of the seven noble treasures of a stream-enterer.<sup>3</sup>

5. **Non-greed (*alobha*)** has the characteristic of a lack of desire and non-adherence to an object. Just as a drop of water runs off a lotus petal without adhering to it, or a person having fallen into filth has no desire to stay in it, even so the mind does not adhere and attach to the object. Non-greed includes the positive aspects of generosity and renunciation. By giving away our valuables, we lessen our attachment to them. The ability to wisely renounce possessions, beloved family members, worldly pleasures, and to live peacefully in solitude, is a quality of renunciation based on non-greed.
6. **Non-hatred (*adosa*)** has the characteristic of a lack of ferocity, as exhibited by a good and gentle friend. It manifests as agreeableness, a quality that like the shimmering full moon is liked by everyone. Its positive side is forgiveness and loving-kindness. It is exemplified in the story of the seven-year-old novice of the Elder Tissa.

The Elder Tissa ordained an attendant, a seven-year-old boy. The elder taught him to contemplate the

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<sup>3</sup> The Seven Noble Treasures are faith, generosity, morality, shame regarding wrongdoing, fear of wrongdoing, learning, and wisdom.



impurity of the 32 parts of the body, which he did to great effect. For the instant the razor touched his hair, the boy became fully enlightened. Later, while traveling on a three-day journey, the novice and the elder were forced to occupy the same room. In order to keep the elder from committing a disciplinary offense of sleeping under the same roof with the novice, the novice sat up meditating the entire night. Because the elder was also concerned about the rule, he tossed a palm fan at the novice to chase him out of the room. Unfortunately, the handle of the fan accidentally struck the novice in the eye and put out his eye.

But the novice, wishing to spare his preceptor the remorse he would no doubt feel, did not tell him. Instead, covering his eye with one hand, he faithfully continued to perform his duties towards the elder. Only later did the elder discover what had really happened. He was deeply moved, bowing to the seven-year-old and asking forgiveness. The novice consoled him by saying, "You are not to be blamed in this matter, and neither am I. The round of existence alone is to be blamed for this." So long as the resultants of mind and body exist, the effect of past unwholesome karmas will take place.

With great remorse the elder related the story to the Buddha, explaining how the novice had even comforted him, cherishing neither anger nor resentment. The Buddha replied:

**"Monks, those who have rid themselves of the taints cherish neither anger nor hatred towards anyone. On the contrary, their senses and thoughts are in a state of calm."**

7. **Neutrality of Mind (*tatramajjhataā*)** is a mental attitude of balance, detachment, and impartiality. It has the characteristic of keeping consciousness and the mental factors on an even keel. It is a state of looking on with equanimity, like the charioteer looking on the horses progressing evenly along the path. When developed, neutrality of mind becomes equanimity, one of the Four Sublime Abidings. Equanimity is developed when one understands deeply that all have karma as their inheritance. Equanimity is different from indifference, which stems from a lack of sensitivity to the suffering of others.

The following twelve mental factors are divided into six pairs. In each pair, the former pertains to mental factors, the latter to consciousness.

8. **Tranquillity of the mental body (*kāyapassaddhi*)**  
 9. **Tranquillity of consciousness (*cittapassaddhi*)**

These two mental factors ensure the composure of consciousness and its associated mental factors so that they remain cool and at rest. They oppose the defilements of restlessness and worry, which create annoyance and agitation.

10. **Lightness of the mental body (*kāyalahutā*)**  
 11. **Lightness of consciousness (*cittalahutā*)**

These two mental factors block out the heaviness of consciousness and the associated mental factors caused by sloth and torpor.

**12. Malleability of the mental body (*kāyamudutā*)**

**13. Malleability of consciousness (*cittamudutā*)**

These two mental factors ensure pliancy of mind that overcomes rigidity of consciousness and mental factors caused by defilements, such as wrong view and conceit.

**14. Wieldiness of the mental body (*kāyakammaññatā*)**

**15. Wieldiness of consciousness (*cittakammaññatā*)**

These two mental factors provide for the adaptability of consciousness and mental factors in carrying out their beneficial tasks. They are compared to heated gold, which is fit to be shaped for any use.

**16. Proficiency of the mental body (*kāyapāguññatā*)**

**17. Proficiency of consciousness (*cittapāguññatā*)**

These two mental factors provide for the skillfulness and healthiness of consciousness and mental factors. They suppress the sickness of the mind caused by both passion and a lack of faith.

**18. Rectitude of the mental body (*kāyujukatā*)**

**19. Rectitude of consciousness (*cittujukatā*)**

These two mental factors ensure the strictness and uprightness of consciousness that opposes crookedness, deception, hypocrisy, and so on.

These 19 Beautiful Universals arise together with all forms of wholesome consciousness — for example, performing acts of generosity, helping the needy, keeping moral precepts, serving our parents or elders, listening to or teaching the Dharma, or practicing meditation.

## 2 THREE ABSTINENCES

1. **Right Speech (*sammāvācā*)** is abstaining from the four types of wrong speech, namely, speaking falsely, divisively, harshly, or frivolously — or instigating others to do so.
2. **Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*)** is abstaining from the three types of wrong bodily action, namely, engaging in killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct — or instigating others to do so.
3. **Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)** is abstaining from the five types of wrong trading, namely, selling poisons, intoxicants, weapons, slaves, or animals for slaughter — or from instigating others to do so. (Gaining wealth and property by wrong speech or wrong bodily actions are also considered forms of wrong livelihood.)

The three abstinences do not arise together but separately when one intentionally abstains from them, respectively. For example, although one is accustomed to uttering harsh speech when prompted, one refrains and abstains from doing so because of the mental factors of shame and fear of wrongdoing. At that moment, among the three abstinences, only the mental factor

of right speech arises. The same applies to right action when one is prompted and provided the opportunity to have sexual intercourse with a married woman, but refrains and abstains from doing so. At that moment, only the mental factor of right action is involved.

### 3 TWO ILLIMITABLES

1. **Compassion (*karuṇā*)** is the wish to remove or alleviate the suffering of others. It is defined as “that quality which makes the heart of a good person tremble and quiver for the suffering of others.” When it is aroused, we strive to then actually render help to remove others’ suffering. Yet if we fail, we do not give in to sadness. For we realize that all beings are the owners of their karma and have karma as their inheritance. It is this great compassion, this desire to save others from drowning in the ocean of birth and death, that originally spurred the hermit Sumedha (the Buddha-to-be) to boldly give up his attainment of *Arahantship* in that very life to instead strive for 4 indeterminate periods (*asaṅkheyya*) and 100,000 aeons to become a Supremely Enlightened Buddha able to reveal the path of liberation to all living beings.
2. **Appreciative Joy (*muditā*)** means rejoicing or delighting in others’ success, achievement, and prosperity. Applauding and approving of the success of others, we wish: “May their prosperity continue to grow.”

These two beautiful mental factors are called illimitables because they are to be developed towards all living beings in

all directions without limits. The other two sublime abidings, loving-kindness and equanimity, come under the mental factors of non-hatred and neutrality of mind, respectively. Compassion and appreciative joy can only arise apart from one another. This is because they each take a different object. Compassion takes the suffering of others as its object, whereas appreciative joy takes the success of others.

#### 4 ONE NON-DELUSION

Non-delusion, or wisdom faculty, has the characteristic of penetrating and perceiving things as they really are, as impermanent, suffering, and non-self. It dispels ignorance, thereby revealing the Four Noble Truths. It is manifested as non-bewilderment, similar to a guide in a forest. Non-delusion is necessary for understanding karma and its results, as well as for the attainment of *jhāna*, path, and fruition. It is also called insight (*paññā*), knowledge (*vijjā*), and right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*).

There are three kinds of wisdom: [1] Wisdom that comes from one's reflection (*cintā-mayā-paññā*); [2] Wisdom that comes from listening to or studying the Dharma (*suta-mayā-paññā*); [3] Wisdom that comes from mental development through meditation (*bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*). With this wisdom, one finally gains a direct understanding of the impermanent, suffering and non-self nature of mind and matter, and their causes, even to the extent of realizing Nirvana here and now.

When wisdom is developed, one knows what is real in the ultimate sense, and what is unreal. And until we attain path and fruition, our minds will always be contaminated by some degree

of wrong view. Wisdom's proximate cause is concentration. As Buddha explains:

**"One who has concentration knows things as they really are."**

(SN 22.5)

These are the 52 mental factors. They do not all arise together, but rather they only arise along with the appropriate state of consciousness.

## VIII

### UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERIES OF MENTAL FACTORS

Mental factors always accompany consciousness. They assist it in performing more specific functions in the total act of cognition. A practical example such as eating makes this clear. How does consciousness work when eating or drinking, and how do the mental factors assist it in the process?

#### 1 HOW MENTAL FACTORS WORK IN THE PROCESS OF EATING

At the moment food or drink touches the tongue-sensitivity, a tongue-door cognitive process begins, where the tongue-consciousness arises, and one becomes aware of the taste. Bare awareness of the taste is the characteristic of tongue-consciousness. Mind-door cognitive processes then follow to continue to apprehend the mental image of taste.

The associated **seven universal mental factors** work as follows: [1] The mental factor of **contact** causes the taste to “touch” the tongue-sensitivity, allowing tongue-consciousness to be aware of the taste. Without contact, consciousness of an object would be impossible. [2] The mental factor of **feeling** experiences the taste and enjoys the desirable aspects of it. Apart from the mental factor of feeling, there is no individual, no being, no self, no entity who experiences the flavor. [3] The mental factor of **perception** performs the function of marking the flavor as a condition for perceiving it again: “This is a particular sweet taste, this is a particular sour taste” and so on. [4] The mental factor of **volition** acts upon the taste and generates karma rooted in greed, if one delights in the taste. Volition also organizes and urges all of the associated mental factors to act upon the taste. [5] The mental factor of **one-pointedness** unifies the mental factors on the taste. [6] The **life-faculty** mental factor sustains the vitality of the associated mental factors so that they will remain alive and endure until they complete their task. [7] Finally, the mental factor of **attention** directs the mind to the taste. Simply put, this is how these seven universal mental factors assist consciousness in the total act of cognition.

**Six occasionals** are also involved in the act assisting consciousness: [1] The mental factor of **initial application of mind** acts to place the associated mental factors onto the taste. [2] The mental factor of **sustained application of mind** holds the associated mental factors on the taste by causing it to examine the taste again and again. [3] The mental factor of **decision** decides, “Ah, this is a nice sweet taste” and so on. [4] The mental factor of **energy** supports the other mental factors so that they do not



retreat, in particular helping greed to arise. [5] The mental factor of **joy** keeps a joyful interest in the taste. [6] And the mental factor of **desire** is the desire to get the taste or to let greed for it arise (desire is not the craving in this case).

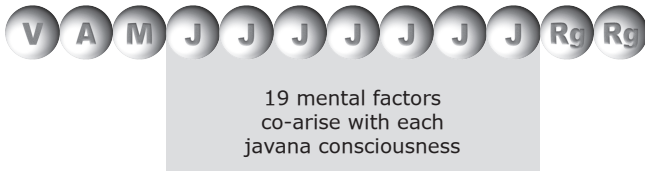
In addition to these 13 mental factors, there are **4 unwholesome universal mental factors** that arise with every unwholesome consciousness: [1] The mental factor of **delusion** conceals the true nature of the taste, which in reality is impermanent and impure. [2] The mental factor of **shamelessness** is the absence of shame over the arising of greed while enjoying a pleasant taste. [3] The mental factor of **fearlessness-of-wrongdoing** is not being apprehensive about the consequences of the arising of greed while enjoying the taste. [4] The mental factor of **restlessness** distracts and disquiets the mind while enjoying the taste.

There are also **two unwholesome occasional mental factors** rooted in greed. [1] The mental factor of **greed** enjoys the taste, grasps it, and does not want to give it up. [2] The mental factor of **wrong view** misinterprets the taste as permanent.

## 2 NINETEEN MENTAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH JAVANA CONSCIOUSNESS ROOTED IN GREED

In all, there are 19 mental factors plus one type of unwholesome consciousness rooted in greed that arise during the process of enjoying food. This process occurs throughout the *javana* stages of the tongue-door cognitive process, and during many mind-door cognitive processes. Greed gains more momentum as more mind-door cognitive processes pass by. As we know, unwholesome karma is being performed and reinforced by

repeated unwholesome *javana* moments. Reacting with greed while eating, seeing, hearing, smelling, and sensing, we turn out to be the slave of our craving and become a person with a greedy temperament.



- KEY:**
- V** vibrating bhavaṅga;
  - A** arresting bhavaṅga;
  - M** mind-door adverting consciousness;
  - J** javana;
  - Rg** registering consciousness.

**CHART 7 : Mind-Door Cognitive Process — During Eating**

In summary, 19 mental factors co-arise with one type of unwholesome consciousness rooted in greed, which function together as *javanas* that arise successively 7 times during the tongue-door and mind-door cognitive processes (chart 7). The 19 mental factors are:

- |                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Contact         | 7. Attention                     |
| 2. Feeling         | 8. Initial application of mind   |
| 3. Perception      | 9. Sustained application of mind |
| 4. Volition        | 10. Decision                     |
| 5. One-pointedness | 11. Energy                       |
| 6. Life-faculty    | 12. Joy or rapture               |

- |                                       |                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 13. <b>Desire</b>                     | 17. <b>Restlessness</b> |
| 14. <b>Delusion</b>                   | 18. <b>Greed</b>        |
| 15. <b>Shamelessness</b>              | 19. <b>Wrong View</b>   |
| 16. <b>Fearlessness of wrongdoing</b> |                         |

Each *javana* consciousness arises along with these 19 concomitant mental factors, performs its specific function, and vanishes, becoming the condition for the next consciousness to arise again in an unbroken continuity. None of the consciousnesses and mental factors should be regarded as a permanent “self” of any kind.

### 3 SEVENTEEN MENTAL FACTORS

#### ASSOCIATED WITH JAVANA CONSCIOUSNESS ROOTED IN HATRED

Sometimes, however, we cannot get the food we want. And due to our unfulfilled desire, agitation may arise. At such times, one type of consciousness rooted in anger, unprompted and associated with 17 mental factors, functions as *javanas* that arise successively 7 times during the tongue-door and mind-door cognitive processes. The 17 mental factors are:

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. <b>Contact</b>         | 7. <b>Attention</b>                     |
| 2. <b>Feeling</b>         | 8. <b>Initial application of mind</b>   |
| 3. <b>Perception</b>      | 9. <b>Sustained application of mind</b> |
| 4. <b>Volition</b>        | 10. <b>Decision</b>                     |
| 5. <b>One-pointedness</b> | 11. <b>Energy</b>                       |
| 6. <b>Life-faculty</b>    | 12. <b>Desire</b>                       |

13. Delusion

16. Restlessness

14. Shamelessness

17. Hatred

15. Fearlessness of wrongdoing

If that type of unwholesome consciousness is prompted, the two mental factors of sloth and torpor will be present. The mental factor of wrong view and joy are excluded here. Wrong view is greed-rooted, and one who is furious has no joy. If one envies others' success, unprompted, then 18 mental factors will arise, with the addition of one mental factor of envy to the preceding list. Sometimes one may feel remorse over a misdeed one has performed: 18 mental factors will be present, but the mental factor of envy will be replaced with worry and remorse. Recognizing these unwholesome mental factors and their dangers when they arise helps us to transform them, and free ourselves from their grip.

#### 4 PRACTICING MINDFULNESS AND

#### CLEAR COMPREHENSION (*sati-sampajañña*)

In order to avoid reacting with the same patterns of greed and hate when sense objects impinge on our six sense-doors, we must practice mindfulness and clear comprehension.

Taking the example of eating again, we can choose to be mindful of the four elements as we eat. While chewing, we attend to the food's textures of hardness, softness, or roughness and contemplate, "This is the earth-element." Regarding the food's temperature, we contemplate, "This is the fire-element." When liquid oozes from the food, we contemplate, "This is the

water-element.” When the food is being pushed from the mouth to the stomach, we contemplate, “This is the wind-element.”

Tongue-sensitivity and the food are made up by four elements in the ultimate sense. As both are considered matter, the discernment of them is called the discernment of matter.

Furthermore, we discern mind. We give attention to the fact that when the food comes into contact with the tongue-sensitivity, the mental factor of perception arises. It notes the different kinds of taste, such as salty, sweet, sour, bitter, astringent, and so on. Many different types of feeling — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral — also arise successively owing to tongue contact. We try to be aware of them. We discover that if the taste is agreeable, pleasant feeling arises, followed by craving. We reach out our hands to grasp more agreeably flavored food, a sure sign of craving. When the taste no longer provides satisfaction, when it no longer stimulates pleasant feeling, we notice that as a result, the craving ceases. Here we see the impermanence and impersonal nature of dependently arisen mental phenomena. This is the discernment of mind together with its conditions.

The entire act of eating is merely a co-occurrence of mind and matter dependent on transient conditions and a succession of dependently arisen states, not an abiding self. Having gained a penetrative insight of conditionality by careful discernment, food no longer enslaves one. One eats only to sustain life. The process of eating appears tedious, and being hungry again is tiresome. One may even become disenchanted with eating altogether. In this way, through mindfulness and clear comprehension, the situation that is productive of defilement turns out to be one productive of insight.

Food not only stimulates lust for taste, but also the other four sense-objects. By first looking at food's clean, bright appearance, there is eye contact. Owing to eye contact, pleasant feeling arises, followed by craving for this visual object (food). When chewing crunchy food, there are pleasant sounds. When enjoying such sounds, there arises craving for them. When the pleasant aroma of the food impinges on the nose's sensitivity, one enjoys the aroma, then lust for odors arises. When enjoying the softness and smoothness of food, lust for tangible sensations comes into being. This is how food stimulates lust for the five sense-objects. And the food "devours" the negligent eater.

## **5 THIRTY-THREE MENTAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WHOLESOME JAVANA CONSCIOUSNESS**

Now, let us see how many mental factors are involved in wholesome deeds. While engaging in any wholesome deed such as charity, self-restraint, insight meditation, or providing service to the community — there is one wholesome consciousness with three roots, associated with 33 mental factors, occurring many times at the *javana* stage. Of these, there are the 7 universals, which must arise with every consciousness; 6 occasionals, if we act with joy; 19 beautiful universals, which must arise with every wholesome consciousness; and 1 non-delusion. If the same skillful deed is performed without knowledge, then, only consciousness with two roots, together with 32 mental factors (excluding the mental factor of non-delusion) will be present.

IX

HOW WRONG VIEW  
OF “I” OCCURS

Having analyzed each associated mental factor and the specific function it performs, we come to a startling and liberating realization: There is no overlord, no master who exercises control over the process of eating, seeing, hearing, thinking, and so on. The wrong view of “I” or a “being” comes through not being able to break down the compactness of function (*kiccaghana*), the integrative aspect of the mental factors. We therefore mistake the mental factor of feeling as “I,” the mental factor of perception as “I,” the mental factor of greed or hatred as “I,” and the different consciousnesses as “I.” The mind thinks the thought, “I enjoy the taste!” “I am stressed!” or “I am intelligent!” Do not be fooled by the thought, as the “I” is nothing more than an amalgamation of consciousnesses and mental factors.

## CONCLUSION

Mental factors and consciousness are interdependent. To use a metaphor, consciousness is the body of a car. The associated mental factors are like the engine, gear shifter, brake, steering wheel, tires, and rearview mirror. They perform their own specific yet integrated functions to help keep the car moving. Similarly, mental factors assist consciousness in the totality of the act of cognition — either tasting a flavor, seeing a form, hearing a sound, smelling an odor, sensing a tangible object, or experiencing a mental object. Without the help of mental factors, consciousness cannot cognize an object fully, just as a car cannot move forward, turn to the side, back up, and so on, independently.

It is important to study mental factors to help us understand how the mind reacts when it comes into contact with any of the six sense-objects (corresponding to the six kinds of consciousness). This is particularly true if we wish to avoid evil, cultivate good, and purify our mind.

However, as we incline the mind to cultivate greater and greater wholesomeness, it must constantly be remembered that neither consciousness nor mental factors constitute any kind of permanent self, soul, ego, or personality. This is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha and the only path to final liberation from suffering. In the absence of this understanding, stream-entry remains out of reach.





# MATTER

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## MATTER

### (*Rūpa*)

**W**hy is matter, the third ultimate reality, called *rūpa* in Pāḷi? The Pāḷi word *rūpa* is derived from the verb *ruppati*, which means “to be deformed, disturbed, oppressed and broken.” The Buddha explained that material form is called deformed (*ruppati*) because it is subject to disease, affliction, mutilation, and decay. This definition shows that our body, which is material form, ultimately undergoes change at all times.

Why is it so important to understand matter? In THE GREATER DISCOURSE ON THE COWHERD (MN 33), the Buddha explains:

**“How does a *bhikkhu* have knowledge of matter? Here a *bhikkhu* understands as it really is: ‘All matter of whatever kind consists of the four great elements and matter derived from the four great elements.’ That is how a *bhikkhu* has knowledge of matter.”**

In the same Sutta, the Buddha later says that without this knowledge, a *bhikkhu* is incapable of growth, increase, and fulfillment in this Dharma and Vinaya.

## II

**ALL MATTER IS DERIVED FROM  
THE FOUR GREAT ELEMENTS**

The four great elements that the Buddha was referring to are the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind — the primary building blocks of matter. Of course, these four are not what we literally think of as earth, water, fire, and wind. These are names for qualities or characteristics displayed by matter, more concretely called solidity, cohesion, temperature, and pressure. Every material substance, ranging from the smallest particles in our body to the most immense objects such as mountains and seas, consists of these four elements, together with a minimum of four types of derived matter. The word element is called *dhatu* in Pāli, meaning that it carries its own characteristics or intrinsic nature.

For example, earth-element has the primary characteristic of hardness; water-element has the primary characteristic of cohesion; fire-element's primary characteristic is heat; and wind-element's primary characteristic is pushing. Thus, when a meditator practices four elements meditation (see chapter 11) and gives attention to the experience of the four elements in his or her body, it is not in the conventional sense of searching for dirt, liquid, flame, or gas. It is in the sense of understanding these characteristics of hardness, cohesion, heat, and pushing as they manifest in the body.

Let us now examine the four great elements in greater detail.

## III

## THE FOUR GREAT ELEMENTS

Earth-element (*pathavīdhātu*) is so called because, like the earth, it serves as the foundation or base for the other three elements. This is the element of extension, and due to this extension objects occupy space. The main characteristic of earth-element is hardness; however, its secondary characteristics include softness, smoothness, roughness, heaviness, and lightness. Whatever is internal (in our bodies) that is hard, solid, rough, or soft — such as head hair, teeth, nails, bones, heart, spleen, bowel, and so on — has this earth-element as its predominant factor. The other three elements coexist with less intensity.

Due to the earth-element our bodies manifest in various shapes and sizes. An excess of earth-element causes us to become hard and rigid like stone, resulting in arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and other conditions. Devoid of this earth-element, however, we would simply be amorphous blobs without any solidity, defining features, boundaries, or weight.

Water-element (*āpodhātu*) has the characteristic of cohesion, which provides the binding force for the other elements within a single particle of matter (*rūpa kalāpa*). It binds and holds the other three elements together and prevents them from scattering. Due to its cohesive quality, the water-element also makes it possible for things to manifest in various shapes and sizes, ranging from a tiny atom to an immense planet. For example, without the water-element, Mount Everest would instantly disintegrate and disappear. Why is that so? The elements of earth, fire, and wind

would no longer cohere and as a result would instantly disperse. Our limbs and organs are held together in their proper position due to the property of cohesion provided by the water-element.

This element also has the characteristic of flowing. When water-element is in balance, the other elements cohere. When it is in excess, they disperse and flow. This can be tested by pouring a small amount of water into flour. A small amount causes the flour to cohere. In excess, the mixture flows and the flour disperses.

Whatever is in the body that is fluid, such as blood, pus, urine, grease, tears, sweat, fat, and so on has the water-element as its predominant factor. Due to this characteristic, our bodies are able to maintain their integrity and proper viscosity, as well as their proper shape without shriveling. Without the water-element, our bodies would dry up and blow away.

Fire-element (*tejodhātu*) has the characteristic of heat, which maintains and supports the other elements. It is the element that enables the various types of matter to warm, ripen, mature, and age, as observed in the metabolic processes of the body. The vitality, growth, and duration of all animate beings and plants is due to the fire-element. For example, flowers bloom and fruits ripen and grow soft due to the fire-element. The body eventually grows old, wrinkles, weakens, and so on, all due to the fire-element.

The fire-element manifests as suppleness, like the smoothness of an iron bar that has been repeatedly heated by fire. This element also has the characteristic of cold, which causes things to become rigid. Of course, heat and cold are relative. When we touch water and perceive warmth, it is the fire-element that is

being perceived. When it seems cold, it is also the fire-element, but to a relatively lesser degree.

Whatever is internal that is fiery, warms the body, and aids in digestion, has the fire-element as its predominant factor. In addition, the fire-element causes our bodies to mature and age. If the fire-element in our bodies is balanced, we are healthy. A lack of fire-element leads to poor digestion, and if it becomes excessive, we burn up with fever and may even die. Without any fire-element, matter would cease to exist.

Wind-element (*vāyodhātu*), the element of pressure, distension, and motion, supports the other elements and makes them mobile. It has the dual characteristics of pushing and supporting, and manifests as movement from one place to another. We are able to sit or stand erect because of the supporting characteristic of the wind-element. The wind-element is experienced as tangible pressure, both internally and externally. In our bodies, there are six types of wind:

1. Wind that moves upwards, causing belching, coughing, sneezing, and related illnesses;
2. Wind that moves downwards, causing bowel movements and frequent motions;
3. Wind that moves about in the visceral cavity, apart from the large and small intestines, and makes it possible for the organs to carry out their proper functions;
4. Wind that moves about inside the large and small intestines. (The wind in the intestines causes peristalsis, which



pushes the food through the small and large intestines and out through the rectum.);

5. wind that moves within the limbs, causing the hands and legs to flex;
6. wind inhaled and exhaled as we breathe.

In addition, throughout the body there are small vessels through which the wind-element moves. Without sufficient wind-element, illnesses such as a stroke may result.

In summary, our bodies have as their foundation the earth-element, which serves as the basis for the other three elements. It is held together by the cohesion of the water-element, maintained by the fire-element, and made mobile by the wind-element.

In fact, none of the great elements can be completely absent from matter. It is impossible. All matter has these four qualities even if one or more appear to be absent by the predominance of another. The elements can get out of balance, which might cause an irregularity in the natural cycles of plants, animals, or meteorological phenomena, such as the weather, seasons, and so on. The same can happen in our bodies, which is one reason it is important to have a basic understanding of how the elements relate to one another. To ensure the health of the body, the balancing of these four elements is essential. Balance means a healthy body; imbalance means illness. Keeping the four great elements in balance depends on many factors: our mental and emotional state, a suitable climate, healthy food, clean air and water, as well as the past karma accumulated over countless aeons.

## IV

## EIGHT TYPES OF MATTER FORM A PURE-OCTAD KALĀPA

There are in all 28 types of matter: 4 great elements and 24 types of matter derived from the 4 great elements. Of these 24, 4 types of derived matter, along with the 4 great elements, form what is known as an eightfold particle, or pure-octad *kalāpa*. A pure-octad *kalāpa* consists of:

- |                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. earth-element | 5. color             |
| 2. water-element | 6. smell             |
| 3. fire-element  | 7. taste             |
| 4. wind-element  | 8. nutritive essence |

These 8 types of matter are inseparable. They arise and cease together. ***Octad kalāpas are the basic constituent of inanimate matter*** and also comprise a sizable percentage of the bodies of living beings.

Now that we have discussed these initial 8 types of matter, let us examine the full 28. The 28 kinds of matter can be divided into 18 concretely-produced matter and 10 non-concretely-produced matter.

## 28 KINDS OF MATTER

### Concretely-Produced Matter (18)

#### [I] Great Elements

1. Earth-element
2. Water-element
3. Fire-element
4. Wind-element

#### [II] Sensitive Phenomena

5. Eye-sensitivity
6. Ear-sensitivity
7. Nose-sensitivity
8. Tongue-sensitivity
9. Body-sensitivity

#### [III] Objective Phenomena

10. Visible object
11. Sound
12. Smell
13. Taste

(tangible objects are the 3 elements of earth, fire, and wind)

#### [IV] Sexual Phenomena

14. Femininity
15. Masculinity

#### [V] Heart Phenomenon

16. Heart-base

#### [VI] Life Phenomenon

17. Life-faculty

#### [VII] Nutritional Phenomenon

18. Nutriment

### Non-Concretely-Produced Matter (10)

[these form the attributes of the previous 18 types of concretely-produced matter]

#### [I] Limiting Phenomenon

19. Space element

#### [II] Intimating Phenomena

20. Bodily intimation
21. Verbal intimation

#### [III] Mutable Phenomena

22. Lightness
23. Malleability
24. Wieldiness  
(plus two intimations)

#### [IV] Characteristics of Matter

25. Production
26. Continuity
27. Decay
28. Impermanence

CHART 8 : The 28 Kinds of Matter

## THE EIGHTEEN TYPES OF CONCRETELY-PRODUCED MATTER

These 18 types are called concretely-produced matter because they possess intrinsic characteristics, which make them suitable objects for contemplation by insight. They are divided into 7 classes:

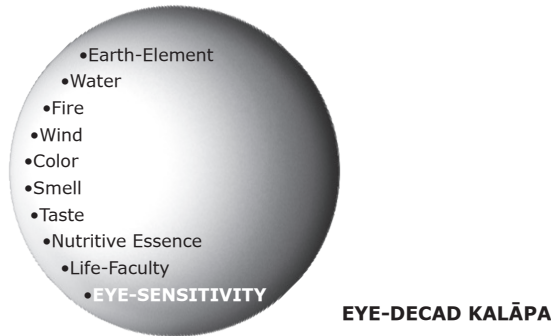
1. Great Elements
2. Sensitive Phenomena
3. Objective Phenomena
4. Sexual Phenomena
5. Heart Phenomenon
6. Life Phenomenon
7. Nutritional Phenomenon

### 1 GREAT ELEMENTS (*as discussed in Section III — The Four Great Elements*)

### 2 SENSITIVE PHENOMENA

There are five transparent parts of the sense organs. “Transparent” signifies the *sensitive* portion of the sense organs that actually receives external stimuli. Some of the *kalāpas* in each of our physical sense organs contain sensitivities that can receive the sensory data of the corresponding sense-object: they are the eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity, and body-sensitivity.

1. The eye-sensitivity takes a visible object or color as its object. What we conventionally call the “eye” is the composition of various material phenomena. Among these the most significant is the eye-sensitivity, the sensitive substance in the retina, derived from the four great elements. Eye-sensitivity registers light and therefore serves as the physical base for eye-consciousness.<sup>1</sup> The eye-sensitivity is found in the eye-decad or tenfold *kalāpa*, and is the transparency or sensitivity of the four elements in that same *kalāpa*. The meditator with sufficient concentration will find that while discerning eye-decad *kalāpas* around the eyes, color constantly impinges on the eye-sensitivity, giving rise to eye-consciousness.

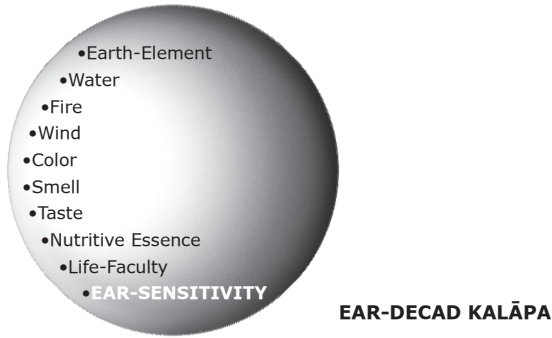


2. The ear-sensitivity takes sound as its object. The ear-sensitivity is the sensitive substance found inside the inner ear that registers sound and therefore serves as the physical base for ear-consciousness. The impingement of a sound on the

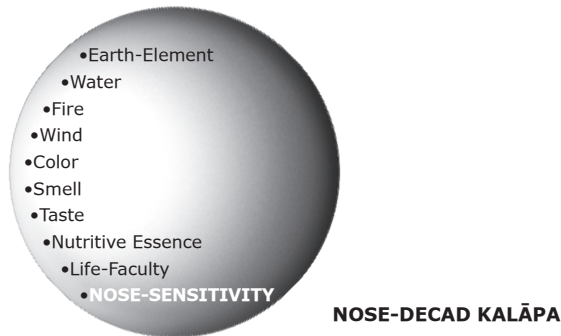
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<sup>1</sup> Thus, the eye-consciousness only sees color, not the form and shape of the visible object. Similarly, the ear-consciousness only hears the sound, but does not know the meaning of the sound.

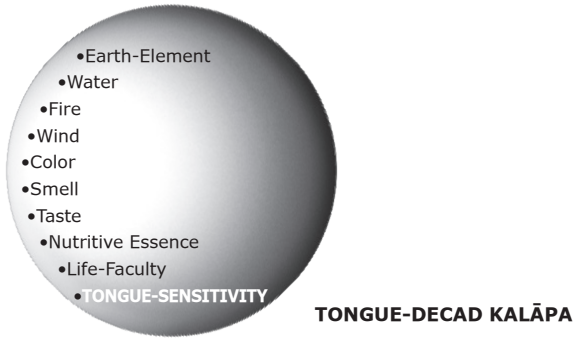
ear-sensitivity gives rise to ear-consciousness. Ear-sensitivity is found in the ear-decad *kalāpa* and is the transparency or sensitivity of the four elements in that same *kalāpa*.



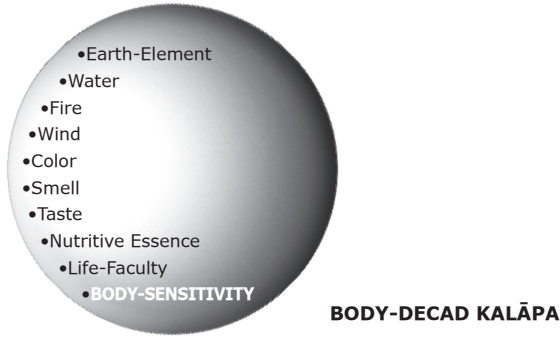
3. The nose-sensitivity takes smell as its object. The nose-sensitivity is the sensitive substance found inside the nose that registers smell and therefore serves as the physical base for nose-consciousness. The impingement of an odor on the nose-sensitivity gives rise to nose-consciousness. The nose-sensitivity is to be found in the nose-decad *kalāpa* and it is the transparency of the four elements in that same *kalāpa*.



4. The tongue-sensitivity takes taste as its object. The tongue-sensitivity is the sensitive substance found diffused over the tongue that registers taste and therefore serves as the physical base for tongue-consciousness. The impingement of a taste on the tongue-sensitivity gives rise to tongue-consciousness. The tongue-sensitivity is to be found in the tongue-decad *kalāpa* and it is the transparency of the four elements in that same *kalāpa*.



5. The body-sensitivity takes the tangible or touch of earth, fire, and wind-elements as its object. It is the sensitive substance extending over the body that registers the touch of tangible objects and therefore serves as the physical base for body-consciousness. The impingement of a tangible object on the body-sensitivity gives rise to body-consciousness. Body-sensitivity is to be found in body-decad *kalāpas* all over the body and it is the transparency of the four elements in those *kalāpas*.



The common characteristic of these five sensitivities is the sensitivity of a particular sense-base to its corresponding object (for example, eye-sensitivity is sensitive towards color, ear-sensitivity towards sound, etc.). We are born with that sensitivity as a result of our past karma, which arose from our desire and craving to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the objects received through those senses. The five types of sense-consciousness arise dependent on these five sensitivities, respectively. When various colors and lights impinge on the eye-sensitivity, the consciousness called eye-consciousness, which sees that visible object, arises and vanishes. The concurrence of visible object, eye-base and consciousness is called contact, which gives rise to the eye-door cognitive process. This is followed by many mind-door cognitive processes, in order to apprehend the visible object more clearly; similarly for the ear, nose, tongue, and body sensitivities.



### 3 OBJECTIVE PHENOMENA

There are four objective phenomena: visible objects (colors), sounds, smells, and tastes.

Tangible objects are the three elements of earth, fire, and wind: the earth-element, experienced as hardness and roughness; the fire-element, experienced as heat or cold; and the wind-element, experienced as pressure or support. Water-element is excluded since it cannot be felt by the sense of touch.<sup>2</sup> These five sense-objects have the characteristic of impinging on their respective sense-bases and thus serve as the objects of the five types of sense-consciousness.

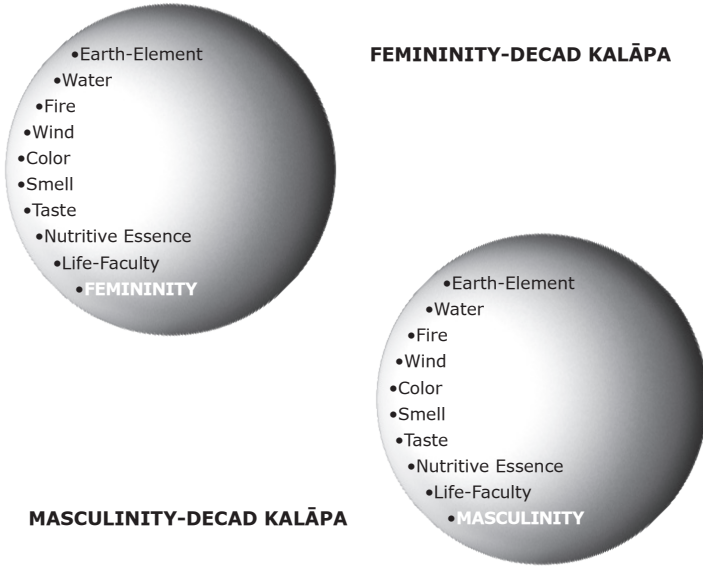
One should not think that the five sense-objects only exist externally. They are also found in the body. For instance, when a meditator is discerning the four elements in bile internally, a bitter taste might appear. Likewise, when discerning the smell of one's own body internally, a foul odor may become apparent.

### 4 SEXUAL PHENOMENA (*bhāvarūpa*)

There are two kinds of sexual phenomena: femininity and masculinity. Femininity is the characteristic of the female sex. It manifests through marks, signs, deportment, bodily structure, voice, and so on of the female sex, by which we know, "This is a female." It is found in females (occasionally found in the male hermaphrodite).

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<sup>2</sup> According to ABHIDHAMMA, water-element cannot be experienced by way of touch, but by mind.



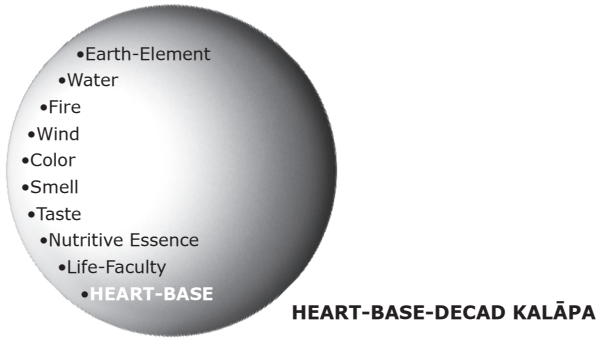
Masculinity is the characteristic of the male sex. It manifests through marks, signs, deportment, bodily structure, voice, and so on of the male sex, by which we know, “This is a male.” It is found in males (occasionally found in the female hermaphrodite).

The eight inseparable elements of matter, plus the life-faculty and sexual-phenomena, form either femininity or masculinity-decad *kalāpa*. These *kalāpas* pervade the entire body of a male or a female and are the cause of the distinction between them.

## 5 HEART PHENOMENON

Heart phenomenon refers to the heart-base (*hadayavatthu*). The eight inseparable types of matter plus the life-faculty and heart-base form a heart-base-decad *kalāpa*. Many heart-base-decad

*kalāpas* are found in the blood inside the heart, not the heart itself. They are the support or base for all consciousnesses with the exception of the five types of sense-consciousness. Like all *kalāpas*, heart-base-decad *kalāpas* arise and pass away at tremendous speed.



## 6 LIFE PHENOMENON

Life phenomenon refers to the life-faculty (*jīvitindriya*). The eight inseparable types of matter and the life-faculty form a life-nonad *kalāpa* or nine-fold particle. Just as there is a vital force in mental factors, so there is a vital force in the matter of living beings called the life-faculty. This faculty has a protective function, like water in a pond that sustains a lotus and prevents it from withering. The life-faculty has the characteristic of maintaining all coexistent matter in a single *kalāpa*. The life-faculty maintains only karma-produced matter, such as eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, sex-, and heart-base-decad *kalāpas*. Every being's life is maintained by this karma-produced life-faculty. When it terminates, we say a being "dies," and its body becomes a corpse.



LIFE-NONAD KALĀPA

## 7 NUTRITIONAL PHENOMENON

Nutritional phenomenon refers to the nutritive essence (*ojā*) that exists in every pure-octad *kalāpa*. Nutritive essence is the nutritive substance contained in edible food that maintains the growth of new matter in the body. The nutritive essence in each *kalāpa*, having been supported by the body's digestive fire, again and again assists in the production of new *kalāpas*. In this way, food eaten in one day can sustain the body for seven days.

We have finished discussing all 18 concretely-produced matter.

The five sensitivities, sexual phenomena, heart-base, and life-faculty originate due to karma performed in previous lives. Thus, if our eyes, ears, nose, body, or face are not properly shaped, it is due to our past unwholesome karma. There is no Lord exercising his supreme power. Karma arose in former circumstances, and the results are experienced down the line.

In conclusion, these 18 types of concretely-produced matter have the following similar characteristics:

1. They each possess an intrinsic nature (*sabhāvarūpa*), such as heat in the case of fire-element, hardness in the case of earth-element, and so on;
2. They each possess the three general characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self (*salakkhaṇarūpa*);
3. They are all directly produced by conditions, such as karma, consciousness, temperature, and nutriment (*nipp hannarūpa*);
4. They are all subject to change and constant alteration (*rūparūpa*);
5. They can all be comprehended by insight knowledge (*sammasanarūpa*).

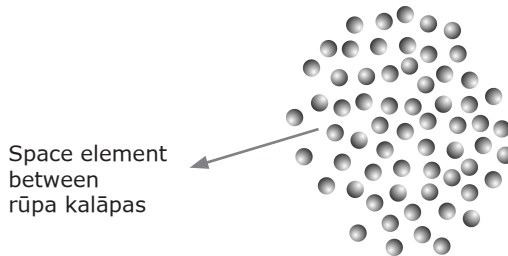
## VI

## THE TEN TYPES OF NON-CONCRETELY-PRODUCED MATTER

The ten types of non-concretely-produced matter are so-called because they do not arise directly from the four main causes of matter (karma, consciousness, temperature, and nutriment). They are merely the attributes of concretely-produced matter. Therefore, they are not classified as ultimate realities and cannot become the object of *vipassanā* meditation. These are divided into four classes:

### 1 LIMITING MATERIAL PHENOMENON

The limiting material phenomenon refers to the space element (*ākāśadhātu*). The space element is the space that delimits or separates *rūpa kalāpas*. Just as eggs nested tightly in a basket still have space between them, so too, in our body there are many forms of *rūpa kalāpas*: eye-decad *kalāpas*, life-nonad *kalāpas*, body-decad *kalāpas*, and so on. How is it possible to differentiate between them? It is through the space between them. It enables us to distinguish one particle of matter from another.



In hard lumps of stone, metal, rocks, gold and the like, there are innumerable material particles. Each particle is separated by the space element. It is due to the space element that lumps of stone and metal can be broken or cut into pieces.

## 2 INTIMATING MATERIAL PHENOMENA

There are two means of intimation: bodily and vocal.

1. **Bodily intimation:** Through movement such as nodding the head, bending the arm, moving the hand, going forward and backward, we reveal our intention to others. For instance, when we want to move closer to someone, many *rūpa kalāpas*, called matter-produced-by-consciousness, are created. They pervade the entire body. The wind-element in each *kalāpa* of consciousness-born matter arises together, one after the other, causing matter to move from one place to another. The body thereby moves forward, and our physical intentions are revealed.
2. **Verbal intimation:** When we intend to speak, many consciousness-born *kalāpas* arise and pervade the body. The earth-element in consciousness-born *kalāpas* reaches the throat where it collides with the earth-element in the karma-born *kalāpas* already in the throat. This causes the occurrence of sound, and our verbal intentions are revealed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the section on matter-produced-by-consciousness for further explanation.

### 3 MUTABLE MATERIAL PHENOMENA

This category comprises special modes of concretely-produced matter. It includes the two types of intimation that we have just discussed, and three other phenomena: lightness, malleability, and wieldiness.

Lightness is capable of preventing any disturbance that would create heaviness in matter or dispels it if it is present. Malleability is capable of dispelling rigidity in matter. And wieldiness is capable of dispelling unwieldiness in matter. These three must arise together.

When one of the four primary elements is out of balance in any part of the body relative to the others, that part of the body tends to be heavy and awkward, inflexible and unwieldy in its movements. This can happen due to climate, food, or mood. When the four elements are balanced, the phenomena of lightness, malleability, and wieldiness dispel the weariness, rigidity, and unwieldiness of matter. This enables our body to function more efficiently. We are thereby able to enjoy better health and consequently display a more pleasant disposition.

### 4 FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF MATTER

There are four characteristics that describe the life cycle of matter, namely: production, continuity, decay, and impermanence.

Production is the initial arising of matter in material process while continuity is the repeated arising of matter in the same material process. Actually, both production and continuity are part of the same process, which is termed "the birth of matter." Decay is the maturing process which, like the sun passing its



zenith, is eventually swallowed in darkness. And impermanence is the dissolution and final termination of that matter. Therefore, at the level of ultimate reality, every matter undergoes three stages: arising or birth, turning or decay, and passing or impermanence.

Including the one space element, the two elements of intimation, the three elements of mutability, and the four characteristics of matter, we have now covered a total of ten types of non-concretely-produced matter.

Matter cannot be described as either wholesome or unwholesome, because such terminology is applicable only to mental phenomena. Unlike individual consciousnesses, which can only arise one at a time, many material particles can arise within our body at the same time. If we pay close attention to the four elements in our body by practicing four elements meditation, we realize for ourselves that the body is only a collection of *rūpa kalāpas* arising and passing away at tremendous speed.

Each *rūpa kalāpa* is so minute that it cannot be seen with the eye. Even the finest mote of dust is an aggregate of many *rūpa kalāpas*. Bacteria, which are composed of many *rūpa kalāpas*, can only be seen with a microscope. However, a mind well trained in concentration is not only able to discern individual *rūpa kalāpas*, it is also able to discern the individual elements that comprise each *kalāpa*.

## VII

CLASSIFICATION  
OF MATTER

All matter is divided into various categories as follows:

1. **Rootless:** Unlike consciousness, matter is rootless. It does not associate with any root of wholesome and unwholesome.
2. **Conditional:** All matter arises with four causes (as discussed in Section VIII — The Origination of Matter).
3. **Defiled:** Matter can be made the object of defilements. For example, the eye-sensitivity can become the means of attachment through craving and wrong view of self.
4. **Mundane:** Unlike supra-mundane consciousness, there is no matter that transcends the world of the five aggregates of clinging.
5. **Pertaining to the sense-sphere:** Matter by nature pertains to the sense-sphere, because it is the object of sensual craving.
6. **Objectless:** Matter cannot know an object like consciousness.
7. **Not to be eradicated:** Matter, unlike defilements, cannot be eradicated by the four supra-mundane path knowledges.

## VIII

THE ORIGINATION  
OF MATTER

Matter is produced by four causes:

1. **Karma**
2. **Consciousness**
3. **Temperature or Fire**
4. **Nutriment**

## 1 KARMA

Suppose that in a past life, owing to the craving for continued existence, a person had observed morality with the intention of being reborn as a beautiful and charming woman. When this karma ripens and produces results, that person's desire will be fulfilled. At the moment of conception the body-decad *kalāpa*, the heart-base-decad *kalāpa*, and the femininity-decad *kalāpa*, which make up the embryo, arise. The arising of these three types of *kalāpas* is called "production," while following the development of faculties, the subsequent arising of these and other matter is called "continuity." The heart-base-decad *kalāpa* serves as the base for the rebirth-linking consciousness, whereas the femininity-decad *kalāpa* springs from the craving to become a woman. Both are the result of past karma.

Eye-, ear-, nose-, and tongue-decad *kalāpas* arise gradually. These four are also produced by karma, born from the desire to

see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Beings who are born blind and deaf are devoid of eye-decad and ear-decad *kalāpas* as a result of the ripening of unwholesome karma.

It is therefore said that the eight inseparable elements, the five sensitivities, the sexual phenomena, and the heart-base are produced by karma.

Karma determines the sex, lifespan, health, temperament, and physical appearance of a human being in conformity with deeds done in the past. In THE SHORTER EXPOSITION OF ACTION (MN 135), the Buddha states:

- **Taking life makes a being short-lived, whereas abstaining from killing leads to longevity;**
- **Cruelty begets many sorts of sickness, whereas kindness begets health;**
- **Anger robs a person of beauty, whereas patience enhances beauty.**

Even among animals, differences in species, appearance, size, strength, and so on arise due to past karma.

As the Buddha often explained, the direct cause for rebirth is karma. But for the result to materialize, it requires craving. Therefore, all of the karma-produced matter mentioned has craving as its root. This indicates the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, which specifies that it is “craving that leads to rebirth.”

## 2 CONSCIOUSNESS

Every consciousness dependent on the heart-base is able to produce consciousness-born *kalāpas*. For example, when we want to say something, if we pay attention to the heart-base, we can see that many millions of pure-octad *kalāpas* are being produced and spreading all over the body due to our intention to speak. Many karma-born *kalāpas* are found in the throat. If we discern these particles, we can see that they contain at least eight inseparable elements. When consciousness-born *kalāpas* reach the throat, the earth-element in the consciousness-born *kalāpa* strikes the earth-element of the karma-born *kalāpa*, producing sound. This is verbal intimation. This is just like when we knock on a door. Due to the striking of the earth-element in our hand against the earth-element in the door, sound is produced.

In like manner, when we intend to shake hands with a friend, our intention produces many consciousness-born *kalāpas* that spread all over the body. The wind-element in consciousness-born *kalāpas* causes the hand to move from place to place. This is bodily intimation.

Another example of consciousness-born matter occurs when we get angry. At that time, many consciousness-born octad *kalāpas* are produced and spread throughout the body. Due to anger, the fire-element in the consciousness-born *kalāpas* becomes predominant. This fire-element heats up the entire body, resulting in an increased heart rate, reddened face, and rougher breath. When the fire-element is excessive, the wind-element also becomes active, causing the body to shake and tremble. At such times we feel terrible, as if we were being

punished by our unskillful thought. People have been known to have heart attacks at such times.

We come to see how our mental states have a strong impact on the body. Depression, anxiety, fear, and hatred produce unhealthy matter in the body, which can cause sickness. THE YELLOW EMPEROR'S INNER CANON (HUANGDI NEIJING), an ancient Chinese medical text that has been treated as the fundamental doctrinal source for Chinese medicine for more than two millennia, draws the same conclusion: most diseases come from the defiled mind. Give up the negative emotions for the sake of your health.

At the opposite extreme, if we cherish wholesome thoughts — such as loving-kindness, contentment, honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude — these superior consciousnesses, when developed to a greater degree, will produce many pure and bright consciousness-born *kalāpas* throughout the body, and the color element within each *kalāpa* becomes bright. When many exceedingly bright *kalāpas* arise either simultaneously or successively within the body, the color element manifests as light. One may see light inside the body. These superior forms of matter heal the body and bring good health, radiant complexion, and lightness of body and mind.

The renowned Japanese researcher Masaru Emoto,<sup>4</sup> in his investigation of water, demonstrated the direct consequences of destructive thoughts on the formation of water crystals. He found that constructive thoughts like love and appreciation have the opposite effect, forming beautiful symmetrical structures.

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4 THE HIDDEN MESSAGES IN WATER by Masaru Emoto

His work demonstrates that our thoughts can directly influence matter, not only within our bodies, which are composed mostly of water, but also beyond our bodies.

If we investigate what is happening in the world today, we may become convinced of the frightening possibility that our collective thoughts and actions are affecting the normal balance and rhythms of nature. Climate chaos, global warming, and the repeated occurrence of natural disasters are partially due to an imbalance of the four elements arising from the corruption in our own minds.

According to Ledi Sayadaw, the well-known 19th-century Burmese scholar-monk, in *THE MANUAL OF COSMIC ORDER (NIYĀMA DĪPANĪ)*, karma can be classified in two ways, as that which affects only ourselves and that which “overflows” its boundaries and affects others (even inanimate things) as well. Indeed, he states, “When men become exceedingly corrupt in thought and deed, all the overflowing course of their karma rushes from this extensive earth up to the orbit of the moon, sun, and stars, antagonizing even the realm of space and the whole organic world of trees, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

Buddha also said:

**“At such time, monks, as kings are unrighteous, the ministers, brahmins, householders and villagers are also unrighteous. This being so, moon, stars, and sun go wrong in their courses; days and nights, months and fortnights, seasons and years are out of joint; the wind blows wrongly, out of season, the sky does not rain sufficiently and seasonally, and the crops ripen in the wrong season. Men who live on such crops are short-lived, weak and sickly.”**

(AN IV.70)

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5 NĪYĀMA DĪPANĪ (MANUAL OF COSMIC ORDER) III

These prophetic words are only a warning of what may come. It is hoped that humankind wakes from its dreams of greed, hatred, and delusion before it is too late. Otherwise we will end up turning the planet into a disaster-zone where life as we know it can no longer exist.

The good news is that if we improve our thoughts, words, and actions, that change will affect not only ourselves but others and the environment as well. For example, if we radiate thoughts of loving-kindness, tolerance, compassion, contentment, and gratitude and develop these qualities in our daily lives, we might be able to counter some of the negativity that is creating many of the problems in the world. This would have a healing effect on everyone. The Buddha was known for his tolerance and compassion, emphasizing the importance of developing these qualities in our daily lives.

One meditation practice taught by the Buddha in particular can heal our hearts and minds and act as a balm healing the hearts and minds of others. It is called loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*). For this meditation, we radiate thoughts of loving-kindness to others by sincerely wishing that they be well, happy, and peaceful, free from enmity and all other defilements.

Thoughts of loving-kindness will produce many consciousness-born *kalāpas*. These particles will have a preponderance of fire-element. That fire-element can produce many generations of temperature-born *kalāpas*, internally and externally. These are manifested as good vibrations or energy emanating from us that have a positive effect on ourselves and others.



Many years ago I was in Malaysia, living with a fellow nun and a young lady. This young lady was behaving rudely towards us constantly without any apparent reason. And I was beginning to feel irritated by her behavior. One day I felt I should do something to improve the situation. Remembering the Buddha's words, "**Anger cannot be overcome by anger,**" I decided to radiate loving-kindness towards her.

Keeping her image clearly in mind, I repeatedly and sincerely sent her the following thoughts for half an hour: "May you be well and happy, free from all anger." Afterward, I returned to my room. Before I stepped inside, the other nun told me that the young lady had prepared two gifts for us. What a surprise! It was truly beyond my expectation. She presented me with a gift by respectfully bowing three times. And from that day forward she became much more cordial, and we lived in harmony until we departed.

On another occasion, I awoke in the middle of the night, having been bitten by many small black ants. When I got up the ants were crawling all over my body. Although small in size, the bite of these ants was extremely painful. As a Buddhist nun, my precept is to refrain from taking the life of any living being even if it attacks me. I tried to pick the ants off my body without harming them, but the more I tried, the more they seemed to hold on. My skin was starting to become inflamed and, not knowing what else to do, I decided that the best way to deal with them was to radiate loving-kindness towards them.

To my astonishment, most of the ants immediately stopped biting. Evidently, my thoughts had a soothing effect on their

normally aggressive behavior. One or two ants who must have been slow receivers continued to bite me. But I didn't feel any pain as my mind was suffused with loving-kindness for them. After this incident the ants continued to move around the room but never again on my body. We shared the space in harmony.

Controlled double-blind studies carried out at two separate American hospitals in San Francisco in 1998 showed that sick people who were prayed for without knowing it recovered more quickly and had fewer complications than those who were not prayed for. This may be why my teacher, who could not be cured by modern medical treatments, was cured by the Buddha's protective verses recited by a senior monk when he was severely ill many years ago.

People have reported that after radiating thoughts of loving-kindness to people they find difficult, their relationships with them improve dramatically. Perhaps employers should cultivate more loving-kindness towards their employees to ensure better productivity.

Thoughts of compassion are effective as well. I vividly remember that on two occasions when suffering from severe headaches, I tried in many ways to ease them but all in vain. Finally, I took my headache as a meditation object and repeatedly radiated compassion outward towards all sentient beings: "May all living beings be free from the headache I now experience." Within a few minutes, the headache was suddenly gone. Incredible! This approach was far more effective than taking a painkiller. We should not underestimate the power of developing a wholesome mind.

Even more interesting, however, are similar studies on inanimate things. According to the American doctor Larry Dossey, when seeds are prayed for, they tend to germinate more quickly. If Dossey's seeds and Emoto's water know how to respond to loving human thoughts, why not living beings?

Mind leads the world. The only way to effectively improve the world, to heal our wounded planet and save ourselves from destruction, is to radiate thoughts of love, appreciation, compassion and gratitude towards all living beings, even to the great Earth itself, which has sustained life for so many generations.

### 3 TEMPERATURE OR FIRE

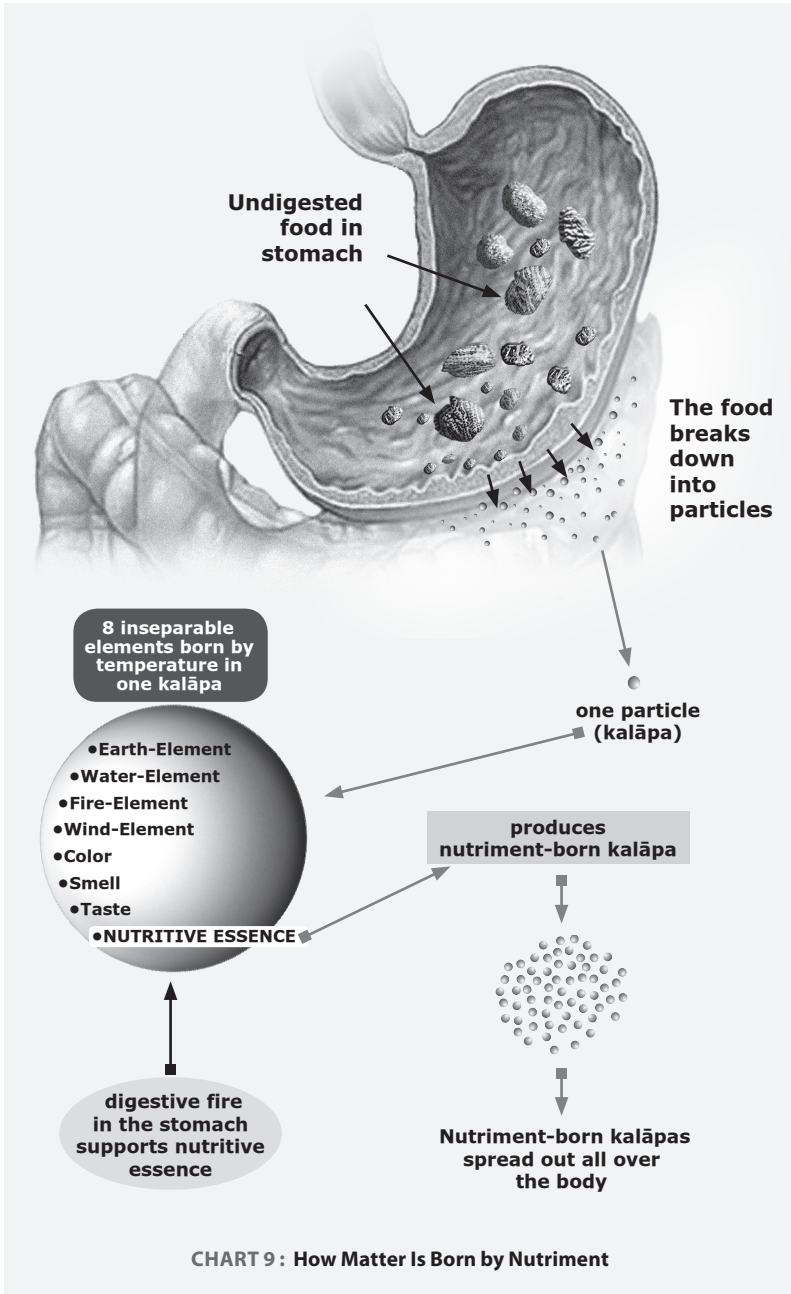
Every material particle contains the fire-element. This fire-element, when it reaches the turning phase, is able to produce a new generation of temperature-produced octad *kalāpas*. These new generations of temperature-produced octad *kalāpas* themselves contain fire-element, and this new fire-element can produce further generations of temperature-produced octad *kalāpas* both internally and externally (within and without the body). This is the law of temperature (*utu niyāma*), which explains the duration of things.

Internally, temperature-born matter includes undigested food, pus, feces, and urine. Externally created temperature-born matter includes oceans, mountains, stones, trees, plants, food, clothing, jewelry, money, tables, corpses, and so on. The fire-element in, for example, a rock, gold, or other metal is very powerful. It can produce many generations of matter, which

leads to the long duration of these types of matter as they sustain themselves over long periods.

Our body is comprised of karma-born matter, consciousness-born matter, temperature-born matter, and nutriment-born matter. After death, the corpse is only able to sustain itself as inanimate matter through new generations of temperature-born *kalāpas*. The fire-element in each of the *kalāpas* produces new generations of temperature-born *kalāpas*, one after the other, and the fire-element in them, in turn, produces further generations. This process repeats again and again until finally the force of the fire-element weakens and is only able to produce a small number of temperature-born *kalāpas*. The corpse decays accordingly and finally becomes dust. When the fire-element completely stops reproducing itself, even the dust particles of the bones disappear from the world. Conditionally arisen phenomena are always marked by the characteristics of impermanence.

When a meditator develops powerful insight or deep concentration, such consciousness produces many bright and powerful consciousness-born *kalāpas* inside the body (consciousness-born matter only occurs internally). In each consciousness-born *kalāpa*, there is a fire-element, which can produce many new generations of temperature-born octad *kalāpas*, both inside and outside the body. When many exceedingly bright *kalāpas* arise either simultaneously or successively outside the body, their brightness manifests as light. So a meditator may see the light externally. With this brilliant light, one can see things invisible to the average eye. The light can travel far. How far the light travels depends on the intensity of one's concentration. The better the concentration, the farther and brighter the light spreads.



Venerable Anuruddhā, one of the great disciples of the Buddha, was foremost in the exercise of the divine eye (*dibba cakkhu*). He could spread light throughout a thousand world-systems, enabling him to see other beings in other realms of existence. If we consider that the extremely powerful wholesome thoughts producing this light can also affect others, we can better understand why the Arahant Aṅgulimāla said that “A fully enlightened one becomes a light to the world.”

#### 4 NUTRIMENT

All living beings on this earth require a certain amount of nutritive essence from an outside source in order to maintain their physical bodies. We normally call this outside source food, which is nothing more than an aggregate of temperature-born particles we are able to take into our bodies and assimilate. After food is chewed and swallowed, the nutritive essence in its temperature-born *kalāpas* meets with the karmically-produced digestive fire in our stomachs. The digestive heat is the fire-element of the life-nomad *kalāpas* found throughout the body, which are present to a stronger degree in the stomach.

Supported by our digestive fire, this nutritive essence is able to produce new generations of *rūpa kalāpas* called matter-born-by-nutrient (*āhāraja rūpa*). These nutrient-born *kalāpas* spread out all over the body, fortifying the body with their nutritive essence. (see Chart 9)

How is this happening? The succeeding generations of nutritive essence inside nutrient-born matter supports the nutritive essence of karma-born, consciousness-born, temperature-born,

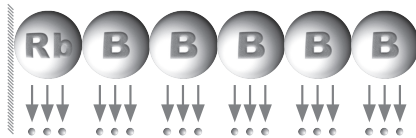
and the existing nutriment-born *kalāpas*. In this way, the nutritive essence in food eaten in a single day can sustain a body for many days. However, if the food taken is unsuitable and unwholesome, our body could become weak and sickly.

**IX**

**THE CONTINUITY  
OF MATTER**

**1 KARMA-BORN MATTER (*kammaja-rūpa*)**

Karma-born matter of body-decad *kalāpas*, sex-decad *kalāpas*, and heart-base-decad *kalāpas* for human beings begins to form at the very first arising sub-moment of the rebirth consciousness moment. Karma-born matter goes on forming continuously at every sub-moment of arising, turning, and dissolving throughout life. This implies that our body is greatly influenced by past and present karma.



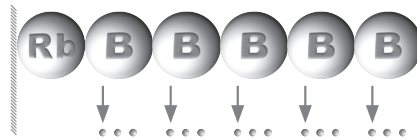
**Karma-born matter starts to form at the arising sub-moment of the rebirth consciousness-moment.**

**KEY:** **Rb** rebirth consciousness; **B** bhavaṅga;  
 ••• three sub-moments of arising, turning and dissolving.

**CHART 10: Karma-Born Matter**

## 2 CONSCIOUSNESS-BORN MATTER (*cittaja-rūpa*)

Consciousness-born matter springs up, starting with the arising sub-moment of the first *bhavaṅga* consciousness-moment, immediately following rebirth consciousness. It continues to be formed only at the arising sub-moment of each subsequent consciousness throughout life. Rebirth-linking consciousness, having just arisen in a new existence, does not produce consciousness-born matter because it is still too weak to do so. Nor can the five sense-consciousnesses, because they also lack power. Mind is strong at the arising sub-moment, so consciousness-born matter only arises at that sub-moment, not otherwise.



**Consciousness-born matter starts to form at the arising sub-moment of the bhavaṅga consciousness-moment.**

**KEY:** **Rb** rebirth consciousness; **B** bhavaṅga;  
 ••• three sub-moments of arising, turning and dissolving.

**CHART 11 : Consciousness-Born Matter**

## 3 TEMPERATURE-BORN MATTER (*utuja-rūpa*)

Every karma-born, consciousness-born, and nutriment-born matter has fire-element. Like consciousness, matter goes through three sub-moments of arising, turning, and dissolving. Unlike consciousness, matter is the strongest at the turning sub-moment. Therefore, fire-element produces temperature-born matter only at that sub-moment.



Temperature-born matter starts to form when the fire-element in each *rūpa kalāpa* of karma-born, consciousness-born, and nutriment-born matter reaches the turning sub-moment.

#### 4 NUTRIMENT-BORN MATTER (*āhāraja-rūpa*)

Every *kalāpa* in the body also contains nutritive essence. But nutriment-born matter only starts to form when the internal nutritive essence (within the body) meets the external nutritive essence (from food), and this can only occur when the food eaten has been properly digested and its nutritive essence diffused throughout the body.

## X

### THE MOMENT OF DEATH

At the time of death, karma-born matter that arose earlier ceases. Following it, consciousness-born matter and nutriment-born matter also cease. Temperature-born matter remains in the form of a corpse.

## XI

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIND AND MATTER

What is the relationship between mind and matter? Mind arises dependent on matter, either in the heart-base or the five physical sense-bases. No mind can arise without matter, except in the immaterial realms (where there is no matter). Matter is not simply the *base* for consciousness and mental factors, it is also the *object* for consciousness and mental factors.

Mind and matter are interdependent. When the mind is pure and wholesome, the body is robust and healthy. When the mind is depressed and overwhelmed by defilements, the body also becomes heavy, sluggish, and lacks energy. Conversely, a healthy body helps the mind function efficiently, just as physical illness can make it difficult to relax and concentrate the mind.

There is also a time relationship between mind and matter. The duration or life span of matter is equal to 17 moments of consciousness. In other words, 17 moments of consciousness (*cittas*) arise and pass away during the time it takes for one *rūpa kalāpa* to arise, decay, and pass away. Whereas consciousness can produce matter, matter cannot produce consciousness.

In this sense, mind is more powerful than matter. It is also why people who are sick can often heal themselves through the practice of meditation. One of my good friends, a Burmese nun, was diagnosed with multiple tumours in her breast. She practiced four elements meditation to heal herself, focusing on the

fire-element in her tumours for the first five days. When she felt the fire had heated up the tumours and the tumours became soft, she went on to discern their softness until the tumours became fluid. She then discerned their flowing characteristic with the resolution: “May all the bad energy flow away with my urine.” After ten days of four elements meditation, she went for another test and discovered that all of the tumours had disappeared.

It also helps to explain how the minds of certain saintly persons, such as the Buddha or Jesus, could have such a profound and positive effect on the rest of the world, even to this day, and how the mind of people like Hitler or Stalin could cause so much suffering and destruction.

## XII

### MATTER IS NOT “SELF”

Not understanding that the conditional matter that comprises this body is in a state of constant flux, arising and passing away at every single moment, beings mistakenly regard body as self, or self as possessing a body, or body as being in a self, or self as being in a body. They live obsessed by such notions as, “I am body, body is mine.” As such, when the body changes, experiences decline, or is lost, there arises in beings sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Not only that, from the notion of self comes the notion that things belong to a self (*attaniya*), be it real estate, monetary wealth, gold, vehicles, children, spouse, name, and fame. In an ultimate sense one does not possess a

self, so how much less anything that belongs to a self? As said in DHAMMAPADA (Verse 62):

**“Sons have I, wealth have I,  
Thus a fool frets and fusses.  
Verily, one’s self does not exist.  
Whence sons? Whence wealth?”**

Owing to the misconception that we own things, imagining that they are stable, able to satisfy, or personal, we exhaust ourselves in pursuit of them. Endlessly searching for satisfaction, we accumulate, cling to, protect, and worry about the possessions we have and the ones we still might get.

### XIII

## CONCLUSION

The first three ultimate truths — consciousness, mental factors, and matter — form what are merely conventional truths called a human, *deva*, or animal. Without this understanding, we are shackled, bound, trapped, and chained by ignorance. Ignorance in turn gives rise to craving. We live perceiving, thinking, and viewing body and mind as “mine,” “I,” “myself” with craving, conceit, and wrong view. Such clinging is the Truth of Suffering. In his first discourse, the Buddha said:

**“What is the Truth of Suffering?  
In short, the five aggregates of clinging  
are the Truth of Suffering.”**

(SN 56.11)

The five aggregates of clinging are:

1. **The aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhandha*)**, which consists of the four great elements and derived matter, whether past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near.
2. **The aggregate of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*)**, which is the same as the mental factor of feeling, whether past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near.
3. **The aggregate of perception (*saññākkhandha*)**, which is the same as the mental factor of perception, whether past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near.
4. **The aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandha*)**, which includes the remaining fifty mental factors (minus feeling and perception), whether past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near.
5. **The aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*)**, which consists of all consciousnesses except the eight supramundane consciousnesses, whether past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near.

The first aggregate is equivalent to matter. The other four aggregates are equivalent to mind. They make up the conventional self. Clinging to self as lasting, happy, and real inevitably prolongs the suffering in the course of *saṃsāra*.

*Samsāra*, which literally means “perpetual wandering,” is the round of deaths and rebirths, a beginningless arising and passing away of mind and matter. Compared to the course of *samsāra*, a single lifetime constitutes only a fleeting moment. *Samsāra* is painful, but some continue to relish the idea of being reborn again and again, because they believe that a new body provides a new home for an enduring “self,” a notion to which they have become very attached.

But those who understand the nature of birth and death, and the burden of mind and matter, hold *samsāra* in dread. They put forth great effort to free themselves from its clutches. The noble ones who have awakened their heart of compassion, bearing patiently the burden of mind and body, work hard to show others the path to ultimate freedom and happiness, which is liberation from all selfish desires and an awakening to the timeless bliss and peace of Nirvana.



# NIRVANA

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The fourth ultimate reality is Nirvana (*Nibbāna*). It is supra-mundane, that is, beyond the conditioned world of mind and matter (the five aggregates). Nirvana is the extinction of greed, hatred, and delusion — the state of final deliverance from the suffering inherent in conditioned existence. The commentaries define Nirvana as “departure from the entanglement of craving.” It is craving that binds one to the repeated cycle of birth and death. When craving is uprooted, one attains Nirvana.

## I

## TWO TYPES OF NIRVANA

Although Nirvana has the single intrinsic nature of being the unconditioned deathless element, Nirvana is said to be twofold with reference to the presence or absence of the five aggregates. The Nirvana experienced by the living *Arahants* is called “with the residue remaining” (*saupadisesa*) because the five aggregates remain present. The Nirvana attained with the *Arahant’s* final cessation is called “without residue remaining” (*anupadisesa*) because the five aggregates are discarded forever without remainder. The commentaries also refer to the two elements of Nirvana as the extinguishment of the defilements (*kilesa parinibbāna*) and the extinguishment of the aggregates (*khandha parinibbāna*).

Among the four ultimate truths, Nirvana is called the “unconditioned dharma” (*asaṅkhata dhamma*) because it is not conditioned by any cause, hence it is not subject to change. It

is permanent, peaceful, blissful, unchanging, and beyond the duality of self and other. The other three ultimate realities — *citta*, *cetasika*, and *rūpa* — are called “conditioned dharma” (*saṅkhata dhamma*). Conditioned dharmas are constantly dissolving and passing away. Not enduring for more than one trillionth of a second, they cannot be grasped or owned as mine, I, myself, and as such, are inevitably unsatisfactory.

## II

### DIFFERENT STAGES OF INSIGHT KNOWLEDGE

Nirvana is the object of the four Paths (*magga*) and four Fruitions (*phala*). Path and Fruition can only be achieved through *vipassanā* practice by contemplating the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and the impersonal nature (*anattā*) of mind and matter internally and externally. In the course of *vipassanā* practice, one eventually goes through different stages of insight before one realizes Nirvana. These stages of insight are:

1. Knowledge of Analysis of Mind and Matter  
(*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*)
2. Knowledge of Discerning Cause and Condition  
(*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*)
3. Knowledge of Comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*)
4. Knowledge of Rise and Fall (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*)

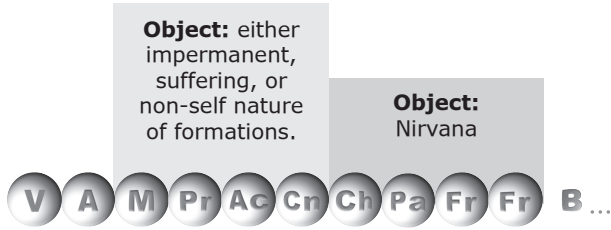
5. Knowledge of Dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*)
6. Knowledge of the Fearful (*bhaya-ñāṇa*)
7. Knowledge of Danger (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*)
8. Knowledge of Disenchantment (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*)
9. Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance  
(*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*)
10. Knowledge of Reflective Contemplation  
(*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*)
11. Knowledge of Equanimity Towards Formations  
(*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*).

### III

## STREAM-ENTRY PATH CONSCIOUSNESS

### 1 COGNITIVE PROCESS OF SUPRAMUNDANE STREAM-ENTRY PATH

When one's insight knowledge gains full maturity by contemplating either the *anicca*, *dukkha*, or *anattā* of formations (*saṅkhāra*), one attains Nirvana. At that time, the cognitive process of supramundane stream-entry path (*sotāpatti magga vīthi*) runs as follows:



- KEY:**
- |           |                                      |           |                     |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| <b>V</b>  | vibrating bhavaṅga;                  | <b>A</b>  | arresting bhavaṅga; |
| <b>M</b>  | mind-door adverting consciousness;   |           |                     |
| <b>Pr</b> | preparation;                         | <b>Ac</b> | access;             |
| <b>Cn</b> | conformity;                          | <b>Ch</b> | change-of-lineage;  |
| <b>Pa</b> | stream-entry path consciousness;     |           |                     |
| <b>Fr</b> | stream-entry fruition consciousness; |           |                     |
| <b>B</b>  | bhavaṅga.                            |           |                     |

**CHART 12 : Cognitive Process of First Attainment of Path and Fruition**

First, a *bhavaṅga* vibrates, then a second *bhavaṅga* is arrested. After that, a mind-door adverting consciousness arises, observing either the *anicca*, *dukkha*, or *anattā* of formations. Then a wholesome sense-sphere consciousness associated with knowledge arises as four *javanas*, which perform the following functions:

1. Preparation (*parikamma*), which prepares the mind for the attainment of Path consciousness;
2. Access (*upacāra*), which arises in proximity to the attainment of Path consciousness;
3. Conformity (*anuloma*), which harmonizes the preceding moments with the subsequent attainment of the Path. After this, one's consciousness ceases to take formations as an object.

4. Then change-of-lineage (*gotrabhu*) arises, which is the first consciousness to take Nirvana as its object, thereby passing out of the lineage of worldlings (*puthujjana*) and entering into the lineage of the Noble Ones (*Ariya*). It prepares the mind for the arising of Path Knowledge and then ceases.

After change-of-lineage, path consciousness follows in an uninterrupted continuity, piercing and exploding the mass of greed, hatred, and delusion never pierced and exploded before. Path consciousness arises only once, taking Nirvana as its object. As a direct or immediate result of path consciousness, two or three moments of fruition consciousness arise, taking Nirvana as their object. At this point, one becomes a stream-enterer. After two fruition consciousnesses, the mind returns to the life-continuum, lapsing into *bhavaṅga* again.

Although change-of-lineage takes Nirvana as its object, it does not have the power or stability to destroy defilements as does path consciousness. Path consciousness arises for only one consciousness-moment and then passes away. In fact, it is never again repeated in the mental continuum of the person who attains it, since the connected fetters have been permanently uprooted. One consciousness-moment is powerful enough to eradicate connected fetters. The corresponding fruition consciousness initially arises immediately after the path consciousness-moment, and endures for two or three consciousness-moments. Subsequently, it can be repeated for many thousands of moments when one enters fruition attainment.

## 2 FETTERS UPROOTED BY STREAM-ENTRY PATH CONSCIOUSNESS

Stream-entry path consciousness permanently uproots three fetters:

1. Identity view (*sakkāya-dit̥ṭhi*). Such a person no longer considers the five aggregates as “myself” (*atta*).
2. Attachment to Rites and Rituals (*silabbataparāmāsa*). This includes attachment to such practices as imitating the behavior of cows, dogs, and other animals, human sacrifice, various forms of torturing the body (such as flagellation, sleeping on a bed of thorns, standing on one foot, burning oneself, holding one’s breath, and excessive fasting). Such practices can neither purify the mind nor lead to escape from the round of rebirths.
3. Doubt (*vicikicchā*). This specifically refers to doubt in the awakening of the Buddha, the truth of his Dharma, and the practice of his noble disciples. This doubt a stream-enterer has completely destroyed. This can be verified by the story of Suppabuddha, the leper, who became a stream-enterer while listening attentively to a discourse given by the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> When the crowd had dispersed, he followed the Buddha to the monastery. Sakka, king of the *devas*, wishing to test the leper’s confidence in the Triple Gem, appeared to him and said, “You are only a poor man, living on what you get by begging, with no one to fall back on. I can give you immense wealth if you deny

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1 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY 66

the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and say that you have no use for them.” Suppabuddha replied, “I am certainly not a poor man, with no one to rely on. I am a rich man; I possess the Seven Noble Treasures which all *Ariyas* possess: confidence (*saddhā*), morality (*sīla*), shame of wrongdoing (*hiri*), fear of wrongdoing (*ottappa*), learning (*suta*),<sup>2</sup> generosity (*cāga*), and insight knowledge (*paññā*).”

Then Sakka went to the Buddha and related the conversation between himself and Suppabuddha. The Buddha explained to Sakka that it would not be easy even for a hundred or a thousand Sakkas to make Suppabuddha lose faith in the Triple Gem. This is one example of the unshakeable faith that one develops upon becoming a stream-enterer.

One who experiences stream-entry path and fruition is called a Stream-enterer. He has shortened his stay in beginningless *samsāra*. However negligent the stream-enterer may be, he or she is fixed in destiny and bound to attain final Nirvana within seven lifetimes.<sup>3</sup> He is no longer bound to the netherworld.

Neither is such a person capable of concealing a wrong deed he has committed. Upon committing a wrong deed he immediately confesses, reveals, and discloses it to others, and he undertakes restraint for the future. Take the case of the Buddha’s lay disciple Khujjutarā, a servant of Queen Sāmāvati. One of her duties was to buy flowers for the Queen. She had fallen into the

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2 Learning (*suta*): including learning knowledge (*agama-suta*) and direct knowledge (*adhigama-suta*) such as analysis of mind and matter and discerning cause and effect.

3 RATANA SUTTA (Sn 2.1)

bad habit of keeping for herself half of the money given to her for buying flowers. Due to the ripening of her past good karma, one day she was able to listen to a discourse given by the Buddha and attained stream-entry path and fruition. Since it is impossible for one who has seen the Path to conceal his or her wrong deeds, Khujjutarā confessed to the Queen that she had not been performing her duty honestly. Queen Sāmāvātī, being a benevolent person, forgave her.

Stream-entry path consciousness also permanently uproots five other consciousnesses, namely, the four consciousnesses rooted in greed, associated with wrong view, and the consciousness rooted in delusion, associated with doubt.

### **3 FOUR FUNCTIONS OF STREAM-ENTRY PATH CONSCIOUSNESS**

Just as a lamp performs four functions simultaneously in a single moment (it burns the wick, makes light appear, dispels darkness, and consumes the oil), similarly, stream-entry path simultaneously performs the following four functions:

1. Full understanding of the Noble Truth of Suffering, which is the five aggregates of clinging;
2. Abandoning the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, which is craving for any sensual pleasure that is strong enough to lead to rebirth in the four woeful states;
3. Realizing the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, which is Nirvana; and
4. Developing the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering, which is the Noble Eightfold Path:





- i. **Right View:** realizing Nirvana, which is the same as the mental factor of wisdom faculty;
- ii. **Right Thought:** application of the mind to Nirvana, which is the same as the mental factor of initial application of the mind;
- iii. **Right Speech;**
- iv. **Right Action;**
- v. **Right Livelihood;**

Right speech, right action and right livelihood are necessarily present as the three moral factors of the eightfold path, performing the function of eradicating the inclinations to wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood respectively.

- vi. **Right Effort:** making the effort to realize Nirvana, which is the same as the mental factor of effort;
- vii. **Right Mindfulness:** being mindful of Nirvana, which is the same as the mental factor of mindfulness;
- viii. **Right Concentration:** unification of mind on Nirvana, which is the same as the mental factor of one-pointedness.

Thus at the time a meditator enters the stream, all eight factors of the supramundane Noble Eightfold Path flow uninterrupted, from the arising of right view until the attainment of Nirvana.

What is meant by all this? With Nirvana as its object, the mental factor of wisdom faculty associated with path consciousness removes the ignorance that covers the Four Noble Truths. Thus,

for the first time, one knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are. Not until the attainment of stream-entry (*sotāpanna*) path consciousness can we truly begin to understand the Four Noble Truths.

As the Buddha said:

**“Monks, it is through not understanding, not penetrating the Four Noble Truths that you and I have roamed and wandered through this long course of repeated births and deaths. But when these Four Noble Truths are understood and penetrated, rooted out is the craving for existence, destroyed is that which leads to renewed becoming, and there is no more coming to be.”**

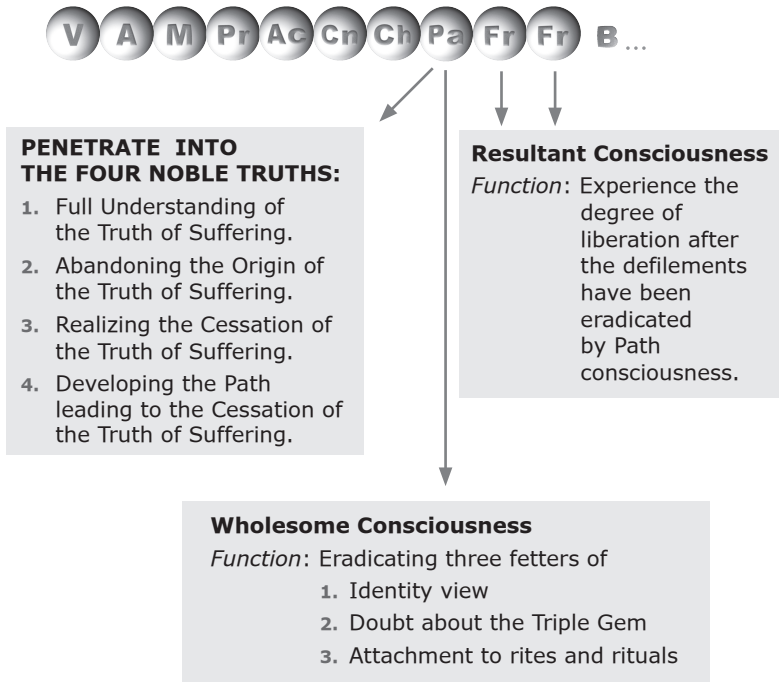
(SN 56.21)

#### IV

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PATH CONSCIOUSNESS AND FRUITION CONSCIOUSNESS

What is the difference between path consciousness and fruition consciousness? Path consciousness is wholesome consciousness, fruition consciousness is resultant consciousness. Path consciousness gives its result immediately after its own occurrence. This is the special quality of supramundane dharma: it is *akālika* (takes no time). Mundane wholesome dharma, such as an act of charity one performs, bears its fruit after a certain period of time, for example, after a day, ten days, one month, four years, ten years, or even after many lives. Path consciousness bears its fruit without delay.

Path consciousness has the function of eradicating (or of permanently attenuating) defilements; fruition consciousness has the function of experiencing immediately the degree of liberation made possible by the preceding path consciousness.



- KEY:**
- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <b>V</b> vibrating bhavaṅga;                   | <b>A</b> arresting bhavaṅga; |
| <b>M</b> mind-door adverting consciousness;    |                              |
| <b>Pr</b> preparation;                         | <b>Ac</b> access;            |
| <b>Cn</b> conformity;                          | <b>Ch</b> change-of-lineage; |
| <b>Pa</b> stream-entry path consciousness;     |                              |
| <b>Fr</b> stream-entry fruition consciousness; |                              |
| <b>B</b> bhavaṅga.                             |                              |

**CHART 13 : Cognitive Process of Stream-Entry Path & Fruition Consciousness**

V

## THIRTY-SIX MENTAL FACTORS ARISE WITH STREAM-ENTRY PATH CONSCIOUSNESS

When stream-entry path consciousness arises taking Nirvana as its object, 36 associated mental factors also arise. What are these 36 mental factors?

1. **Contact** causes the impingement of stream-entry path consciousness and its associated mental factors with Nirvana;
2. **Feeling** experiences the bliss of Nirvana;
3. **Perception** notes, “This is Nirvana”;
4. **Volition** urges the path consciousness and its associated mental factors to take Nirvana as an object;
5. **One-pointedness** unifies the consciousness and its mental factors on Nirvana;
6. **Life-faculty** sustains the vitality of consciousness and its associated mental factors;
7. **Attention** directs the consciousness and its associated mental factors towards Nirvana;
8. **Initial application of mind** places the consciousness and its associated mental factors on Nirvana;
9. **Sustained application of mind** continuously sustains the consciousness and its associated mental factors on Nirvana;
10. **Decision** makes the decision, “This is Nirvana”;

11. **Effort** supports consciousness and its associated mental factors to know Nirvana;
12. **Joy** makes consciousness and its associated mental factors delight in Nirvana;
13. **Desire** wishes to attain Nirvana;
14. **Faith** is unshakeable faith in Nirvana;
15. **Mindfulness** means not forgetting Nirvana;
- 16/17. **Shame of wrongdoing** and **fear of wrongdoing** arise at the moment of path knowledge when the desire to perform unwholesome actions is eradicated;
18. **Non-greed** does not adhere to Nirvana as “mine”;
19. **Non-hatred** is the agreeable state of mind that sees Nirvana;
20. **Neutrality of mind** balances consciousness and the associated mental factors so they can function together in harmony at the time of taking Nirvana as their object;
- 21/22. **Tranquillity of consciousness** and **tranquillity of mental factors** provide tranquillity and serenity of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object;
- 23/24. **Lightness of consciousness** and **lightness of mental factors** are the qualities of lightness and swiftness of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object;
- 25/26. **Malleability of consciousness** and **malleability of mental factors** are the pliancy of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object;

- 27/28. Wieldiness of consciousness** and **wieldiness of mental factors** are the adaptability of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object.
- 29/30. Proficiency of consciousness** and **proficiency of mental factors** are the skillfulness of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object;
- 31/32. Rectitude of consciousness** and **rectitude of mental factors** are the uprightness of mind at the time of taking Nirvana as the object;
- 33-35. Right Speech, Right Action** and **Right Livelihood** arise together as the three morality factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, which eradicate wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood;
- 36. Wisdom faculty** penetrates Nirvana and removes the ignorance that obscures and veils the Four Noble Truths.

Thus, there is one stream-entry path consciousness and 36 associated mental factors at the moment stream-entry path consciousness realizes Nirvana. Stream-entry path consciousness is supramundane consciousness.

## VI

## SUPRAMUNDANE CONSCIOUSNESS

There are eight supramundane consciousnesses. Four are supramundane wholesome consciousnesses and four are supramundane resultant consciousnesses.

### 1 FOUR SUPRAMUNDANE WHOLESAME CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. Path consciousness of stream-entry
2. Path consciousness of once-returning
3. Path consciousness of non-returning
4. Path consciousness of *Arahantship*

### 2 FOUR SUPRAMUNDANE RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. Resultant fruition consciousness of stream-entry
2. Resultant fruition consciousness of once-returning
3. Resultant fruition consciousness of non-returning
4. Resultant fruition consciousness of *Arahantship*

While path consciousness of stream-entry permanently eliminates the three fetters, path consciousness of once-returning does not eradicate any fetters, but lessens the grosser forms of sensual desire and ill-will. One who has reached this stage will be



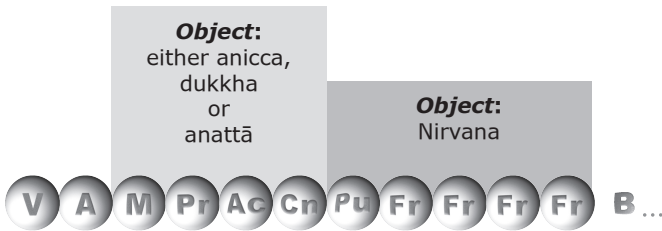
reborn in the sensuous planes at most one more time before final liberation. Path consciousness of non-returning eradicates the fetters of sensual desire and ill-will; it also permanently uproots the two consciousnesses rooted in anger. He will never again be reborn in the sensuous planes, but in the fine-material world if he does not attain *Arahantship* in this life. Path consciousness of *Arahantship* eliminates the remaining five subtle fetters: desire for fine-material and immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. It also eliminates the remaining five unwholesome consciousnesses: the four rooted in greed dissociated from view and the one rooted in delusion associated with restlessness. Thus all unwholesome consciousnesses are forever destroyed and never arise in an *Arahant's* mind.

All eight supramundane consciousnesses take Nirvana as their object. These eight supramundane consciousnesses pertain to the four stages of enlightenment: [1] stream-entry (*sotāpanna*), [2] once-returning (*sakadāgāmi*), [3] non-returning (*anāgāmi*), and [4] *Arahantship*. Those who have attained one of these four stages of enlightenment have become noble ones. Every noble one has the capacity to enter into the fruition attainment (*phala samāpatti*) that corresponds to the path they have realized. For example, the stream-enterer enters into stream-entry fruition attainment and the once-returner enters into once-returner fruition attainment, etc. The aim of fruition attainment is to experience the bliss of Nirvana, and a noble one can abide in this attainment for as long as he or she determines, up to seven days.

## VII

THE FRUITION  
ATTAINMENT

The fruition attainment cognitive process runs as follows:



- KEY:**
- |           |                                      |           |                     |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| <b>V</b>  | vibrating bhavaṅga;                  | <b>A</b>  | arresting bhavaṅga; |
| <b>M</b>  | mind-door adverting consciousness;   |           |                     |
| <b>Pr</b> | preparation;                         | <b>Ac</b> | access;             |
| <b>Cn</b> | conformity;                          | <b>Pu</b> | purification;       |
| <b>Fr</b> | stream-entry fruition consciousness; |           |                     |
| <b>B</b>  | bhavaṅga.                            |           |                     |

**CHART 14 : Cognitive Process of Attainment of Fruition**

In developing fruition attainment, the stream-enterer has to meditate on the three characteristics of formations: *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. When he or she is ready to enter fruition attainment, he or she focuses on only one of the three characteristics as the vehicle for entry into fruition attainment until the fruition attainment cognitive process (*phala samāpatti vīthi*) arises. The *bhavaṅga* vibrates twice and becomes arrested. Then, the mind-door adverting consciousness adverts to that same characteristic, followed by preparation, access, and conformity, which also take

the same characteristic as the object. Then follows purification (*vodāna*),<sup>4</sup> which takes Nirvana as its object. Here purification replaces change-of-lineage, as the stream-enterer has already cut off the lineage of worldlings. After that, stream-entry fruition consciousness, taking Nirvana as object, functions as *javana* many thousands of moments for as long as the person wishes, for up to seven days. When the person emerges from fruition attainment, the mind lapses into *bhavaṅga cittas* again.

For a stream-enterer to attain higher stages of enlightenment, he has to contemplate the three characteristics of mind and matter or the five aggregates, internally and externally, repeatedly until path consciousness of once-returning arises. In THE DISCOURSE OF THE VIRTUOUS (SN 22.122), when a monk named Mahā Kotthita asked Venerable Sāriputta to explain the appropriate way to contemplate the five aggregates in order to attain once-returning, Venerable Sāriputta replied:

**“A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not a self. Should a monk attend in this way, it is possible that monk would realize the fruit of once-returning.”**

The monk then asked again the appropriate way to contemplate the five aggregates in order to attain non-returning and *Arahantship*. The Venerable Sāriputta gave the same answer. He said, even an *Arahant* continues to attend to the five aggregates

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<sup>4</sup> In this case, purification (*vodāna*) replaces change-of-lineage, which only occurs just before the attainment of stream-entry path consciousness, since at that time, the lineage of worldlings is permanently cut off.

in the same appropriate way. Although for an *Arahant* there is nothing further to do, and nothing to add to what has been done, still these things — when developed and pursued — lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here and now and to mindfulness and clear comprehension.

The cognitive processes of the supramundane path and fruition attainments of once-returning, non-returning, and *Arahantship* are the same as that described here for stream-entry, except each respective path consciousness for a once-returner, non-returner, or *Arahant* would arise in place of the stream-entry path consciousness.

Here ends the explanation of the Fourth Ultimate Reality, Nirvana, and the eight supramundane consciousnesses.





**PART TWO**

THE **CYCLE**  
OF **BIRTH**  
AND **DEATH**



# THE PROCESS OF DEATH AND REBIRTH

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## THE NEAR-DEATH COGNITIVE PROCESS

### I

#### SIGNS APPEARING DURING THE DYING MOMENT

Consciousness continues to flow through a single existence, from rebirth-linking consciousness up to the near-death cognitive process. At that time, owing to the maturity of one of the karmas, one of the following three signs will necessarily present itself to the dying person's mind through any one of the six doors.

##### 1 KARMA

A karma includes wholesome and unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind, willed and carried out in the past. In this case, a particular karma performed in the past appears at the mind door as if it were being performed in the present moment. For example, a monastic may re-experience delivering a Dharma sermon, a butcher slaughtering an animal, or a meditator meditating.

##### 2 SIGN OF KARMA (*kamma nimitta*)

Sign of karma is a form, a symbol or an instrument in performing a karma. Wholesome signs of karma might include the food, a pagoda, oil lamps, fruit, flowers, or ascetic robes one offered to the Sangha, an object or image associated with a skillful deed that is about to determine rebirth. For example, one who performed

meritorious deeds such as building hospitals, meditation centers, missions for serving the hungry, monasteries, or roads may see the hospital, center, food, and so on as a sign of karma in their dying moment.

Unwholesome signs of karma might include a knife, gun, axe, bomb, poison, or any such instrument used when engaging in unwholesome karma. Such a sign can manifest as a sight, sound, smell, taste, tangible, or mental object. Those who slaughtered animals might hear the screaming of their victims or see the knife used when slaughtering them.

I recently heard about the case of a Vietnamese woman who experienced a sign of karma for several hours, possibly days, before she finally passed away. She had been the wife of a butcher and most probably had also done her share of butchering during the marriage. When her end drew near, villagers could hear her grunting and squealing like a pig. Her death was no doubt a most unpleasant one.

### **3 SIGN OF DESTINATION (*gati nimitta*)**

A sign of destination indicates where one may be reborn. If one is going to be reborn in one of the various hells, each with its own characteristic brand of torment, that person may see black dogs giving chase, wardens pulling at one, or fire leaping. And one may even scream, "Very hot, very hot!"

If one is going to be reborn on the human plane, he or she may see the red color of the mother's womb. If one is going to be reborn as an animal, say for example a monkey, he or she may

see a forest. One may see brightness, celestial mansions, vehicles, and platforms, or may even hear celestial music or smell a heavenly scent if rebirth is to take place on a heavenly plane.

After one of my teaching sessions in Australia on the process of death and rebirth and the various signs experienced by a dying person, one of my supporters approached me and related how her husband, just before dying, frequently cried out, "Very bright, very bright!" She thought the house light might have been disturbing his tranquillity and quickly switched it off. But her husband continued repeating the same thing before passing away. She added that her husband died of cancer but because he was a meditator, refused to use any drug that might cloud his mind. He meditated until he died. This indicated to me that her husband might have been experiencing a heavenly sign of destination as radiant beings of varying degrees of glory approached.

One of these three types of signs will arise and become the object of the near-death cognitive process, except in the case of liberated ones, because *Arahants* are no longer bound to the cycle of death and rebirth.

Why does one of these objects arise during the dying moment? It arises because of a particular past karma that has met all the appropriate conditions to produce rebirth-linking consciousness in the very next life. However, because all of us have performed an infinite variety of both wholesome and unwholesome actions, how do we know which karma will produce its result at the time of death?

II

## THE ORDER OF KARMIC RIPENING

Categorized by way of the order in which actions bear their results, there are four kinds of karma:

1. **Weighty karma** (*garuka kamma*)
2. **Death-proximate karma** (*āsanna kamma*)
3. **Habitual karma** (*āciṅṅa kamma*)
4. **Reserve karma** (*katattā kamma*)

### 1 WEIGHTY KARMA

Weighty karma is powerful karma that is sure to produce rebirth consciousness immediately in the next existence. There are wholesome and unwholesome weighty karmas.

On the wholesome side, this class of karma is the attainment of fine-material and immaterial absorptions that are capable of producing rebirth in the fine-material and immaterial planes of existence.

Supramundane path consciousness is also weighty wholesome karma because it closes the door to the possibility of rebirth in an unfortunate destination, namely, the four woeful planes. On the unwholesome side, there are five types of weighty karma, sometimes called the five heinous crimes:

1. creating a schism in the Sangha;
2. injuring a Buddha;

3. murdering an *Arahant*;
4. matricide;
5. patricide.

In addition to these five weighty deeds, fixed wrong view that denies karma and karma's results also becomes a weighty karma if one adheres to it up to the time of death. But if such fixed wrong view is abandoned in the course of life, it is not reckoned as weighty karma.

The following story illustrates how unwholesome weighty karma can produce rebirth in one of the hells:

Devadatta, like Ānanda, was the Buddha's cousin. But unlike Ānanda he envied the Buddha, who received many more honors and offerings. He therefore aspired to become head of the Buddha's monastic order. Under the influence of such mental and heart-defiling corruptions as delusion, envy, and anger, he tried to kill the Buddha in order to take his place by force.

On one occasion, when the Buddha was walking near the foot of Vulture's Peak, a small hill in Rājagaha, Devadatta toppled a large rock with the intention of killing the Supremely Enlightened teacher of the Dharma. He failed because it is impossible to kill a Buddha. But he managed to injure him when a splinter from the rock hit the Buddha's foot, causing bloodshed and severe pain. This was the first weighty karma he committed.

Having failed to kill the Buddha, Devadatta tried a different tactic. He attempted to split the Order by inducing

PART TWO — THE CYCLE OF BIRTH & DEATH



some newly admitted monks to leave with him during PĀṬIMOKKHA recitation. However, most of them were soon brought back by the Buddha's chief male disciples, Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna. This is the second and even more serious weighty karma he committed, which produced rebirth in hell immediately after his untimely death. It is said that before he died of a sudden illness, he wished to repent and apologize to the Buddha. But his deeds were so heavy that he was prevented from getting to the Buddha in time. According to the commentary, Devadatta was swallowed up by the Earth and reborn in *Avīci*, the most deplorable and unbearable hell.<sup>1</sup>

The following incidents are other examples of weighty karma. Prince Ajātasattu was spurred on by Devadatta to kill his father, King Bimbisāra, thereby usurping the throne to rule alongside Devadatta in a planned alliance of church and state.<sup>2</sup> Although Ajātasattu had developed sufficient perfections (*pāramī*, very meritorious karma undertaken with the aim of attaining Nirvana) to attain path and fruition in that very life, he was unable to do so, even while listening to a discourse delivered by the Buddha and even as his ministers attained. Although he sat alongside them and heard the same words, his weighty karma frustrated his attainment. This is because anyone who has committed one of the five weighty karmas is unable to attain absorption or Nirvana for the rest of his life.

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1 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

2 Ibid



## 2 DEATH-PROXIMATE KARMA

Death-proximate karma is volitional action performed or remembered shortly before death, prior to the last cognitive process. When there is no weighty karma, death-proximate karma ripens first.

There are several stories exemplifying the powerful effect of death-proximate karma. Once Maṭṭakuṇḍalī, the only son of a stingy millionaire, was dying of jaundice. This was because his father was unwilling to spend any money on medical consultation. Moreover, the millionaire had his dying son put out near the front door, in case any of their relatives came by to visit the poor boy, lest they should see all the riches inside the house.

With his divine eye, the Buddha perceived the plight of the dying boy. Out of compassion he appeared before him. When Maṭṭakuṇḍalī saw the Buddha, his heart was overfilled with joy and a sense of devotion. At that very moment, in possession of deep faith in the Buddha, he died and was immediately reborn in one of the heavens. What caused this dramatic result? It was due to the wholesome death-proximate karma Maṭṭakuṇḍalī had mentally performed at that moment.<sup>3</sup>

Another example of death-proximate karma concerns one of the Burmese monks at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. This recluse had been born with a large scar on top of his head. When he arrived and began to practice dependent origination, he was able to recall his previous life. He had been a robber and was finally caught and punished. His punishment was to be placed inside

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<sup>3</sup> DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

a large rice bag and beaten with sticks. As he was being beaten, one of the sticks made a large gash at the top of his head. He was then thrown into the river while still inside the bag.

But as he was drowning, he was fortunate enough to vividly recall the memory of one day meeting a monk walking along the road on his alms round. In a moment of deep conviction, he offered all of his food to the monk with strong volition while wishing, "By the merit of this offering, may I become like you and attain what you have attained."

Oftentimes it is not easy to completely understand the workings of karma. They are so complex that it is said only a Buddha is able to consider the ramifications, exceptions, and intervening factors fully. All one is left to say about this story is that the monk's last life as a robber led to painful results, and the scar on top of his head is mute testament to a final moment of brutality that ended his past life. (The phenomenon of birthmarks has become a powerful line of western scientific research validating the reality of past lives.)

The near-death wholesome karma of the robber's final memory must have led to his fortunate rebirth as a human being, in a buddhist country, under circumstances that enabled him to become what he had wished for in his previous life, powered by his spontaneous act of generosity to someone who must have been a great recipient. We should not dismiss the power of what appear to be small things. The strong volition of the donor and the virtue of the recipient are the key. The Buddha said gifts offered to virtuous and Noble Ones yield greater results than gifts offered to an ordinary being.

One may argue that as a robber he had performed many unskillful deeds throughout that life, and yet just recalling one good act saved him from experiencing their painful consequences in the next life. We should understand that the rebirth-linking consciousness is greatly influenced by the power of death-proximate karma. Vividly recalling a good deed near death is powerful enough to lead to a fortunate rebirth. A skillful last thought brings a good rebirth, whereas an unwholesome last thought brings an unhappy rebirth.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the robber's unskillful actions committed throughout his life had become lapsed karma. Their karmic energy remains dormant awaiting the right conditions to opportunistically ripen and produce results as long as he remains in the cycle of birth and death.

The next example shows how negative death-proximate karma can manifest. During the Buddha's time a monk was offered a robe made of the finest cloth and became very attached to it. However, he died before he was able to wear it. Due to his strong attachment, he was reborn within the folds of the robe — as a flea. After the monk's funeral services, his fellow monks were preparing to distribute his belongings. But the Buddha with his divine ear heard the frantic cries of the flea about to be "robbed" of his property. He requested Ānanda to postpone the distribution for seven days, knowing that if the cloth had been given away, the flea's anger would have caused him to be reborn in a miserable hell. After seven days the flea's past good karma as a monk matured, and he was reborn in Tusita Heaven.<sup>4</sup> In this case,

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4 DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY

the monk, who became an ascetic to renounce attachments, could be faulted for clinging even to his small store of allowable requisites.

Because that attachment persisted until just before the dying moment, it was potent enough to cause rebirth in the animal world, even if only for a short time. We see that any possession one clings to with the delusion of ownership, even a piece of cloth, can become the object of attachment and downfall. Those who possess great wealth and family should constantly watch for even stronger attachment.

Another example is a western nun's experience, who stated that in her fifth past life, she was a celestial being, a male *deva*. He served a larger, more powerful *deva* and fell in love with a female *deva*. But after some time, the female *deva* left him for a more powerful *deva*. His mind began to burn with anger and jealousy, and his life-faculty was immediately cut off. Owing to the anger-tainted consciousness serving as death-proximate karma, the former *deva* spontaneously reappeared in the realm of hungry ghosts living in darkness.

Understanding the importance of wholesome death-proximate karma that leads to a happy rebirth, relatives and friends should avoid crying or arguing over their inheritance in front of a dying person. This can disturb the dying person's mental tranquillity and lead to catastrophic results. Instead, the bereaved should do their best to create a supportive and loving environment, which will become a supporting condition for the ripening of that person's near-death wholesome karma.

For example, the bereaved can perform some charitable act on the dying person's behalf for a cause or organization the person favors, then announce it as joyful news. They might also

- keep a Buddha image in the room to inspire confidence and joy,
- decorate the room with flowers and incense to make the environment calm and peaceful,
- invite monastics or friends for protective (*paritta*) or discourse (*sutta*) chanting,
- radiate loving-kindness to him or her,
- direct the dying person's mind to a meditation subject regularly practiced (such as mindfulness of breathing),
- remind the person of good deeds done previously.

These are just a few ways to support the dying person's wholesome mental state in order that the person passes away peacefully, joyfully, and uplifted, ensuring a fortunate rebirth in the world to come.

When one is reborn on a higher plane, such as the human or *deva* worlds, one has a much better opportunity to cultivate what is profitable. When many wholesome deeds are performed, unwholesome deeds accumulated by cycling through births and deaths lose their power to ripen quickly. And even if they ripen, their potency is lessened due to the abundance of wholesome karma. This process is compared to adding fresh water to salted water to dilute its saltiness.

### 3 HABITUAL KARMA

Habitual karma is any type of volitional mental, verbal, and bodily action one frequently engages in. For a hunter, habitual karma is hunting animals; for a doctor, treating patients; for a devoted Christian, praying to the God; for the truthful, speaking the truth; for a benevolent person, radiating love for everyone. For a devoted Buddhist, his habitual karma might be offering the four requisites to monastics, keeping the five or eight precepts, listening to Dharma, practicing tranquillity or insight meditation, offering flowers, lights, and incense to the Buddha's image, or studying Dharma.

One story in DHAMMAPADA 224 shows how different good habitual karmas produce their results in the very next life. Once, Venerable Moggallāna visited the *deva* world and found many *devas* living in luxurious mansions. He asked them what good deeds they have done to be reborn in the *deva* world. They gave him different answers. One of them said it was because he always spoke the truth; another female said she did not get angry with her master and had no ill-will towards him although he often abused her. Then, there were others who were reborn there because they helped the needy.

Another example of unwholesome habitual karma comes from a meditator at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. When he traced back the causes and conditions to his second past life, he saw that he was a monk at that time with the unfortunate habit of criticizing his fellow monks for eating meat, particularly beef. His harsh speech was willed and carried out with anger, which created many unwholesome *javanas* in the mind-door cognitive

process in his stream of consciousness. At his dying moment this unwholesome karma matured. An ox appeared as a sign of destination during his near-death cognitive process. Thereafter, he passed away. Rebirth-linking consciousness apprehended the same sign of destination as its object, and he was reborn as an ox. As an ox, it was able to recall its wrong speech performed in his previous life as a monk. And though unable to speak, the ox shed many tears. Fortunately, at his dying moment, some of the ox's previous wholesome karma as a monk matured. Based on his good habitual karma of virtue and meditation as a monk, he was able to take rebirth as a man in his present life.

From this example we come to understand that karma performed in one life does not necessarily produce rebirth consciousness in the very next life. A karma performed two lives ago, or even many lives ago, may suddenly meet with sufficient supportive conditions in the dying moment, and like a seed finally coming into contact with all that it needs to mature, cause rebirth consciousness to arise in the new life.

In the absence of death-proximate karma and weighty karma, habitual karma will produce its result and serve as the cause and supporting condition for our next life. The best habitual karma is concentration and insight meditation practice. For this reason if we make a habit of keeping our attention on a meditation object, our attention will come under greater conscious control and naturally return to our meditation object at the time of death. Wholesome habitual karma is important for many reasons, not the least of which is that it can become wholesome death-proximate karma with the power to produce a fortunate rebirth.

Whoever dreads an unhappy rebirth should exert effort to guard his or her mind. Mind is the forerunner of all states. Unhappy rebirth is the reflection of the negativity of the mind.

#### **4 RESERVE KARMA**

Reserve karma includes any remaining karma potent enough to take the role of setting the course of our rebirth.

There is an excellent simile utilized by the Buddha comparing examples of these four categories of karma to many cattle in a shed. The four kinds of karma have a natural order of ripening when past actions bear results. Suppose many cattle are kept in a shed overnight. In the morning, as the door of the shed is opened to set them out to pasture, which one will come out first?

If there is a very large and strong bull, it will of course go out first. This can be likened to weighty karma, which will definitely bear its result in the very next life. If there is no large and strong bull then the one closest to the door will go out first. This can be likened to death-proximate karma bearing its fruit immediately in the next life. If one of the cattle has been attentive, repeatedly noting what time the shed is opened, it may move to the door just before it opens and come out first. This is like habitual karma bearing its result in the next life. A weaker one, who had not been close to the door but who suddenly got shoved there by the others, may come out first. This can be likened to an unexpected reserve karma that has an opportunity to ripen and bear its fruit in the very next life.



III

NEAR-DEATH  
COGNITIVE PROCESS  
(MARAṄĀSANNA VĪTHI)

How does the near-death cognitive process<sup>5</sup> occur? During the dying moment, one of the karmas performed, perhaps a death-proximate karma or a habitual karma, ripens and manifests as karma, a sign of karma, or as a sign of destination at one of the dying person's six sense-doors.

Let us take the example of another meditator at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. He was able to recall his immediate past life. At that time he had been a domesticated pig, living on a small farm in Myanmar. Every day, as a traditional practice, his owner would offer food to the monastics who came by on alms round. Contrary to what most of us think animals are or are not capable of, the pig was very happy to watch his owner making these offerings.

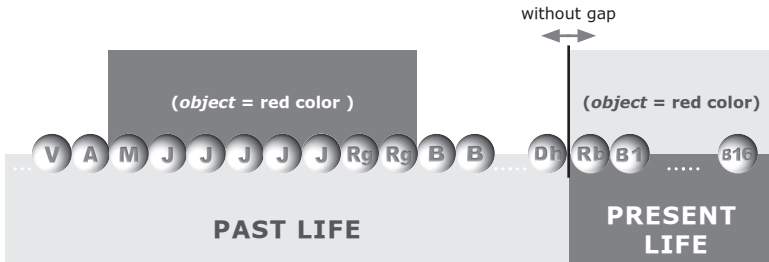
At the time of death, the wholesome habitual karma of rejoicing in others' merit ripened. It caused the appearance of a sign of destination, in this case the red color of a human womb, in his final near-death mind-door cognitive process. It seems most meditators at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery who discern their past lives saw the red color as a sign of destination, indicating rebirth as a human being.

The near-death mind-door cognitive process runs as follows:

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5 For an explanation of the near-death cognitive process, please refer to Chart 15.

THE PROCESS OF DEATH & REBIRTH



**KEY:** Dh death consciousness; Rb rebirth consciousness;  
V vibrating bhavaṅga; A arresting bhavaṅga;  
M mind-door adverting consciousness;  
J javana consciousness;  
Rg registering consciousness;  
B bhavaṅga consciousness.

**CHART 15 : The Near-Death Cognitive Process**

Initially the life-continuum consciousness vibrates for a moment and is arrested. Then the mind-door adverting consciousness arises and adverts to the red color as its object, followed by five *javanas*, which swiftly run over the object (red color), apprehending it.

Usually sense-sphere *javanas* arise seven times. But during the near-death cognitive process, *javanas* run only five times, owing to the weakness of the heart-base at the time of death. Unlike the usual *javanas*, which carry karma, this last *javana* process lacks the original productive karmic potency, acting rather as the channel for the past karma that has ripened and is ready to produce rebirth. After these five *javanas*, two moments of registering consciousness arise and cease (sometimes they may not arise). The near-death cognitive process comes to an end here.

Then the mind lapses into the stream of *bhavaṅga* consciousness (in some cases, *bhavaṅga* consciousness may not arise). This is followed by one moment of death consciousness (*cuti-citta*). This is the last consciousness in life. It performs the function of passing away from the present existence. Death consciousness, which is process-freed, is out of the cognitive process. So death consciousness takes a different object than the near-death cognitive process.

“Death” is formally defined as the cutting off of the life-faculty at the end of a single existence. Immediately after death consciousness, without any gap, rebirth-linking consciousness, together with its associated mental factors, arises, taking the same object as the near-death cognitive process of the previous life as its object (in this example the red color).

From this we can directly see that the subsequent birth is not determined by the last moment of death consciousness, which itself is resultant consciousness. It is determined by past karma, which causes the sign of destination (in this case the red color) to appear at the near-death cognitive process. However that past karma is not necessarily related to the karma accrued in the first previous life. It can be karma performed two lives ago, as in the case of the monk who was reborn as a flea, or a million lifetimes ago.

# REBIRTH

## IV

### THREE VIEWS ABOUT REBIRTH

What will happen after death? There are three predominant views nowadays:

1. According to the view of materialism, life consists only of molecules, only matter, and mind is merely a by-product of matter. After death, all consciousness comes to an end and the life process will be completely extinguished, with nothing remaining but the dead matter.
2. Most Western religions hold an opposite view. They believe in eternity after life, holding the view that humans live a single life on earth, then go on to live eternally at some stage of existence like hell or heaven, determined by their present virtues and conduct.
3. Eastern religions believe in repeated birth and death. According to their view, the present life is just a fleeting moment in the beginningless cycle of birth and death. Hinduism believes in rebirth, but emphasizes a permanent soul migrating from one body to another. Buddhism does not believe in transmigration of soul, but in a repeated occurrence of life depending on causes and conditions; in this ongoing process, no permanent entity or soul is found.

## V

## HOW DOES THE PROCESS OF BIRTH AND DEATH OCCUR WITHOUT A TRANSMIGRATING SOUL

Now comes the question, how does the process of birth and death occur without a transmigrating soul? Following the same story of the pig, immediately after death consciousness, rebirth consciousness arises in a new human existence, taking the red color object of the near-death cognitive process of the previous life as its object. Rebirth consciousness is generated by previous karma, grounded in “latent ignorance and latent craving,” the two root causes of the round of existence. The function of rebirth consciousness is to link the previous existence to the present existence. This does not mean, however, that a soul from the past migrates to a new body. When we light up a lamp from another lamp, we never think the flame has transmigrated from the first lamp to the second. But dependent on the first lamp, the second lamp is lit up. To say a permanent soul transmigrates from one life to another is the wrong view of eternalism (*sassata-diṭṭhi*). Eternalism maintains that the entirety of personal existence exists forever, because one does not see with right understanding the constant cessation of formations dependent on conditions. As we know, consciousness arises and ceases within a trillionth of a second, and is not the same even for two consecutive moments (let alone from one life to the other). Life is just a continuity of consciousness or process sustained by the law of causality.

However, although each consciousness arises and falls away, it transmits to its successor whatever impression has been recorded upon itself, passing down whatever it experiences to the next consciousness. All thoughts and experiences we have undergone left their imprint on this mental continuum and form our habitual tendencies and temperaments. For example, one of my fellow nuns told me that when she was young, she always thought of committing suicide without any reason, until one day she discerned one of her past lives, where she ended her life by committing suicide. That experience left its imprint on her mental continuum, causing her to be inclined to commit suicide. Another example is from a British nun, who, when she practiced dependent origination, was able to recall when she had been a monkey in one of her previous lives. The habitual karma of her monkey life left behind a tendency in this life towards a desire and ability to climb trees, which she often did, sometimes to great heights, regardless of being a girl. Many hours were spent playing in her beloved trees as a young child, which led to some frustration, since she always longed to swing from tree to tree, but could not. Remember the Western nun I mentioned before who was a *deva* in that life and died because of anger? She also related to me that she still feels the effect of that anger that she harbored in her fifth past life on this present life. And in this life, she has a hatred-temperament.

This transmission of previous experiences gives us a false sense of identity, even though there is no self. Unable to discern the continuity of process arising dependent on various conditions, we wrongly perceive that the same soul transmigrates

from one life to the other. Such misperception occurred during the Buddha's time, too. During the Buddha's time a monk called Sāti who, due to his wrong understanding, proclaimed: "It is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the rounds of rebirth, not another." Other bhikkhus desired to detach him from that pernicious wrong view, but failed, and reported to the Buddha. The Buddha summoned Sāti, and asked, "What is that consciousness, Sāti?" Sāti replied: "Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions." The Buddha reprimanded him: "Misguided man, have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness? But you, misguided man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up such demerit; for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time." Then, the Buddha gave him a discourse on Dependent Origination, showing how all phenomena of existence arise and cease, based on causes and conditions. (MN38)

On the other hand, to say that all mind and matter permanently cease at the time of death and have no continuation whatsoever in the new life is the wrong view of annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*), which denies rebirth. Annihilationists claim that after death the entirety of personal existence perishes, and the new existence has nothing to do with the past. A person with an annihilationist view does not see with right understanding the constant arising of formations produced by causes. As long as the causes remain unexhausted, the effects will keep on arising. Therefore, we should be careful not to get entangled in these

two wrong views.<sup>6</sup> The Buddha rejected these two extremes and taught the Middle Path: with ignorance as a condition, karmic formations come to be; with karmic formations as condition, consciousness comes to be; with consciousness as condition, mind and matter come to be, etc.

According to Dependent Origination, the mind and matter in a new existence is the result of past wholesome and unwholesome karma rooted in latent ignorance and craving. When we shout near a cliff, we hear an echo. This echo is not the original sound, nor is it completely independent of the original sound. Likewise, a new existence is not the same as the old one, nor is it completely different or independent of the old one.

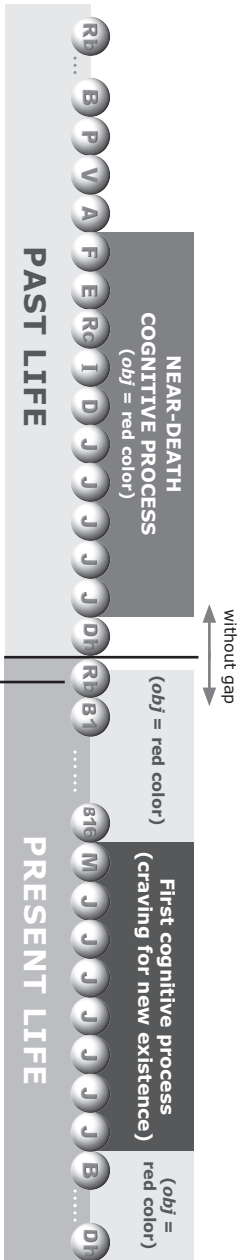
With the arising of rebirth consciousness, the matter of the body-decad *kalāpa*, sex-decad *kalāpa*, and heart-base-decad *kalāpa* also arise (see **Chart 16**). Keep in mind that rebirth consciousness cannot arise unless it is supported by the heart-base (except in an immaterial realm).

After rebirth consciousness, *bhavaṅga* consciousness arises taking the same object as rebirth consciousness (the red color in the mother's womb). Rebirth consciousness is also a kind of *bhavaṅga* consciousness, and as both are resultants of the same karma, they take the same object of the previous near-death cognitive process. After a total of 16 *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses,

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6 KACCĀNAGOTTA OF NIDĀNAVAGGA, SĀMYUTTA NIKĀYA: "This world, *Kaccāna*, for the most part depends upon a duality — upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence in regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of existence to the world."





Rebirth consciousness arises with its associated mental factors and 30 matter as the result of past karma:

- 30 Matter — (sex-decad kalāpa) — (body-decad kalāpa) — (heart-base-decad kalāpa)

- KEY:**
- Dh** death consciousness; **Rb** rebirth consciousness; **P** past bhavaṅga;
  - V** vibrating bhavaṅga; **A** arresting bhavaṅga; **F** five-door adverting consciousness;
  - E** eye-consciousness; **Rc** receiving consciousness; **I** investigating consciousness;
  - D** determining consciousness; **M** mind-door adverting consciousness;
  - J** javana; **B** bhavaṅga.

CHART 16 : Process of Birth and Death

the first mind-door cognitive process in the new life arises, taking rebirth consciousness as its object with a strong desire to live a new life. In this cognitive process an attachment develops to the new existence. **The first cognitive process in one's life is craving for the new existence, regardless of what that existence may be (see Chart 16).**

VI

THE CAUSE OF  
REBIRTH

Every being desires and craves for existence, and this craving is what the Buddha is describing as the Second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering:

**"It is this craving (thirst) which leads to renewed existence (rebirth) accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence."<sup>7</sup>** (SN 56.11)

Even a non-returner, who has completely uprooted and destroyed all desire for sensual pleasure, still has craving for fine-material and immaterial existence. This craving is a powerful mental force latent in our mental stream that keeps us going round and round in the cycle of birth and death. In fact, the first words of the Buddha after his great enlightenment, inwardly uttered in a poem of joy, acknowledged this very truth:

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7 SETTING IN MOTION THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA

“Through many a birth I wandered in *samsāra*,  
 Seeking, but not finding the builder of this house.  
 Painful it is to be born again and again.  
 O! Housebuilder<sup>8</sup>, you are seen,  
 you shall build no house<sup>9</sup> again.  
 All your rafters<sup>10</sup> are broken.  
 Your ridge pole<sup>11</sup> is shattered.  
 My mind has attained the unconditioned.<sup>12</sup>  
 Achieved is the End of Craving.”<sup>13</sup>

Even during the new being’s first mind-door cognitive process, where all the sense faculties are not yet developed, an attachment has already developed to the new existence. When that cognitive process ends, *bhavaṅga* consciousness arises in order to preserve the continuity of existence. In due course, sense-door cognitive processes and other mind-door cognitive processes will arise. As long as there is no cognitive process, *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses will continue to arise and pass away, again and again, flowing on like a stream, until, at the end of that new life, death consciousness arises again.

The current-life death consciousness takes the same red color as its object as rebirth consciousness and *bhavaṅga* consciousness. So, in one’s lifetime, rebirth consciousness, *bhavaṅga* consciousness, and death consciousness all take the same object, which is the object of the near-death cognitive process from the previous life. From here we can see that death consciousness is already determined at rebirth and that rebirth, *bhavaṅga*, and death consciousness are actually the same consciousness,

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8 Craving

9 Body

10 Passions

11 Ignorance

12 Nirvana

13 DHAMMAPADA 153-154

performing different functions at different times, just as a woman might be a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a career woman, assuming different roles at different times.

Like an endless river, sometimes turbulent and at other times so calm and quiet that we can barely see its movement, our stream of consciousness flows on from conception to death and from death to rebirth, revolving like the wheel of a cart. This is how life goes on again and again in the cycle of birth and death throughout our beginningless stay in *samsāra*. The wise, disenchanted with the transient nature of life, put forth effort, realize the deathless state, and completely cut off the fetter of craving, attaining peace.

VII

REBIRTH IN  
THE HUMAN REALM

At the first moment of conception of a human, rebirth consciousness and its associated mental factors arise together with their accompanying matter, as the result of a particular karma that ripened at the time of death.

For human rebirth, the rebirth consciousness must be one of the eight sense-sphere resultant consciousnesses, associated with knowledge or dissociated from knowledge, depending on the deed performed. If one performs a wholesome deed joyfully, with an understanding of the workings of karma, and if that deed ripens at the time of death, as a direct result one's rebirth

consciousness will be with three roots, together with thirty-three mental factors (seven universals, six occasionals, nineteen beautiful, and one non-delusion). Human beings whose rebirth consciousness is dissociated from knowledge or with two roots (only thirty-two mental factors), will be unable to achieve any *jhāna* or path and fruition in this lifetime, even though they may strive strenuously. This is because their rebirth consciousness lacks the root of non-delusion, which is an essential factor to achieve those goals.

Body-decad *kalāpa*, heart-base-decad *kalāpa*, and sex-decad *kalāpa* are formed at the moment of conception. The heart-base, which is also karma-born matter, becomes the base for rebirth consciousness. According to ABHIDHAMMA, sex is determined by our past karma and is conditioned by the individual's inclination or aspiration to be a man or woman. Some wish to be reborn female, some male, due to their own reasons. For example, Yasodhara, wife of Prince Siddhartha, in many of her past lives, performed the various karmas with the aspiration to become the Bodhisatta's faithful female companion along the rounds of rebirth and assisted him in fulfilling his wish to become a fully-enlightened Buddha.

I personally know a Myanmar nun who has the supra-normal power of recollecting past lives. She could recollect many of her past lives and told me all her numerous past lives were female, as she was only inclined to be reborn as a female.

## VIII

REBIRTH IN  
THE FINE-MATERIAL REALMS

For rebirth in the Fine-material Realms, there is a different type of mind and matter. When a *samatha* meditator achieves *jhāna*, for example first *jhāna*, through the practice of mindfulness of breathing, and is still able to enter into first *jhāna* again during his dying moment, the near-death cognitive process runs as follows:

First, *bhavaṅga* consciousness vibrates and is arrested, followed by mind-door advertent consciousness, which takes the counterpart sign,<sup>14</sup> as its object. In this case, the counterpart sign functions as the sign of karma. Five *javanas* follow, running swiftly over the object. This is followed by death consciousness, the last mind-moment of that existence. Immediately after death consciousness, rebirth consciousness, which is resultant consciousness, arises in one of the three planes of first *jhāna* (fine-material realms), apprehending the same counterpart sign as its object. (see Chart 17)

Rebirth as a Brahma in a Fine-material Realm is spontaneous, without the necessity of a womb.<sup>15</sup> If the meditator was in first *jhāna* at the time of death, then the rebirth consciousness of this fine-material being, a Brahma, is first-*jhāna* resultant consciousness. This consciousness arises along with concomitant

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 10, mindfulness of breathing.

<sup>15</sup> According to Buddhism there are four kinds of birth, namely: egg-born beings, womb-born beings, moisture-born beings, and beings having spontaneous birth.

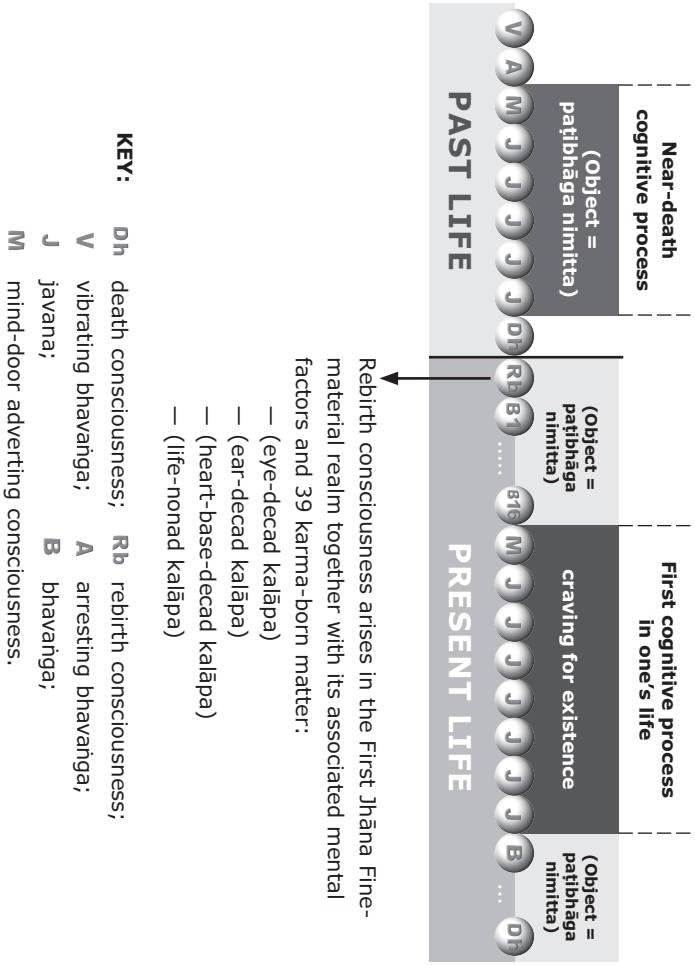


CHART 17 : Death and Rebirth Process for Brahma

mental factors and 39 types of matter — the eye-decad *kalāpa*, ear-decad *kalāpa*, heart-base-decad *kalāpa*, and the life-nonad *kalāpa*.<sup>16</sup> Mind and matter in this realm are produced by karma from the previous life and arise simultaneously, fully formed with the faculties of sight and hearing already functioning. After rebirth consciousness, 16 moments of *bhavaṅga* consciousness arise and pass away one after another, apprehending the same counterpart sign as their object. Then, the first mind-door cognitive process in the new existence arises, craving for existence. After this cognitive process the mind lapses back into *bhavaṅga* consciousness again to preserve the continuity of existence. This same *bhavaṅga* consciousness continues to flow, so long as there is no cognitive process, until the arising of death consciousness, which also takes the same counterpart sign as its object, and then the being passes away from that existence. Again, in the next existence, rebirth consciousness arises and consciousness continues to flow on from conception to death repeatedly.

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<sup>16</sup> The beings in the fine-material realm, being sexless, lack the two decads of sex, and though they possess physical forms of the nose, tongue, and body, these organs are without sense receptivity.



## IX

OCCURRENCE OF  
IDENTITY VIEW

Whether one is born as a human being, *deva*, hungry ghost, animal, or *Brahma*, in the ultimate sense, that so-called being is nothing more than a constitution of mind and matter. Thus, at the arising of rebirth consciousness, mind and matter are present.<sup>17</sup> What we call mind and matter in ABHIDHAMMA is similar to the five aggregates in the Suttas. Mind comprises four mental aggregates of feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, matter is the material aggregate.

Under the influence of ignorance, which conceals reality, the new being quickly identifies these forever-changing and constantly arising-and-dissolving five aggregates as “mine, I, or myself,” thus developing clinging and view, which brings forth suffering. He regards body as the self; the self as having body; body as being in the self; the self as being in the body. He thinks: “I am the body; body is mine,” and becomes obsessed with this wrong view of a self. He regards the remaining four mental aggregates in the same way. This is how identity view and clinging spring up based on the five aggregates.

Obsessed by this view, when the body alters and changes, then sorrow, grief, lamentation, and despair arise in him. That is

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<sup>17</sup> Except in the case of non-percipient beings in the fine-material realm, who have only one aggregate (the material aggregate), and beings in the immaterial realm, who have four mental aggregates and no materiality.

why the Buddha states the Noble Truth of Suffering is the five aggregates of clinging.

Now we can see how all beings are born into suffering and conceived in suffering. However, according to Buddhist logic, no event, occurrence or phenomenon in this world arises without causes. The entire world is governed by causality. Suffering arises owing to causes. Since the resultant five aggregates arise at the very first moment of rebirth, we see that our decision to take rebirth must have been made in a previous life.

Why do the resultant five aggregates of clinging arise at the very first moment of rebirth consciousness? According to the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*), it is karma, rooted in ignorance and craving, that results in the five aggregates. This karma was performed in one of the past lives and has met with all the conditions required to produce the five aggregates in the present life.

Let us now examine the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, which will show us exactly how, when, and why that decision was made.



# DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

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The questions “Where did ‘I’ come from? Where will ‘I’ go?” have concerned human beings for countless lifetimes. For most the answer remains uncertain.

This “I” is a conventional truth, an accepted way of speaking, cherished by almost everyone. The Buddha solved this question with the exposition of the doctrine of Dependent Origination he rediscovered.

Dependent Origination<sup>1</sup> is the doctrine of conditionality. Its purpose is to show how an “individual” or mind and matter revolve in the wheel of existence, undergoing the cycle of birth and death, and how suffering ceases by the cessation of the causes and conditions that perpetuate the cycle.

## I

### THE DEPENDENT ORIGINATION FORMULA

The Dependent Origination formula is: “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; when this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”

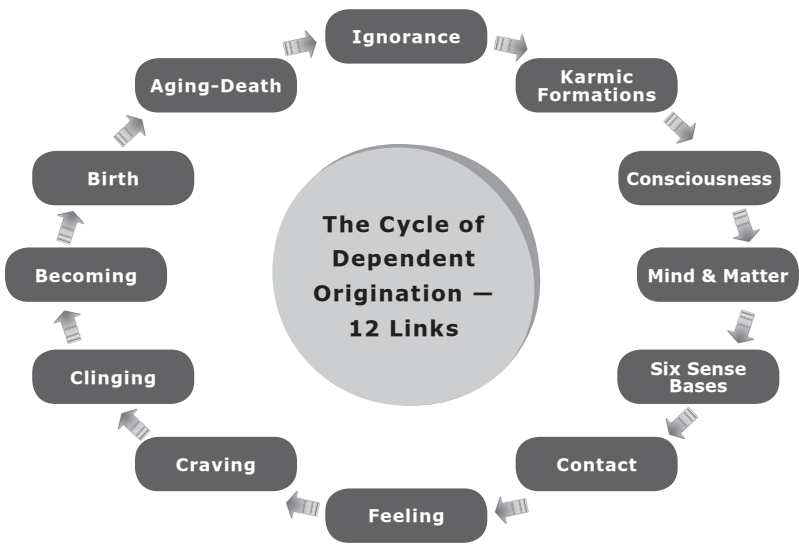
More specifically, Dependent Origination explains that, dependent on ignorance arise karmic formations; dependent on karmic formations arises consciousness; dependent on

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<sup>1</sup> The explanation of Dependent Origination here is largely based on the ancient book THE PATH OF PURIFICATION (Buddhaghosa’s magnum opus, the VISUDDHIMAGGA).

## DEPENDENT ORIGATION

consciousness arise mind and matter; dependent on mind and matter arise the six sense-bases; dependent on the six sense-bases arises contact; dependent on contact arises feeling; dependent on feeling arises craving; dependent on craving arises clinging; dependent on clinging arises becoming; dependent on becoming arises birth; dependent on birth arise aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering (*dukkha*).



**CHART 18 : The Cycle of Dependent Origination**

Dependent Origination consists of 12 interrelated factors. They are mere mind and matter. Each factor is entirely dependent upon other factors as supporting conditions and in turn becomes the supporting condition for still other factors. Let us study the meaning of each factor first before disclosing their interrelation.

II

## FACTORS OF DEPENDENT ORIGATION

### 1 IGNORANCE

The characteristic of ignorance is mental blindness or unknowing. Its function is to confuse, and its manifestation is non-penetration or concealment of the true nature of objects. According to the discourses, ignorance is not knowing the Four Noble Truths, but according to ABHIDHAMMA, ignorance means not knowing the following eight facts:

1. the Noble Truth of Suffering,
2. the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering,
3. the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering,
4. the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering,
5. the past Five Aggregates,
6. the future Five Aggregates,
7. the past and the future Five Aggregates together, and
8. specific conditionality and conditionally-arisen states, including karma and its consequences.

### 2 KARMIC FORMATIONS

The characteristic of karmic formations is to form. Their function is to accumulate, their manifestation is volition, and their proximate cause is ignorance.

There are three types of karmic formations:

1. **Formations of demerit:** these include the volitions in the 12 types of unwholesome consciousness,<sup>2</sup> eight of which are rooted in greed, two in anger, and two in delusion. These comprise all unwholesome physical, verbal, and mental formations.
2. **Formations of merit:** these are divided into two categories:
  - a. volitions in the eight types of wholesome consciousness<sup>3</sup> pertaining to the sense-sphere, four of which are associated with knowledge and four dissociated from knowledge. These comprise wholesome physical, verbal, and mental formations.
  - b. volitions in the five types of wholesome consciousness pertaining to the fine-material sphere. These are the first through fifth fine-material *jhānas* and comprise only mental formations.
3. **Formations of the imperturbable:** these include volitions in the four types of wholesome consciousness pertaining to the immaterial sphere. These are the four immaterial *jhānas*, which are mental formations.

### 3 CONSCIOUSNESS

Here “consciousness” refers to resultant consciousness. It includes rebirth-linking consciousness and consciousness that occurs in the course of an individual existence.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2.



Rebirth-linking consciousness is the initial consciousness of one's life on a plane within either the sensual, fine-material, or immaterial sphere. Its function is to link the previous to the present existence. Rebirth-linking consciousness is neither the same consciousness transmigrated from the past, nor an altogether different and independent consciousness crossing over from the past life to the present existence. With the passing away of death consciousness in the previous existence, rebirth-linking consciousness arises to link the previous to the present existence. Rightly speaking, there is a continuity of process, from death to rebirth consciousness.

Take the example of my fellow nun in Myanmar who, in her second past life, regularly offered food to the community of monastics. During her dying moment, a fortunate sign of destination, a *devi* (angel), appeared in her near-death mind-door cognitive process. That process consists of life-continuum *bhavaṅga* consciousnesses that arise and cease, followed by one mind-door adverting consciousness, five *javana* consciousnesses, and two registering consciousnesses which arise one after the other, each apprehending the same sign of a *devi* as object. Thereafter, one moment of death consciousness arises and ceases. Without any lapse in time, taking the same *devi* as object, as a continuous process, rebirth-consciousness arises in a new existence, in this case on a heavenly plane.

Therefore, rebirth-linking consciousness is not the same consciousness from the past, yet it is not completely independent of it either. It is not an enduring being passing from existence to existence, even though it may conventionally seem that way. Ultimately speaking, there is no enduring soul or self,

and yet the same karma continues to operate and produce its results.

Consciousness that occurs in the course of an individual existence includes all five sense-consciousnesses and so on.

#### **4 MIND AND MATTER**

Here, “mind” refers only to the associated mental factors, without including consciousness as we previously understood. Matter refers to the four great elements, together with their derived matter produced by karma.

#### **5 SIX SENSE-BASES**

The six sense-bases are the eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, and mind-base. The first five bases are the sensitive matter of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, whereas the mind-base is not a physical base but refers to resultant consciousness.

#### **6 CONTACT**

The coming together of sense-base, sense-object and consciousness is called contact. We have six bases, thus there are six types of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact.

#### **7 FEELING**

There are six classes of feeling: feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, and feeling born of mind-contact.

Each feeling can be experienced in one of three ways: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, or neutral feeling. Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as pleasurable or gratifying is pleasant feeling. Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as painful and difficult to endure is unpleasant feeling. Whatever is experienced physically or mentally as neither enjoyable nor hurtful is neutral feeling (MN 44). Since each of the six contacts gives rise to three types of feeling, there are 18 types of feeling ( $3 \times 6 = 18$ ).

## 8 CRAVING

Craving (*taṇhā*) literally means “thirst.” It is the same as the mental factor of greed. Although its characteristic is grasping an object, it is in fact the thirst for feeling. Because there are six kinds of feeling, there are six kinds of craving, namely, craving for sights, sounds, smells, flavors, tangibles, and objects of mind. Each of these six types of craving is threefold according to its mode of occurrence:

1. **Craving for sensual pleasure** (*kāma-taṇhā*) is longing for sense-objects that are agreeable, beautiful, and pleasurable.
2. **Craving for continued existence** (*bhava-taṇhā*) is associated with the wrong view of eternalism (regarding existence or pleasure as permanent).
3. **Craving for non-existence after death** (*vibhava-taṇhā*) is associated with the view of annihilationism (believing that beings are annihilated at death with no rebirth and no further results of karma).

## 9 CLINGING

Clinging (*upādāna*) means to take firm hold of; it is an intensified form of craving. Clinging is attachment that has become so strong that we cannot easily let go of an object. Its characteristic is seizing, its function is not to release, and its manifestation is as a strong form of craving and as false view.

There are four kinds of clinging:

1. **Clinging to sensual pleasures** (*kāmuṇupādāna*) is sensuous lust, greed, attachment, infatuation, and delight in the pleasures of the six senses to the point that one is unable to let go of them. The six objects of sensuality are, of course, forms cognizable through the eye, sounds cognizable through the ear, aromas cognizable through the nose, flavors cognizable through the tongue, tangibles cognizable through the body, and mental objects cognizable through the mind — all agreeable, pleasing, endearing, charming, enticing, accompanied by craving. Whatever pleasure or happiness arises in dependence on these six objects of sensuality that one cannot let go of is clinging to sensual pleasures.
2. **Clinging to false views** (*diṭṭhupādāna*) is harboring such pernicious ideas as: there is no value in giving, in offering, in sacrificing, in presenting as charity; no fruit or result of skillful and unskillful actions; no this world, no other world to come; no special significance in what is done to mother and father; no beings who are reborn spontaneously; no ascetics and brahmins faring and practicing rightly who, having realized this world and the other

world for themselves by direct knowledge, make them known to others. In other words, not believing in karma and karma's results denies the value of virtue, morality, restraint, and the possibility of path knowledge. These views, once established in a mind, will not leave. So it is called clinging to false views.

3. **Clinging to rites and rituals** (*sīlabbatupādāna*) is adherence to the wrong view that purification of the mind and the attainment of Nirvana can come about through the observance of mere rites and rituals such as praying, vows, austerities, self-mortification, and so on. This even includes, according to the Commentary to the PATH OF PURIFICATION, adhering to the view that moral restraint and absorption practice, which are praiseworthy and useful, is sufficient for liberation.
4. **Clinging to the doctrine of soul** (*attavadupādāna*) is regarding consciousness as soul, or feeling as soul, perception as soul, formations as soul, materiality as soul. Or it is regarding something other than these five aggregates as an enduring soul.

## 10 BECOMING

There are two types of becoming:

1. **Karma-process becoming** (*kamma-bhava*)
2. **Rebirth becoming** (*upapatti-bhava*)

Karma-process becoming is intended here. This process refers to the karmic volitions, both wholesome and unwholesome, that constitute karma that generates rebirth.

**11 BIRTH**

“Birth” means the first manifestation of aggregates of a living being when rebirth takes place in any existence. Beings in the sensual sphere have five aggregates, whereas beings reborn in the immaterial sphere have only four (mental) aggregates. Birth is a continuation of the four mental aggregates with a new form built of the material aggregate.

**12 AGING, DEATH, SORROW, LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF, AND DESPAIR**

Aging manifests as decrepitude, the loss of hair and teeth and of the skin’s beauty and elasticity, the shriveling and wrinkling of the body, the declining of the six sense faculties, the undermining of strength, confusion of memory, and intelligence, and so on. It is the waning of youthful vigor and physical strength and the increase of illness. Death is the breaking up of the material aggregate and the falling away from our current existence. Sorrow is a burning in the mind; lamentation is crying out; pain is bodily distress; grief is mental pain; despair is losing hope.

Let us now examine how each factor is interdependently arisen.

III

## LINKS OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

### DEPENDENT ON IGNORANCE ARISE KARMIC FORMATIONS

Ignorance is more than not knowing eight factual things, but also distorting them. Let us review and explain them one by one:

1. The first fact is *not knowing the noble truth of suffering*, which refers to the five aggregates of clinging. Without knowing it, we may misperceive the five aggregates in the cycle of rebirths as pleasant and desirable and so perform physical, verbal, or mental formations to renew them. This in turn becomes the cause of that very suffering. As the Buddha frequently points out, repeated birth is suffering, partly because all birth ends with aging, sickness, and death, and partly because by their very nature the five aggregates are fickle, distressing, and impersonal.
2. The second fact is *not knowing the origin of suffering*, which refers to craving. Without knowing it, we may distort reality and imagine that craving is the origin of happiness. We seek various sensual pleasures through the six sense-objects in an attempt to satiate this craving: the eye constantly longs for pleasurable sights, the ear for pleasurable sounds, the nose for pleasurable smells, the tongue for pleasurable flavors, the body for pleasurable sensations, and the mind for pleasurable mental objects.

3. The third fact is *not knowing the cessation of suffering*, which refers to Nirvana. Without knowing it, we may distort reality and imagine that the final cessation of suffering is brought about by rebirth somewhere such as a heavenly world or Pure Land. Or we may imagine that a meditative state, such as one of the very blissful *jhānas* that transcend sensual pleasure, is the final cessation of suffering. So with ignorance as condition, we perform various karmic formations to reach what our distorted view imagines is the cessation of suffering.
4. The fourth fact is *not knowing the path leading to the cessation of suffering*, which refers to the Noble Eightfold Path. Without knowing it, we distort reality and imagine that the path to the final end of suffering consists of self-indulgence, self-mortification, suicide, rites and rituals such as animal or human sacrifices to honor gods, and so on. So we perform various karmic formations based on our wrong view of what is and what is not the path. One real life experience comes from my fellow nun who was a brahmin in her past life. Owing to misguided beliefs, this brahmin consistently urged his followers to sacrifice chicken to worship god, thinking it was a wholesome deed. As a result, he was reborn as a chicken in his subsequent life.
- 5,6,7. The fifth, sixth, and seventh facts are *not knowing the past five aggregates, the future five aggregates, and both the past and future five aggregates together*. Because of that, we distort reality and may mistakenly believe that we come from nowhere and are going nowhere, denying the reality



that the present aggregates are the effect of the past and will in turn become the cause of future aggregates, if ignorance and craving remain intact. Holding this wrong belief is itself unwholesome mental karma.

8. The eighth fact is *not knowing about specific conditionality and conditionally arisen states*, which refers to not seeing Dependent Origination or the law of causality. For example, not knowing that ignorance is a specific condition for volitional formations, we may distort reality and wrongly come to think that the mental factor of ignorance is “self” and that volitional formations are performed by that same self. Or we may wrongly think that all 12 factors of specific conditionality and conditionally arisen states are self, like the misguided monk Sāti, harboring the pernicious wrong view that there is an enduring self undergoing the cycle of rebirth and death.

Thus, not knowing these eight factual things, we form the three types of karmic formations. The Buddha explains:

**“Not knowing, recluses, in ignorance, one forms the formation of merit, forms the formation of demerit, forms the formation of the imperturbable.”**  
(cf. S.ii,82)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See VISUDDHIMAGGA (5th edition, 1991) page 542, Chapter XVII, Verse 64, second paragraph.

## DEPENDENT ON KARMIC FORMATIONS ARISES CONSCIOUSNESS

### 1. At the Rebirth Consciousness-Moment

Because of karma rooted in ignorance performed in a past life, rebirth-linking consciousness arises in the present life. Thus the first consciousness in the present life, namely the rebirth-linking consciousness or what is conventionally called birth, is the direct result of karmic formations performed in a previous life. As mentioned earlier, rebirth-linking consciousness arises as a continuity of process from the past, sustained by the law of causality.

Let us look at various causes that produce this rebirth-linking consciousness in more detail. A dying man, unable to bear the rush of unmanageable painful feelings during his last moments, feels anxious as the life force of his present body gradually slips away. As the end approaches and one karma meets with suitable conditions to ripen, it manifests as a sign of karma. His mind grasps and firmly hangs on to this sign. While this process is occurring, as craving for existence remains intact, its force pushes consciousness forward. This makes it possible for his karmic formation to bear its result.

Supported by craving, the force of his past karmic formations hurls his consciousness towards a new birth. His rebirth consciousness hangs on to the same object of the sign of karma.

Latent ignorance makes him blind to the danger inherent in renewed existence. With the ceasing of death consciousness and the arising of rebirth consciousness, his mind

abandons its former support, the heart-base (or for easier understanding, the old body); and gets a new support (a new heart-base, a new body appropriate to that plane, provided by karma) in the new existence.

It is like a man who desires to cross a river, grasps and firmly hangs on to a rope tied to a tree on the bank, then hurls himself across, not knowing the danger that awaits him on the farther shore. Having hurled himself across the river, he lets go of the rope and is supported by the other bank. Likewise the newly arising rebirth consciousness, supported by a new heart-base, establishes itself in the new existence by taking as its object the same sign of karma as the previous life's near-death cognitive process.

Thus we come to a clear understanding that rebirth consciousness has arisen in this life due to causes and not without causes. There are five causes:

- i. ignorance — which is not knowing that danger awaits one in any new existence,
- ii. craving — which is the attachment to continued existence due to ignorance,
- iii. clinging — which is hanging on to the sign of karma due to intense attachment to existence,
- iv. volitional formation — which is the ripening of the volition one previously had while performing the action, and
- v. karma — which is the force that was left behind by that volition.

In brief, rebirth-linking consciousness springs up in this life because of our misguided craving for continued existence, thrust forward into the abyss of renewed existence by karmic formations, manifesting as a sign of karma, prompting our destination based on past action.

Hence, we conclude that this cycle of rebirth and death is merely a continuity of dependent processes governed by causality, not able to exist without causes and conditions. The “new” being is neither the same nor different, not the old one, not a new one. If there were absolute identity in the stream of continuity, it would be an enduring self above and beyond the process of change, which is in fact, as we can now grasp intellectually, impossible.

And yet if there were absolute otherness, then the wrongdoer cast to hell for his past misdeed would actually be innocent of any wrongdoing, for what was done in the past must have been done by a different person. Such a view nullifies the lawful (i.e. orderly) operation of karma. It denies the possibility of any relationship between what was done and what will come of it and negates the orderliness of a kind of grand justice inherent in all things throughout the universe.

But one might still ask, if no transmigration occurs, who is it that experiences the pleasant and painful results of past actions?

To ask “who” is, first of all, still clinging to the wrong view of self. As we have seen, at least intellectually, the mental factor of feeling has the characteristic of experiencing the

desirable and undesirable result of karma, which consists of pleasant and unpleasant feeling and result.

In an ultimate sense, beyond conventions of everyday speech, it is the mental factor of feeling that experiences the results of actions. Feeling feels. The aggregate of feeling is not a self. But most beings, unable to penetrate this reality with wisdom, cling to the feeling aggregate with craving, beset by ideas of me and mine originating from the wrong view of there being a self.

It is only on the level of conventional speech and conventional truth that we find such things as man, woman, ghost, *deva*, demon, *brahma*, dog, and so on, the self “who” experiences results of former actions and present feelings. Ultimately, these things are dependently originated phenomena not found as compact entities existing in reality. When we escape to reality, all such irreducible samsaric problems are instantly cleared away and solved.

## 2. In the Course of an Individual Existence

After rebirth consciousness, in due course, when the five sensitive matters of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are developed enough to be impinged upon by the five kinds of sense-objects, the five types of resultant sense-consciousness — eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness — arise.

When five-door cognitive processes are initiated, other resultant consciousness, such as receiving consciousness,

investigating consciousness, and registering consciousness, begin to arise. Many life-continuum consciousnesses also arise in the course of existence. And when yet another life comes to an end, the last resultant consciousness (death consciousness) arises and impersonally performs the function of passing away from the present existence.

Ignorance and karmic formations, the first two links in Dependent Origination, are the past life causes that lie at the root of our present existence. In other words, previous actions rooted in ignorance “created” our present existence.

So in terms of conventional truth, who is it that creates living beings? Ignorance and karmic formations are our co-creators, and rebirth-linking consciousness and other resultant consciousnesses are their creation. The Buddha says:

**“Recluse, if a person immersed in ignorance generates a meritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the meritorious; if one generates a de-meritorious volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the de-meritorious; if one generates an imperturbable volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the imperturbable.”**

(SN 12.51)

This statement clearly shows that, with karmic formations as condition, consciousness comes to be.

The Buddha taught Dependent Origination to show that there are only impersonal causes and conditions, no soul and no creator (other than our own enduring ignorance).

## DEPENDENT ON CONSCIOUSNESS ARISE MIND AND MATTER

Here, “mind” refers to three associated mental aggregates of feeling, perception and formation (mental factors). “Matter” means the material phenomena produced by karma. With the arising of rebirth consciousness, mind and matter come into being. Actually mind and matter arise simultaneously (co-arise) with the arising of rebirth consciousness. We say mind and matter arise dependent on consciousness because consciousness is the leader of coexisting mental and material factors.

The initial arising of material phenomena in a human being is invisible to the unaided eye. Beginning at the moment of conception, an embryo gradually develops into a fully formed human being as follows: embryonic fluid (invisible at first) in the first week, a foamy substance in the second week, a clot of blood in the third week, a tiny lump of flesh in the fourth week, five buds as head and limbs are formed in the fifth week. At the end of the eleventh week, the head and limbs take shape as the four sense-bases of eye, ear, nose, and tongue are formed. (Other womb-born beings may undergo different stages of development.)

For heavenly beings on sense-sphere planes of existence, rebirth is spontaneous (no womb or gestation). At the moment of rebirth-linking consciousness, there arise together three associated mental aggregates and at most 70 types of matter. These comprise the decad *kalāpas* of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, sex, and heart-base.

Beings reborn on fine-material-sphere planes of existence arise, fully formed at the moment of rebirth consciousness with

three associated mental aggregates and 39 types of matter born of karma (eye, ear, heart-base-decad *kalāpas*, and life-nonad *kalāpas*). Non-percipient beings (*asañña satta*), who inhabit the realm of non-percipient beings within the fine-material-sphere planes, have no mental aggregates, only matter (life-nonad *kalāpas*).

For beings in the immaterial sphere, rebirth-linking consciousness and three associated mental aggregates arise, but no matter arises.

### **DEPENDENT ON MIND AND MATTER ARISE THE SIX SENSE-BASES**

Here, “mind and matter” have the same meaning as above. Of the six sense-bases, the first five bases are the sensitive matter of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, while the mind-base indicates resultant consciousness, not the physical base of consciousness. The compound mind-and-matter here is understood as mind alone, matter alone, and mind-and-matter alone. There are five ways to explain this causal link:

1. How is mind (mental factors collectively) a condition for the five physical bases? The mental activity is a necessary support for them. This is because only when mind exists can physical bases exist.
2. How is mind (mental factors collectively) a condition for the mind-base? When the associated mental factors arise, they condition the arising of resultant consciousness, here called the mind-base. Although it is said that consciousness is the



forerunner of co-arising mental factors, the arising of consciousness also depends on mental factors.

3. How is matter a condition for the five physical sense-bases? When the four primary elements which are karma-born matter arise, they condition the arising of the five physical sense bases. This is because all five physical sense-bases are *derived* matter originating dependent on the four primary elements.
4. How is matter a condition for the mind-base or resultant consciousness? “Matter” here refers to five physical sense-bases. The five sense-bases serve as a base for the arising of the mind-base consisting of five sense-consciousnesses. If these five sense-bases are destroyed, no further corresponding sense-consciousness is able to arise.
5. How are mind and matter a condition for the mind-base or resultant consciousness? During the rebirth-linking moment, mind (mental factors) arises together with the mind-base (rebirth consciousness) by way of association, and the heart-base serves as the material base for rebirth consciousness by way of dependence. Remember that, according to the Law of Conditional Relations (*paṭṭhāna*), consciousness and mental factors must arise together (called “association condition” or *sampayutta paccayo*), and consciousness arises dependent on the material heart-base (called “dependence condition” or *nissaya paccayo*). After rebirth consciousness, in the course of one existence, mind and matter condition the arising of other resultant consciousnesses such as the five sense-consciousnesses. This is because consciousness cannot arise without mind and matter.

Thus it is said that dependent on mind and matter, the six sense-bases arise.

### **DEPENDENT ON THE SIX SENSE-BASES ARISES CONTACT**

With the existence of the six sense-bases, contact with their respective six sense-objects can take place. Because contact can only occur when the sense-bases exist, it is said that the arising of contact is dependent on the six sense-bases. In an unending stream of consciousness and in rapid alternation, forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangibles, and mental objects constantly impinge on the respective sense-bases, as long as we are awake.

The Buddha likens contact to a flayed cow. Wherever it stands it is nibbled at by the creatures dwelling there, whether against a wall, a tree, in water... (SN 12.63). We are nearly helpless as we stand exposed to constant excitation by the six kinds of contact, burdening us from all sides, appearing through the six sense-bases.

### **DEPENDENT ON CONTACT ARISES FEELING**

As we are constantly exposed to the contact of the six sense-objects, the six kinds of feeling inevitably follow. Their arising is beyond our control. Most beings spend their lives chasing after pleasant feeling, as such feeling provides a measure of emotional satisfaction.

## **DEPENDENT ON FEELING ARISES CRAVING**

Feeling stimulates and initiates craving. Although the characteristic of craving is grasping an object, it is in fact the thirst for feeling. Our thirst is very stimulated by pleasant feeling. It is much like a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs unable to stand the itch or irritation, scratching the scabs of his wounds with his nails, even going so far as to cauterize his body over a burning charcoal pit and deriving a kind of pleasure or relief by doing so. By scratching and picking at his wounds, he worsens his condition as it becomes infected and foul smelling. Yet, he derives a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment from doing so. In this case, it is craving for pleasant feeling that blinds him to the consequences. Likewise, because of our attachment to the pleasant feelings provided by sensual pleasures, we continue indulging in them despite the serious injury we may be causing to ourselves and others.

We are prone to becoming very attached to pleasant feeling, which serves as a condition for craving. But how does unpleasant feeling condition craving?

When the pleasant feeling one holds dear ceases, as it inevitably must due to the inherently transient nature of conditioned phenomena, then unpleasant feeling takes over. One feels pain. As we cling to the past pleasant feelings, the mind resists and rejects the newly arising unpleasant feeling, wishing the unpleasant feeling would go away and longing for the past pleasant feeling to return.

For example, a man loses his beloved wife. He holds on to the pleasant feelings she gave him, unable to bear the onset of newly arising unpleasant feelings — the pain of loss. Now a strong craving may arise to be released from this unbearable misery. Without knowing the path that brings about the end of suffering, the way to escape to reality and leave behind the misery, he indulges in sensual pleasures as the only means he knows of to deal with pain: delighting in intoxicating drinks and drugs and sexual enjoyments. As a result, craving increases, and he is soon trapped in the net of sensual craving. Like an ant overcome by craving for sweetness, he drowns in a battle with honey.

How does neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling condition craving? Neutral feeling is close to pleasant feeling. For example, a meditator is experiencing neutral feeling born of fifth absorption, resulting from the practice of mindfulness of breathing. She feels extremely good and begins to become attached to it.

Therefore, all three types of feeling condition craving.

Craving is the origin of suffering. Although it is rooted in ignorance, its near cause is feeling. To break the chain linking feeling and craving, it is vitally important neither to react with craving towards pleasant feeling, nor with aversion towards unpleasant feeling, nor with ignorance towards neutral feeling, but just to accept whatever feeling there is, as it is, with a detached and dispassionate attitude. Pay attention to feelings as impermanent, as incessantly arising and passing, as suffering, as a boil, a dart, as insecure, and devoid of self. This way of perceiving and conceiving of feelings effectively blocks craving from arising.

The Buddha teaches:

**“Recluses, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past, present, or future regard what is in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as disease, as fearful, they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving...they are freed from suffering, I say.”**

(SN 12.66)

Conversely, Buddha said:

**“Recluses, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past, present, or future regard what is in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure, they nurture craving. In nurturing craving they nurture suffering; they were not freed from suffering, I say.”**

(SN 12.66)

Heeding what the Buddha teaches, the way we perceive feelings leads either to the arising or to the cessation of craving.

Craving and ignorance are the two root causes that keep beings cycling through the painful round of birth and death. Ignorance is pointed out as the past cause (in a past life) conditioning the present effect (this life), and craving is pointed out as the present cause conditioning the future effect (future lives). But in an ultimate sense, craving and ignorance always arise simultaneously. Although they actually arise together, ignorance is placed first in the chain of Dependent Origination because it rules as the base of all the other factors, like an influential king. Craving is like the chief minister who does the king's bidding.

## **DEPENDENT ON CRAVING ARISES CLINGING**

We have mentioned four kinds of clinging: clinging to sensual pleasures, to false views, to rites and rituals, and to a doctrine of soul.

Those who crave sensual pleasures gradually see their craving develop into strong sensual clinging and attachment. Craving and desire for sensual enjoyments such as sex, money, power, savories, gambling, drinking, drugs, and so on is habit-forming, gradually growing into such strong clinging one is unable to let go.

Say a man were to visit a friend and his eyes were to come in contact for the first time with his friend's extremely beautiful wife. Due to eye-contact, pleasant feeling would arise, which would cause craving to follow. If he allowed his mind to go unchecked, it would burn with greed, manifesting as lust and envy. Obsessed, it would intensify to clinging.

Furthermore, craving for renewed existence conditions clinging to rules and rituals. Suppose a person craves rebirth in an eternal heaven and thinks that praying or sacrificing animals to God or merely believing in a creator or savior will bring about this dream. The person firmly grasps this mistaken view and engages in all kinds of practices, some of which may be very harmful, others of which are good but rooted in ignorance and craving.

Dependent on craving for renewed existence also causes to arise clinging to the doctrine of an eternal soul. Many desire to be reborn again and again, clinging to the same soul that transmigrates from one life to the next.

Then there is craving for non-existence. Dependent on it, clinging to false views arises. One clings to the wrong view that beings end at death, that nothing carries into the future beyond death, that the past does not influence the future, that death is a final rest with no result of karma. Craving for non-existence associated with this view also conditions clinging to sensual pleasures. For if one believes that nothing exists after death, the outcome is hedonistically indulging in sensual pleasures without restraint and even harming others in the process, if only by promoting pernicious wrong views like materialism and annihilationism.

### **DEPENDENT ON CLINGING ARISES BECOMING**

Becoming here refers to karma-process becoming. It is the karmic volitions and activities, both wholesome and unwholesome, that constitute karma that generates rebirth. Clinging to sensual pleasures may be an inducement to all kinds of unskillful and unwholesome volitional actions. Come back to the story of the man who clings to his friend's beautiful wife. Obsessed with lust and unable to control it, he finally engages in sexual misconduct by enticing his friend's wife to commit adultery. This is karma-process becoming that may generate his birth in hell after his death.

Clinging to the sensual enjoyment of sex may be a direct inducement to sexual misconduct, abuse, murder, envy, jealousy, hate, revenge, and many other unskillful actions of body, speech, and mind.

Clinging to rules and rituals leads to karma-process becoming of wrong practice, because action follows view. In a discourse

named after The Dog-Duty-Ascetic, we are told of an ancient Indian view that ascetic rites and rituals led to rebirth in heaven. Seniya was a naked ascetic who believed the dog-duty (acting in all ways like a dog) would lead him to his heavenly goal. So he practiced accordingly for a long time. The Buddha explained to him that if a person develops the dog-practice, dog-habit, and dog-mind fully and without lapse, at the breaking up of the body, after death, he will appear in the company of dogs. It made him sad to realize that, even though they were ascetics, they had been practicing useless rites and rituals instead of an effective dharma for bringing about the end of suffering. If one holds a view such as this, "By this duty or practice or asceticism or holy life, I will become a *deva*," that is harboring a wrong view. For a person of wrong view, there is one of two destinations, the hells or the animal kingdom (MN 57).

In fact, with our minds still clinging to the personality view that there is a self, whatever we do, whether skillful or unskillful, is considered karma-process becoming. We are accumulating karma moment to moment and lifetime to lifetime.

One may ask regarding the first link, "Dependent on ignorance, karmic formations arise." If karmic formations are the same as karma-process becoming, why is karma-process becoming mentioned again here? The Commentary to the PATH OF PURIFICATION explains that the karmic formations in the first link belong to the past life. "Becoming" in this link belongs to the present life. Just as past karmic formations condition the present life, so present karma-process becoming conditions future birth.



## **DEPENDENT ON BECOMING ARISES BIRTH**

When that karma-process becoming matures at the time of death, it produces future birth. “Birth” means the first manifestation of aggregates of a living being when rebirth takes place in any existence. Correctly speaking, it is neither “the same self” nor another person that is reborn. Such terms as “person,” “entity,” “personality,” “self,” “woman,” “man,” “individual,” “I,” or “you” are merely conventional expressions used for the sake of clarity and convenience. What comes to birth is merely mind and matter. Their nature is to quickly arise and pass away. To identify with mind and body as “I,” “me,” or “mine” is to say that we are dying and being reborn at every single moment.

It is possible to cite many experiences, as we have been doing, to illustrate how wholesome and unwholesome actions condition rebirth. It is possible to cite many more to establish that it is impossible for anyone, even a supremely enlightened Buddha, to recall a time when we or anyone did not exist in a previous life.

## **DEPENDENT ON BIRTH ARISE AGING, DEATH, SORROW, LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF, AND DESPAIR**

Once rebirth has taken place, aging and death are sure to follow. Aging is the basis for bodily and mental suffering. It is the harbinger of death, an event that draws nearer and nearer as we age.

Death is the falling away from our current existence. For most of us it is the sad, frightful, and inevitable culmination of birth. We die with pain gripping mind and body, unable to part from all that we hold dear. For one who is born, there is no escape from death, except with the end of suffering that is Nirvana.

As if death in itself were not enough suffering for one life, we are bound to meet with much more throughout life. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, being separated from loved ones, joined together with the unloved, and the loss of health and wealth is the common lot of beings revolving in *saṃsāra*. Those gripped by mental pain poison themselves, hang themselves, beat themselves, harm themselves in countless ways, and undergo many kinds of suffering.

Thus arises the entire mass of suffering.

Suffering is like a wheel. We continue revolving (evolving and devolving) as long as the root causes of latent ignorance and craving are not uprooted by enlightenment path knowledge. Just as a tree will continue to grow and branch out as long as its roots remain intact, so mind and matter repeatedly spring to life so long as ignorance and craving remain intact. Dependent Origination in an ultimate sense is the endless process of cyclical arising, passing, re-arising, re-passing, undergone by mind and matter. Dependent on impersonal conditions with no semblance of any persisting entity that can be taken as “I” or self, the ongoing process of arising and passing away — both on a minute level and in a broader and more easily visible context — is nothing but repeated suffering. Paradoxically, because no one undergoes this suffering, it is said: ***“Suffering exists, but no sufferer is found.”***

This truth cannot be repeated enough, because through its realization one comes to seek an alternative, a solution, an escape to reality, a freedom from suffering. The truth will set us free if we but discern it with insight.

This ongoing process of existence and its impersonal nature has been beautifully expressed in two verses from the PATH OF PURIFICATION:

No doer of deeds is found,  
No one who ever reaps their fruits.  
Empty phenomena roll on,  
This alone is the correct view.

No god nor Brahma can be called,  
The maker of this wheel of life.  
Empty phenomena roll on,  
Dependent on conditions all.

#### IV

## DEPENDENT ORIGATION IN THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Dependent origination operates over the three periods of time — past, present, and future. The two factors of ignorance and karmic formations belong to the past; consciousness, mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and becoming belong to the present; birth, decay, and death belong to the future (see **Chart19**).

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

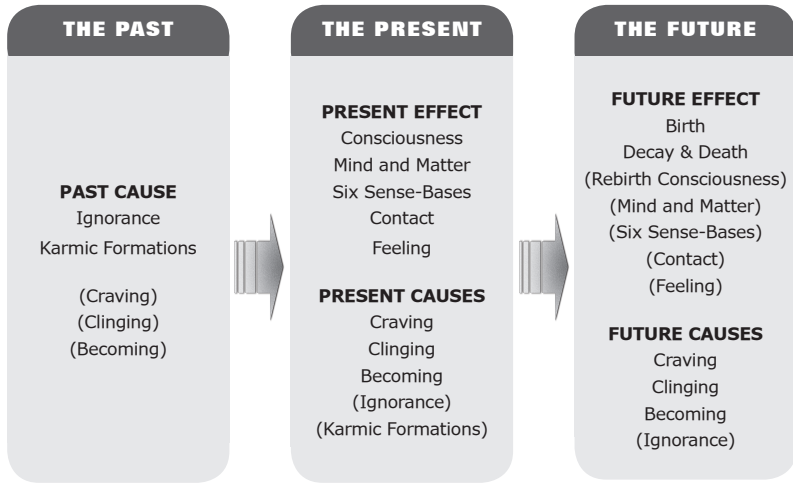


CHART 19: The Three Periods of Time

Although ignorance and karmic formations are said to be the two past causes; craving, clinging, and becoming are operating as well. These five factors produce present effects of consciousness, mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling. And the same five factors subsequently become the present causes for the future effect, starting with birth, and then again become the future causes for another rebirth, and another, and so on ad infinitum (see Chart19).

To make clear the point, let me cite a past-life experience of a female meditator at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery. When she traced back to her immediate past life, at the time of death, she saw the karma of a man happily offering a candle at a pagoda. The man was very poor and had a wife and son to support. One day he and his family went to one of their village’s pagodas and offered their services to clean the surroundings. On completion, the poor man searched around for something to offer. He found a half-burned

candle on the altar. And with great joy he lit it and offered it at the newly cleaned pagoda. Having reflected on his state of misery as a man having to eke out a meager livelihood to support the family, he made a wish to be reborn as a woman in his next existence. For a long time afterwards, with joy he often remembered his wholesome deed, which again and again generated wholesome mental karma.

In this case, his ignorance is not knowing that every existence is bound with suffering as it ends with aging and death. Ignorance also blinds him to wrongly perceive that a “woman” truly exists, rather than merely mind and matter. Liking and desiring life as a woman is his craving. Intense attachment to life as a woman is his clinging. The wholesome volition to offer a candle at the pagoda is his karmic formation, and karma is the potency that was left behind by that wholesome volition. These are five past causes that resulted in the arising of her rebirth consciousness, mind and matter, six sense-bases, contact, and feeling manifesting as a female in the present life, as present effect. These same five factors now will in turn become the present causes for her future birth (as future effect), if she is unable to eliminate the ignorance completely in this life.

We may be awestruck or incredulous and wonder how such a small act could produce a human rebirth, which is so difficult to come by in *samsāra*. The poor man’s offering of a discarded candle was supported and reinforced by his prior wholesome act of wishing to clean, offering to clean, encouraging his family, and actually cleaning the area of the pagoda with an understanding of karma and its results. This means that countless wholesome

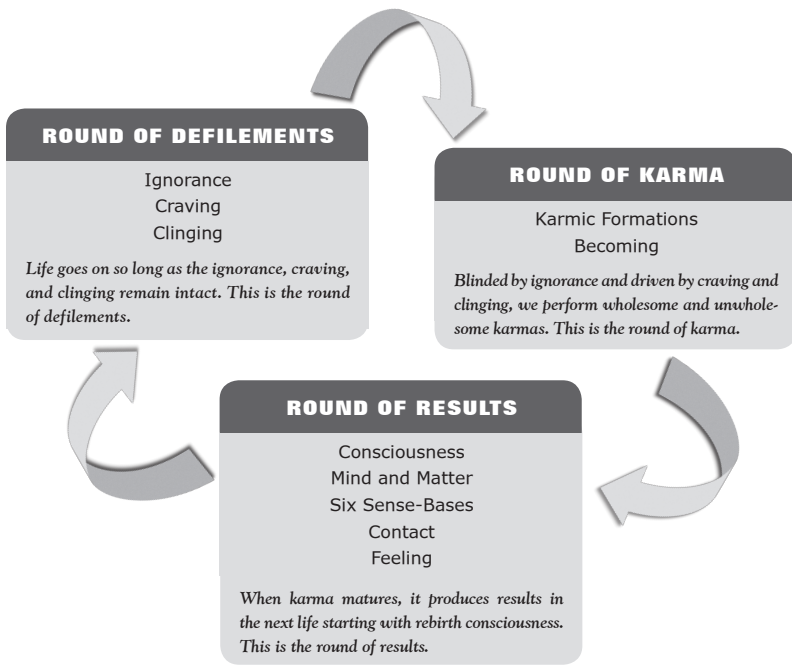
*javanas* arose during the time he was cleaning and encouraging his family in this wholesome activity. Furthermore, he offered the candle with strong volition. When volition is strong, karma is also strong. The great joy he felt before offering, at the time of offering, and after offering is said by the Buddha to be a superior form of charity that can also produce powerful results. He often remembered his wholesome act. This time and again caused many wholesome *javanas* in the mind-door cognitive process to arise. Therefore, supported by favorable conditions, this man's wish came true.

The purpose in connecting Dependent Origination over the three periods of time is to explain how an "individual" revolves in the wheel of existence, and undergoes the cycle of rebirth and death in beginningless *saṃsāra*. *However, Dependent Origination is in fact operating at every moment of life. When six sense-objects impinge six sense-bases, unless one's mind is guarded by mindfulness and wisdom, one turns the wheel of Dependent Origination.*

V

## THE TRIPLE ROUND

From another perspective, Dependent Origination can be understood as a triple round: [1] ignorance, craving, and clinging are the round of defilements; [2] karmic formations and becoming are the round of karma; [3] consciousness, mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling are the round of results (see Chart 20).



**CHART 20: The Triple Round**

An example may make the connections of the triple round clear. During the Buddha’s time, there was a wealthy but very stingy man called Todeyya. Owing to his ignorance, he harbored a strong attachment to his property. This is the round of defilements. Unwilling to share his wealth with others, he buried his treasure in his house. His stinginess, based on his strong craving and clinging to his property, served as karmic formation or karma-process becoming. This is the round of karma. As a result, after his death he was reborn as a dog in the same house.<sup>5</sup> With the arising of rebirth-linking consciousness in the animal realm,

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<sup>5</sup> MN COMMENTARY.

mind and matter, the six sense-bases, contact, and feeling came to be. This is the round of results.

The triple round has no beginning, just as a spinning wheel has no discernible first point. It revolves from the round of defilements to the round of karma to the round of results, then again cycles through. This is why it is called the *wheel* of becoming. Due to ignorance, craving, and clinging, we bind ourselves to this wheel and are unable to escape from their clutches.

Again, in spite of the fact that ignorance is mentioned first in the Dependent Origination formula, it is not a first cause. The Buddha explains:

**“Recluses, this *samsāra* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.” (SN 15.1)**

Without understanding Dependent Origination, we have no way of knowing the real nature of life, the orderly functioning of cause and effect, or the way of escape from suffering to reality. In THE GREATER DISCOURSE ON ORIGINATION, the Buddha states this emphatically:

**“Ānanda, this dependent origination is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this doctrine that the world has become a tangled ball of thread, a bird’s nest, a thicket of reeds, and does not escape from woeful states of existence, from the unfortunate course, from perdition, from suffering in the round of rebirths.” (DN 15)**

When we understand the formula of Dependent Origination as a meditation subject, we become free from doubt about the nature of life, about our past, present, and future existence based on cause and effect relations, and how all beings arise and pass



away repeatedly. The mystery of life is revealed to those who reach the knowledge of discerning cause and condition.<sup>6</sup> They know by direct knowledge and experience the particular karma performed in past lives that brought forth rebirth-consciousness in life after life.

VI

## THE JOURNEY OF REPEATED BIRTHS

The following story from the time of the Buddha tells of a journey of an individual revolving in the wheel of existence, undergoing the round of rebirths in beginningless *samsāra*.

Isidasi was born into an immensely influential family in India. Her father was a wealthy merchant, and she was his beloved only daughter. He married her off to the son of another wealthy businessman. Due to her good upbringing, Isidasi became the ideal wife, a role model in Indian culture at the time. She was respectful to her husband, her parents-in-law, and she attended to all her duties.

In fact, she gave her new husband and family every reason to rejoice in having found such a beautiful and dutiful companion. Yet strangely, after a little more than a month, her husband could not stand her. Wishing to have her put out as soon as possible,

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<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of discerning cause and condition: the second insight knowledge, which knows and sees Dependent Origination directly rather than as mere theory.

he sent her back to her parents. His parents were puzzled by this strange turn of events, as they could clearly see Isidasi's virtues and could not find a single fault. No one could explain why her new husband could not tolerate her, least of all her new husband.

Nevertheless, Isidasi's father soon married her to another wealthy man. Although she served her newest husband even better than the first, after barely a month, the pattern repeated. Her second husband lost affection for her, became irritated by her presence, and eventually sent her back to her parents, ordering the marriage annulled.

Both Isidasi and her loving father were at a total loss to explain. Soon after, as they struggled to understand, a mendicant came by for alms. And it suddenly occurred to the father to offer his gorgeous daughter and a great deal of wealth to the ascetic. With stars in his eyes he accepted his sudden turn of fortune, thanking the merchant for the great mansion, wealth, instant status, and beautiful Isidasi as his bride, all of which was beyond his wildest expectations. Strangely, however, after only two weeks, he went to his new father-in-law and pleaded with him to return his earthenware begging bowl and tattered robes, claiming he could no longer continue to stay with Isidasi under the same roof. The mendicant was certain. The father was confused. And Isidasi was utterly humiliated.

She was so miserable that she found herself contemplating suicide, unable to bear the ignominy. But it so happened that on that day a Buddhist nun came by her generous father's home on alms round. Isidasi was so impressed with the nun's behavior and peaceful countenance that she was immediately beset by the

strong desire to become a nun. After receiving permission from her father, she took ordination. Straightaway, she exerted herself in meditation and after seven days of consistent effort achieved full enlightenment along with the three higher knowledges: recollection of past lives, knowledge of the passing away and reappearance (rebirth) of beings in accordance with their karmas, and knowledge of the destruction of taints.

Through her recollection of past lives, she discovered the underlying causes of her marital failures in this life and much more in the round of rebirths. Eight lives before, she was a man, a rich goldsmith, handsome, full of vigor for life. Intoxicated by his own appearance and magnetism, the young philanderer seduced many men's wives with no regard for modesty, morality, or the sanctity of others' family ties or for the particular hurt he imposed on the husbands. All the goldsmith desired was the thrill of irresponsibly satisfying his lust free of commitment or conscience. He went about his entire life this way.

After the breaking up of his body at death, he was reborn in hell, where he experienced exponentially more hurt and suffering than he had inflicted on others. It is said that the special punishment for adulterers and lechers in one of the hells is a forced walking through a forest where every leaf is a blade. Their body is lacerated repeatedly by leaf blades until their karma is exhausted.

After hell, he was reborn as a monkey. Seven days after his birth, as a result of his sexual misconduct in the past, the baby monkey's penis was bitten off by a rival. The monkey was then reborn as a sheep and in due course was made a gelding, unable to satisfy his sexual urges. His next existence was a castrated ox forced to plough and draw a cart all day long with little rest.

Next, owing to the opportunistic ripening of some store of good karma, he was reborn as a human being. But due to his past sexual abuse, he manifested the body of a hermaphrodite, the son of a slave girl.

In the following existence, he was reborn as an outcaste girl and was sold into slavery while still young. When she matured at 16, the son of the rich creditor, her owner, fell in love with her and took her as his second wife. But instead of being grateful for her new life of luxury and living humbly in harmony with her husband's first wife, who was a virtuous and honorable woman, she did everything she could to protect her position and assert her status by sowing discord between her husband and his other wife. Sadly, she succeeded in causing a great deal of strife in the family. The husband finally abandoned the first wife, and she enjoyed taking her place.

Next, when her immediate past life unwholesome karma did not directly produce rebirth consciousness, she was reborn as Isidasi, the rich, charming, merchant-caste daughter of a kind father. But that unwholesome karma asserted itself and intervened when she repeatedly tried to marry. Even though she served her husbands to the best of her ability, she suffered the disdain, contempt, and neglect of all three of them in succession with no apparent cause in this life. The hidden reason was that in the past she had driven a virtuous and honorable woman out of her home. Feeling humiliated and disenchanting with life, and supported by the ripening of various wholesome karmas accumulated here and there in her long *samsāric* journey, she was able to become a nun and develop the higher knowledges.

Only then did she fully understand the relationship between unskillful actions and the painful consequences that followed. Unrestrained craving rooted in ignorance was the cause of unfathomable tribulation in just the span of a few rebirths. Through her attainment of full enlightenment, she completely eradicated the root causes of rebirth, ignorance, and craving.<sup>7</sup>

- With the total and final cessation of ignorance, karmic formations cease;
- With the cessation of karmic formations, rebirth consciousness ceases;
- With the cessation of rebirth consciousness, mind and matter cease;
- With the cessation of mind and matter, the six sense-bases cease;
- With the cessation of the six sense-bases, contact ceases;
- With the cessation of contact, feeling ceases;
- With the cessation of feeling, craving ceases;
- With the cessation of craving, clinging ceases;
- With the cessation of clinging, becoming ceases;
- With the cessation of becoming, birth ceases;
- With the cessation of birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair no longer arise.

Thus ceases this entire mass of suffering.

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<sup>7</sup> “VERSES OF THE ENLIGHTENED NUNS” (THERĪGATHA).

## DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

Now having begun to fathom the truth of suffering, the origin of suffering, and the cessation of suffering, it is an excellent idea to explore how we might accomplish the cessation of suffering.





**PART THREE**

THE **ESCAPE**





## CHAPTER NINE

# THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

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I

## THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

To bring this suffering to a complete and final cessation, the Noble Eightfold Path is the only path. This path has been travelled and verified by all who have reached the first stage of enlightenment. In his very first discourse, *SETTING THE WHEEL OF DHARMA IN MOTION*, Buddha declares:

“Abandoning both extremes, the *Tathāgata* has comprehended the Middle Path, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to direct knowledge, and which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment, and Nirvana.

“What, O recluses, is that Middle Path the *Tathāgata* has comprehended, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to direct insight knowledge, and which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment, and Nirvana?

“This very Noble Eightfold Path — namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This, O recluses, is the Middle Path, which the *Tathāgata* has comprehended.”

(DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA SUTTA, SN 56.11)

## THE THREE DIVISIONS OF THE PATH

① RIGHT VIEW	SAMMĀ DIṬṬHI	WISDOM TRAINING
② RIGHT THOUGHT	SAMMĀ SĀNKAPPA	
③ RIGHT SPEECH	SAMMĀ VĀCĀ	MORALITY TRAINING
④ RIGHT ACTION	SAMMĀ KAMMANTA	
⑤ RIGHT LIVELIHOOD	SAMMĀ ĀJĪVA	
⑥ RIGHT EFFORT	SAMMĀ VĀYĀMA	CONCENTRATION TRAINING
⑦ RIGHT MINDFULNESS	SAMMĀ SATI	
⑧ RIGHT CONCENTRATION	SAMMĀ SAMĀDHI	

## II

## THREEFOLD TRAINING

This Noble Eightfold Path can be divided into three trainings:

1. **Training in wisdom** (*paññā sikkhā*) consists of right view and right thought.
2. **Training in morality** (*sīla sikkhā*) consists of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.
3. **Training in concentration** (*samādhi sikkhā*) consists of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

## 1 WISDOM TRAINING

Wisdom training means developing right view and right thought, which refer to the mental factors of wisdom and initial application of mind, respectively.

### a. Right View

Right view is the beginning and the consummation of the path. It is the correct way of looking at life and the world because it sees them as they truly are, rather than the way we want them to be. What we perceive as happiness in life is greatly influenced by our culture and society, which is of course different from what happiness really is. Because our view of the world forms our intentions, speech, and actions, right view is the forerunner of all wholesome karma.

Right view starts with the understanding of what is wholesome and unwholesome, and their consequences. Most people from Asia, unlike most people from the West, start their practice of the Dharma with this fundamental right view of karma and its result. As we take up the path of insight, eventually *vipassanā* right view dispels the darkness of ignorance that conceals the three universal marks of existence: impermanence, suffering, and impersonality. This takes into full account the five aggregates of clinging, both internally and externally, together with their causes.

One becomes disenchanted with the five aggregates and develops a wholesome desire for liberation. Finally, right view culminates in the complete understanding of the truth of suffering with the abandoning of craving and realization of Nirvana.

**b. Right Thought**

Right thought is also known as right intention, right resolve, right aspiration, and right application of mind. It means wholesome application of mind with regard to:

- i. thoughts of renunciation of sensual pleasure,
- ii. thoughts of non-harming,
- iii. thoughts of non-cruelty.

When one begins to develop the right view in accordance with the true nature of life, it affects one's thoughts and thereby one's actions in accordance with this new understanding. One willingly gives up thoughts of indulgence and misconduct with regard to sensual pleasures by understanding their dangers and faults. Passionate desire breeds fear, discontent, competition, jealousy, and greater lust that ends with more suffering. Through renunciation, one becomes contented, happy, and peaceful. One eagerly wishes for others to have the same experience. Naturally, one develops a loving heart that grows boundlessly extending amity to all beings, wishing all to be happy and peaceful.

Being free from the enslavement of desire, one develops compassion (particularly the wish to liberate others from suffering) for those who remain ensnared by the net of sensuality, by understanding that they are struggling with suffering in the futile pursuit of sensual pleasures, and are liable to come to ruin in perdition because of not being exposed to the liberating dharma.

## 2 MORALITY TRAINING

Guided by right view, one undertakes training in morality, virtue, and ethical conduct consisting of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. They are the same mental factors as the three abstinences.

### a. Right Speech

Right speech means abstaining from these four types of false speech:

- i. abstaining from deceit and bearing false witness (telling lies for one's own ends, another's, or for some trifling material advantage) or speaking deceitfully (as detailed at AN 10.206),
- ii. abstaining from divisive and malicious words that create discord,
- iii. abstaining from harsh speech that offends or hurts others, bordering on anger,
- iv. abstaining from gossip or idle chatter that lacks benefit, purpose, or depth.

### b. Right Action

Right action means acting in a harmless or beneficial way, conscientious for one's own benefit as well as that of others. It is of three types:

- i. Abstaining from killing or physically assaulting, with the understanding that all beings cherish life and out of

consideration for the fact that what is hateful to us (being harmed or killed) is hateful to others.

- ii. Abstaining from stealing, understanding that it is unjust and unlawful to forcefully or fraudulently take from others what rightfully belongs to them, just as we do not wish to be separated from what is ours.
- iii. Abstaining from sexual misconduct (or other conduct that abuses the senses), understanding the importance of respecting the dignity and welfare of others, just as we wish our loved ones and ourselves to be free of being violated.

By adhering to these basic precepts, we practice right speech and right action for the peace, harmony, and happiness of all beings.

**c. Right Livelihood**

Right livelihood means that one earns one's living in a just and harmless way by, at a minimum, abstaining from the following five kinds of businesses:

- i. abstaining from dealing in weapons,
- ii. abstaining from dealing in slaves,
- iii. abstaining from dealing in animals for slaughter,
- iv. abstaining from dealing in poisons,
- v. abstaining from dealing in intoxicants.



Furthermore, one avoids any occupation that requires a violation of right speech and right action, which would also constitute wrong livelihood.

In brief, training in morality is cultivated with the enlightened view that what is beneficial for others is beneficial for oneself. The Buddha said that those who love themselves should avoid harming others. We ourselves do not want to be harmed by others, and in just the same way, others do not want to be harmed by us. This broadmindedness is best cultivated with an understanding that we are the heirs of our karma (our choices, actions, and volitions). Every volitional action has the latent power to bring about a welcome or unwelcome reaction. Whatever skillful or unskillful actions we perform will eventually come back to us.

When training in morality is well established, one acquires self-confidence in this life and future lives, through an absence of shame and fear, lack of self-reproach or the reproach of others, an unworried mind, gentleness, and serenity. The Buddha outlines the redounding benefits:

**“Virtuous ways of conduct have non-remorse as their benefit and reward; non-remorse has gladness as its benefit and reward ... joy ... serenity ... happiness; happiness has concentration as its benefit and reward; concentration has knowledge and vision of things as they really are as its benefit and reward.”** (AN 10)

These benefits come through the cultivation of morality, laying a solid foundation for success in concentration training. As is pointed out in the discourse on THE SIMILE OF THE RELAY OF CHARIOTS :

**“Purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind.”** (MN 24)

### 3 CONCENTRATION TRAINING

Concentration training consists of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, which are the developed mental factors of effort, mindfulness, and one-pointedness, respectively.

#### a. Right Effort

Right effort is a prerequisite for the other factors of the path. In the absence of effort, nothing can be achieved. Right effort means to exert energy in a persistent and consistent (neither straining nor lapsing) manner in order to abandon unskillful actions and unwholesome states, and to arouse skillful actions and wholesome states. These four types of effort, already discussed in Chapter 3, are, in short:

- i. effort to prevent unarisen unwholesome states,
- ii. effort to discard arisen unwholesome states,
- iii. effort to arouse unarisen wholesome states,
- v. effort to maintain and bring to perfection arisen wholesome states.

### b. Right Mindfulness

Right mindfulness is constantly keeping the mind aware and alert to the phenomena arising in the body and mind. Other ways of saying this are, mindfulness is remembering or not forgetting to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: contemplation of the body, contemplation of the different types of feelings, contemplation of different states of the mind (such as lustful mind, angry mind, contracted mind, distracted mind, etc.), and contemplation of phenomena (such as the five hindrances, six sense-objects, five aggregates, Four Noble Truths, seven factors of enlightenment, etc.).

### c. Right Concentration

Concentration is collecting or unifying the mind, which means cultivating a state where all mental factors are brought together and intensified by directing them onto one particular object, such as the breath or a *kasīṇa*, continuously for a designated period of time. Right concentration means cultivating the first, second, third, and fourth absorptions (**will be discussed in Chapter 10**). During the practice of right concentration, one needs right effort to constantly remember (right mindfulness) the single object so that the mind “sinks” deeply into it and attains absorption. We can thus see that right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration all tie together to bring about a unified, serene, and temporarily purified mind.

When a mind well trained in concentration and insight reaches the pinnacle of success, right view removes the

ignorance that conceals the Four Noble Truths. One sees three common characteristics of phenomena and realizes Nirvana. One's thinking will then always ally to the truth.

In THE GREAT PASSING AWAY OF THE BUDDHA DISCOURSE, the Buddha states:

**"This is morality, this is concentration, this is wisdom. Concentration imbued with morality is of great fruit and profit. Wisdom imbued with concentration is of great fruit and profit. The mind imbued with wisdom becomes completely free from corruptions, that is, from the corruptions of sensuality, of becoming, of false views, and of ignorance."**

(DN 16)

In this quote Buddha clearly states the importance of the need to practice the threefold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom, within the Noble Eightfold Path. Nevertheless, this threefold training is not necessarily sequential. The three trainings in fact complement and enhance each other. When morality is cultivated, concentration benefits and enables one to see things as they truly are. The development of wisdom in turn helps perfect the training of morality and concentration.



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## I

## BENEFITS OF CONCENTRATION

*Having taken a stand in virtue,  
a wise person develops concentration.*

In the teaching of the Buddha, there are two types of meditation practice, concentration and insight. Unlike during the Buddha's time when concentration was highly regarded, people today often overlook the practice of concentration. Many think mindfulness alone is enough for realization.

What does the Buddha have to say about the matter?

**"O recluses, develop concentration!**

**Those who have concentration see things as they really are."**

What "things" are to be seen as they really are? The five aggregates of clinging.

The five aggregates of clinging, when seen as they really are, turn out to be other than they appear. They are radically impermanent, thoroughly unsatisfactory, and utterly impersonal, that is, without self. Penetration of this truth makes enlightenment possible. One also clearly and directly sees the cause of suffering, which ultimately is craving grounded in ignorance. One further sees that when the causes cease, suffering comes to an end.

Just as when we wish to penetrate and clearly see invisible cells in a glass of water, we need a microscope to focus and enhance our vision. Another way of saying "focus and enhance" is *concentrate*.



Likewise, if we want to see the true nature of the five aggregates, we need to develop concentration. It serves as the proximate cause of insight, because a concentrated mind is radiant, pure, united, malleable, objective, free of prejudice, preference, and lust for base sensual pleasures. This makes the discerning mind clear, powerful, and penetrative. And when it turns its enhanced focus first onto the body then onto the mind, ultimate realities are revealed. Their true nature comes to be directly known and verified, removing all doubts.

But apart from this important task, there are other benefits of developing concentration up to the level of *jhāna*. Concentration provides a blissful abiding here and now through the experience of a happiness beyond the sensual in this very life. *Arahants* in particular have not only reached the goal with the help of concentration, they benefit for the remainder of their lives by mastering it. Although *Arahants* have eradicated all defilements, they still have to bear the burden of the body. But through *jhāna* they are able to temporarily transcend this burden. They enter the *jhānas* and can dwell blissfully with a unified mind for an entire day.

Furthermore, concentration is the basis of supernatural powers. The power of *jhāna* concentration allows one to develop mundane psychic powers, like the recollection of past lives, the divine eye (clairvoyance), the divine ear (clairaudience), knowing the minds of others, seeing their births and deaths according to their karma, and the supernatural powers of levitating, flying through the sky and space, bodily visiting other worlds, making many independent bodies out of one, walking on water, going through walls, diving into the ground, etc. For these abilities to

be brought under one's will and conscious control, one has to master the fine-material and immaterial *jhānas*.<sup>1</sup>

Concentration enables one to be reborn in a blissful plane of existence, the fine-material planes. The secret is mastering the *jhāna*, which means being able to enter and exit it at will and as often as one determines, then maintaining it up to the moment of death. This death-proximate karma conditions the arising of rebirth-linking consciousness in the fine-material plane. In this plane, there is no experience of physical pain such as human beings endure, merely the bliss of *jhāna*.

The *jhāna* concentration can be used as a resting place for insight meditators. This is explained by a simile in the commentary to the discourse TWO KINDS OF THOUGHTS (MN 19). Sometimes during battle warriors on one side might feel tired while their enemy feels strong. At that time, with many arrows flying, those warriors feeling weak retreat to the fort. Behind its walls they are safe. They rest until their weariness subsides. Feeling strong and energized again, they leave the fort and return to the battlefield. *Jhāna* is a fort, a **temporary** release, a safe resting place for insight meditators who are at war with Mara battling ignorance and craving.

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see the PATH OF PURIFICATION, "Description of Direct Knowledge" (Vs.xii).

## II

DIFFERENT  
MEDITATION SUBJECTS

There are many ways to develop concentration. In the Path of Purification, 40 serenity meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) are described. Why did the Buddha teach different serenity meditation subjects? It was a skillful means to suit the different temperaments of beings so that more could experience its benefits. Different meditation subjects lead to different levels of concentration. For example, four elements meditation, recollection of the virtues of the Buddha, and the recollection of death lead only to the attainment of access concentration. Other meditation subjects, like mindfulness of breathing, the ten *kaṣiṇas*, and the four sublime abidings (loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity), can lead to the attainment of the fine-material *jhānas*. Still other meditation subjects, such as giving attention to boundless space or boundless consciousness, lead to the attainment of the immaterial *jhānas*.

Here, I would like to recommend mindfulness of breathing as our meditation subject. It is certainly one of the most popular and easy to learn subjects, perhaps owing to the fact that it is what the Bodhisatta was practicing under the bodhi tree when he attained enlightenment. Or perhaps it is because we are breathing all the time and one can easily develop *jhāna* concentration using the breath. It is considered the foremost among the various meditation subjects of all supremely enlightened Buddhas, and many of the Buddha's disciples, because it serves as the basis for

attaining distinction in insight or simply abiding in bliss here and now in this moment.

It is better to begin one's practice with loving-kindness meditation and mindfulness of death meditation for a short period before taking up the breath. The benefits of loving-kindness are immense and immediately visible, and contemplating death is instrumental in developing energy and urgency in one's practice.

## 1 LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

*(mettā bhāvanā)*

*Mettā* is loving friendliness, a happy state of mind that promotes the welfare of others the way an ideal mother would care for her own child. To begin, one reflects on the danger of hate and the advantage of patience. Hate itself is one of the five hindrances that blocks mental development and one's progress in any kind of meditation. For beginners, loving-kindness should not be cultivated towards a very dearly loved person or a particularly hostile one, at least at first. For if the slightest misfortune befalls a dearly loved one, we feel like weeping. Anger springs up if we recollect a hostile person. It is also better to avoid choosing those of the sex one is attracted to, otherwise lust may arise. Finally, avoid anyone who has died. There are a number of reasons for this, but the most interesting is that it will never be possible to attain *jhāna* while doing loving-kindness meditation for a person who has passed away — even if one does not know that the person is dead.

One starts by developing loving-kindness towards oneself — often the hardest person to love, particularly it seems in the West and US. This is done by thinking of the times one has been happy, then visualizing oneself in that joyful state, mentally repeating: “May I be safe; may I be healthy, happy, and peaceful.” Using all positive terms leads to a better effect. The purpose of radiating *mettā* first to oneself is to make one the example: “Just as I wish to be happy and dread pain, so too do other beings.”

We cannot deny that many Westerners find it difficult to either generate or radiate *mettā* towards themselves. Perhaps no one feels he or she deserves it or it runs counter to some unspoken cultural message? As a skillful means, one can first radiate *mettā* to one’s beloved pet. When loving-kindness is initiated and begins to flow, one can extend it to oneself, then to a respected teacher, recollecting the person’s good qualities or the kindness that teacher has shown us. Then *mettā* may be extended out towards one’s fellow meditators, friends, neighbors, protective *devas* in the surrounding area, and finally to all sentient beings without distinction. Mentally wish, “May they be safe; may they be healthy, happy, and peaceful.”

When one becomes more skillful, one can effectively radiate *mettā* to anyone, including an enemy or rival, thereby improving relationships. Take care to start with someone you only slightly dislike, never with the person you hate the most. Otherwise your meditation may quickly devolve into cursing that person!

The object of loving-kindness is happy and joyful beings. So visualize their happy appearance while radiating loving-kindness to them. This easily softens hearts on both sides. By radiating loving-kindness towards fellow meditators, they may be sensitive

enough to “feel” our positive energy and become easy to meditate or live with. By sending loving-kindness towards *devas* or protective spirits in the area, one will be protected by them. When one pulses with loving-kindness towards all human beings, conflict lessens and subsides, making it much easier to live with them. They like us and in turn we will like them, and because we like them, they like us more. *Mettā* miraculously makes the mind courageous, soft, happy, concentrated, and light. If we take the breath as our main meditation subject to develop concentration, *mettā* is excellent preparation for the practice of mindfulness of breathing.

## 2 MINDFULNESS OF DEATH

(*marañānussati*)

When one feels lazy, becomes negligent, and has no interest in practice, it is advisable to practice mindfulness of death. It is a tonic filling one with a sense of urgency that now, this life, this moment is the opportunity to practice. There is no certainty in the future; there is nothing to be gained in the past.

Right now is when the power and opportunity to steer one’s course exists. Human life is incredibly rare; rarer still is hearing the Dharma or having the inclination to practice meditation. Life is fleeting, and practicing mindfulness of death paradoxically energizes and enlivens one.

To begin, contemplate beings who were formerly seen enjoying life but who have now died. Then arouse a sense of urgency by reflecting: “Uncertain is life, certain is death,” “I cannot avoid death,” “I might die at any moment,” “Death is inevitable,” “I have

death as my end," "Alas, before long this body, void of consciousness, will lie on the earth, useless as a rotten log."

Too often we forget that we really might die soon. And as a consequence we become exceedingly negligent. I once instructed a 65-year-old student to contemplate death. To my astonishment she said she would live to 90. Who can guarantee that? "Today is when the effort should be made, for — who knows? — tomorrow death will come. There is no bargaining with Mortality and his mighty horde." "Life endures only for a single breath." "If air in the nostrils that has gone outside does not come in again, or that which has gone inside does not go out again, death will occur."

Moved by spiritual urgency, one is far less prone to waste time in the insatiable pursuit of sensual pleasures such as sexual touch, wealth, social status, luxuries, entertainments, alcohol, drugs, and further distractions. These offer no promise of lasting happiness, but can cause us great harm if we become attached to them, just as ants die inside a honey bottle attempting to enjoy a taste of sweetness. As one continues to contemplate one's approaching death, urgency is aroused, providing a great boost of energy to practice.

Alternatively, one can bring to mind the death of a renowned person. Consider how, despite the person's greatness, she or he had to leave the world. All health slides towards sickness, all youth moves towards aging, all life ends in death. Now one can proceed to the contemplation of the death of dear ones like a parent, spouse, sister, or brother, then to a neutral person. Finally, reflect, "In the same way I shall surely die." It was for no small reason that the Buddha declared:

**“All compounded things are impermanent,  
When one sees with wisdom,  
One is disenchanted with suffering;  
This is the path to purity.” (Dhp. 277)**

Contemplate that at the time of death, nothing helps except one’s spiritual practice. Mindfully stir up a sense of urgency to strive harder while life yet remains.

A yogi devoted to mindfulness of death is constantly diligent and thereby acquires the perception of disenchantment with all kinds of becoming. Perception of impermanence grows, leading to the conquest of attachment to life. Unlike those who fall victim to fear, horror, trembling, and confusion at the time of death, the person who made much of this mindfulness dies undeluded and fearless — a great blessing considering the implications for the near-death cognitive process and how it affects one’s future. These two meditation subjects are called “generally useful” since they are of great benefit for most meditators.



III

**MINDFULNESS OF  
BREATHING**  
(*Ānāpānasati*)

**1 THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS  
OF BREATHING**

The Buddha often praises mindfulness of breathing:

**“Recluses, this concentration through mindfulness of breathing, when developed and practiced much, is both peaceful and sublime, it is an unadulterated blissful abiding, and it banishes at once and stills unskillful, unprofitable thoughts as soon as they arise.”** (SN 54.9)

There are four stages of development for mindfulness of breathing:

1. Breathing in long, he discerns, “I am breathing in long”; or breathing out long, he discerns, “I am breathing out long.”
2. Or breathing in short, he discerns, “I am breathing in short”; or breathing out short, he discerns, “I am breathing out short.”
3. He trains himself, “I will breathe in experiencing the entire body.” He trains himself, “I will breathe out experiencing the entire body.”
4. He trains himself, “I will breathe in calming the bodily formation.” He trains himself, “I will breathe out calming the bodily formation.”

To begin, sit cross-legged or lay both of the legs evenly on the floor. For elderly people, they may sit on a chair. Tilt your head down a bit. Keep the body erect. Skin, flesh, and sinews should be untwisted so that feelings that would arise moment by moment if they were twisted do not arise. Release any tension in the body, which could be the manifestation of hidden attachment or resentment towards oneself, certain people, or the situation. Why choose to keep something harmful? Let it go. When the mind is clear of defilements, the body is at ease.

Smile, then start with breathing in and breathing out. Be aware of the breath under the nostrils or on the upper lip where the breath touches. However, if you cannot feel the point where the air touches, it is absolutely fine. Just be aware of the breath. Do not follow the breath into the body, whether up to the top of the head or down into the belly. This prevents one from developing deep concentration because the mind is constantly moving up and down. Instead, continue to gently place your attention under the nostrils and mindfully and joyfully breathe in and out.

The simile of the gatekeeper illustrates this. Just as a gatekeeper does not question people entering or exiting a town by asking, "Who are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going?" but is simply aware of each person as they arrive at the gate, so too, where incoming breaths or outgoing breaths are going is not your concern, but they are your concern each time they arrive at the nostrils.

Breathe naturally, as if the breath is breathing all by itself. There is no particular effort to breathe; the effort is to be aware, to notice. Do not focus strongly, as this is sure to cause tension

in the nose, forehead, and head, hardening and stiffening the nose and making the head heavy. A common mistake made by most meditators is not realizing that the more effort they exert to know the breath, the more restless they become. Excessive effort causes irritation and hardens the mind. As energy inclines naturally towards agitation when there is an excess of energy and little concentration, restlessness overwhelms the mind. And gradually they become discouraged and downhearted, causing them to lose faith and interest in the process so that they stop short without reaching the goal. What a pity! It is all because of applying the wrong effort.

Let mindfulness on the breath be continuous while taking care not to focus too strongly on it. Balanced effort that avoids extremes of restlessness and laziness is the way. Foreigners in Myanmar who have been practicing a while eventually come to this realization if they are to succeed. Local yogis often make faster progress in concentration than them, because the Burmese know how to practice in a relaxed manner. Foreigners are inclined to be goal-oriented. By placing unnecessary pressure and anxiety on themselves few of them break through. This is counterproductive. Ease and consistency are much more valuable than hard struggle.

Simply be aware of the in and out breath, alert but at ease. Do not attempt to control your breath, instead control your *mind*. Do not let the mind drift or be swept away by fantasizing, planning, questioning, reasoning, doubting, regretting, etc., or by overshooting the object of the breath. However, if various thoughts arise, just be aware of them and let them go. Gently

direct the mind back to the breath again. Avoid paying attention to the cold or heat of the breath, which are characteristics of the fire-element. If one pays attention to such things, it becomes four elements meditation rather than mindfulness of breathing. Just breathe naturally without straining mind or body. *Sustained* attention on the breath is needed to develop concentration. Let go of all expectations. An expectation is a subtle form of greed for the Dharma. It makes the mind tense up. Rest the mind in the breath. If you find it difficult to concentrate on the breath at the beginning because of restlessness, do not be discouraged. It is perfectly natural for the mind to wander here and there. "The mind wanders at will," according to the Buddha. If it were naturally still and concentrated, there would be no need for meditation to still it and concentrate it.

To pacify restlessness, the PATH OF PURIFICATION encourages one to use the counting method. Slowly count at the end of each breath cycle like this: "In-breath, out-breath, one; in-breath, out-breath, two; in-breath, out-breath, three... in-breath, out-breath, eight." Count up to eight ideally. But in any case, never less than five or more than ten. Counting less than five is monotonous and encourages restlessness. And if you count beyond ten, your mind will turn its attention to the number rather than its intended object, which is the breath itself. Count until the mind settles on the breath. Then you may drop the counting, which is simply an aid, and stay with the breath. Also, if you find when you are counting that it leads to distraction, then you should stop counting.

## 2 MAKE MINDFULNESS CONTINUOUS

When the mind becomes calm after half an hour or an hour, give up counting and proceed to the first stage. "Breathing in a long breath, one understands: 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, one understands: 'I breathe out long.'" Long or short refers to the duration of time, both of which are relative and to be decided for oneself. If it takes a long time to breathe then it is a long breath, if a short time, it is a short breath. Do not expend energy making the breath long or short or else you will grow weary. Let the breath happen naturally. The attitude is just like that of a person leisurely sitting on the riverbank observing the flow of the river. Whether the river flows swiftly or slowly is not the person's concern. The only concern is to be aware of it as it manifests without trying to change or control its natural rhythm. We are observing, not attempting to control. The exercise here is to know if the breath is long or short, continuously.

While concentrating on the breath, one may sometimes feel hot tingling in the legs or some other sensation that becomes much more prominent than the breath. If you intend to practice pure concentration, do not shift attention to it, or else concentration on the breath is broken. For mindfulness of breathing, the breath is the only object, whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. No attention should be given to any other object except the breath. Concentration develops quickly if attention is continuous. With breaks, the momentum cools down. When one wishes to make fire from two sticks, it is necessary to rub them together continuously. If we break every so often, they just cool off, defeating the purpose.

### 3 LEARNING FROM THE PAIN

For those who do not sit regularly, very soon they will be challenged by the pain. When the mind starts to settle down on the breath, pain may arise in the knees, back, feet, or shoulders. The usual reaction of the mind is to dislike the pain, so we move to get rid of it. We need to get rid of the pain so that we can be more comfortable. But, often the pain comes back and we become agitated. Wanting to get rid of it is just the manifestation of anger. Pain is our great teacher, and it offers us valuable lessons that, if approached skillfully, we can all benefit from learning:

**First**, no one likes pain. No one likes it because it hurts. If we ourselves dislike being hurt, then we should consider that others feel the same way. So pain reminds us to practice self-restraint to avoid inflicting pain on others psychologically, verbally, or physically.

**Second**, if we ask other meditators, we soon find that they share the same experience of pain. It is natural for everyone to feel pain after sitting still for an extended period of time. So why feel bad or berate ourselves? Instead, we can open our heart — exhibit love and compassion for ourselves and others based on this common understanding.

**Third**, we learn that our bodies are unsatisfactory. Without pain we delusively go about thinking that our cherished bodies provide happiness. But now pain seems endless, one type after another. In daily life, without realizing it, we are constantly changing postures. This conceals our bodily pains. With increased concentration pains are exposed. To ease or mask the pain, we

change posture. But soon another pain arises somewhere, and it seems there is no end to it! The mind becomes extremely agitated, and we want to quickly do away with the pain. Such a reaction makes the mind and body even hotter and the pain unbearable.

As we discovered in Chapter 3, every mental state produces consciousness-born matter. An angry mind produces a great deal of consciousness-born matter with fire-element as its predominant factor, which literally burns the body. So, if pain arises, one recognizes that and accepts it with equanimity. Without a hateful reaction, the pain is bearable, and we can gently direct the mind back to the breath. If we are a keen observer, we will awaken to the fact that it is the mind that knows the pain. Without mind, physical pain cannot be apprehended. Having a mind is also unsatisfactory and distressing (*dukkha*). As it turns out, body and mind are not our refuge, not our protection, they are devoid of satisfaction. This is the lesson of pain in accordance with truth. This understanding helps us to let go of the strong attachment to this mind and body. As a result, one finds the mind easily settles on the breath.

**Fourth**, we also learn about the impersonal nature of “our” body from pain. The body does not yield to our wishes. We come to understand what the Buddha means in pointing out:

**“Form is non-self. For if form were self, this form will not inflict pain. But because form is non-self, form inflicts pain.”**

(SN 22.59[7])

Having understood the impersonal nature of our body, we should cultivate equanimity towards the pain. If we can

contemplate pain as not mine, not myself, and mere cause and effect, then the observing mind can grow dispassionate and detached from it, looking upon it almost as if it were another person's pain. We come to a point when the body is in pain but the mind is at ease. Pain arises because of an imbalance of elements, mostly due to excessive hardness, heat, and vibration. It is merely an aggregate of materiality. It is our identification with and clinging to pain as "*my* pain" that makes it unbearable. This practice, when frequently undertaken, becomes very useful in times of illness and as we approach death. We become able to face them with courage and equanimity.

If while meditating our discomfort becomes a cause of dismay, doubt, or disappointment rather than a cause for the arising of insight, it is then much better to change one's posture mindfully, keeping attention on the breath as we move.

When one has overcome the pain, one still has to face other obstacles that impede progress. These obstacles cause the mind to become dark, unwieldy, intractable, and attaining *jhāna* becomes utterly impossible. What are these obstacles? They are known as the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*): [1] sensual desire, [2] ill-will, [3] sloth and torpor, [4] restlessness and remorse or worry, and [5] skeptical doubt.



## IV

## THE FIVE HINDRANCES

## 1 SENSUAL DESIRE

Sensual desire (*kāmachanda*) is the desire for the six sense-objects of pleasing visible objects, sounds, smells, flavors, tactile sensations, and mental objects. The impingement of these six sense-objects binds one who has not developed mindfulness of breathing. The eye constantly pulls in the direction of agreeable forms, the ear towards agreeable sounds, the nose towards agreeable smells, the tongue towards agreeable flavors, the body towards agreeable tangibles, and the mind towards agreeable mental objects. It is like having six animals — a snake, crocodile, bird, dog, jackal, and monkey — tied with a strong rope bound to a strong post. Those animals with distinct domains and feeding grounds would each pull in a different direction: the snake pulls in the direction of an anthill, the crocodile towards water, the bird towards the sky, the dog towards the village, the jackal towards the charnel ground, and the monkey towards the forest (SN 35.247). But in a retreat setting, the five sense-doors are kept closed, only the mind is to be directed to its meditation object.

For those who are passionate, the mind very quickly loses interest in concentrating on a single object, which yields no enjoyment in the beginning. The mind lingers on the sensual pleasures it formerly delighted in, for example, sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Strong attachment to one's children and spouse is also a great obstacle to progress. One's mind frequently chats with them and worries about them rather than settling peacefully

on the breath. Pet lovers think of their pets. These seem like compassionate thoughts, but neither the children nor animals benefit. The meditator's own good is being sabotaged through distraction, worry, and concern. Take precautions and provide for loved ones in advance of the retreat so that peace of mind will be possible. Longing for a soft, comfortable bed and delicious food can be disturbing as well. The cultivation of contentment is necessary during times of intensive practice.

Sensual desire actually arises due to *unwise reflection* on an object that is agreeable to the senses. We mistakenly think that agreeable objects provide lasting happiness. A sensual object is either sensuality itself or that which produces sensuality. The antidote is to reflect on the dangers of it. The Buddha compares sense-desires to water tinted with a fusion of different colors. In such water one cannot make out one's own reflection. So, too, when one is obsessed with sense-desires, one cannot see one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. (AN V:193)

There are six ways to abandon sense-desires:<sup>2</sup>

1. Reflecting on the foulness of the object of attraction cures lust, for example, gluttony is dispelled by spitting out chewed food and reflecting on how repulsive it has so quickly become.
2. Devoting oneself to meditation on impurity, such as the 32 body parts.
3. Guarding the sense-doors by anchoring one's mind on a single meditation object, in this case, the breath.

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2 Commentary on the FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

4. Moderating food intake: moderation is important because when one is well-fed, lust for other sense-desires increases.
5. Being in supportive spiritual friendships: giving and receiving support from noble friends (*kalyāṇa mitta*) in meditative endeavors is invaluable. The Buddha once explained to Ānanda:

**“Noble friendship is not half of the spiritual life. Noble friendship, Ānanda, is the entire spiritual life!”**

He further explained:

**“Of a recluse, Ānanda, who has a noble friend, a noble companion, a noble associate, it is to be expected that he will cultivate and practice the Noble Eightfold Path.”**

(SN 45.2)

6. Talking about suitable topics: about the austere life, talk conducive to detachment, to freedom from passion, to cessation, tranquillity, enlightenment, and to Nirvana, namely, talk about wanting little, about contentment, solitude, aloofness from society, about rousing one’s energy, talk about virtue, concentration, and wisdom.

Sometimes it is good to ask oneself the purpose of meditation or of going on retreat to meditate intensively. When life comes to an end, we have to take leave of all the sensual objects we cherish, so why not learn to detach from them first? Another way to deal with sensual pleasure is to just be aware and let go of our clinging to it.

## 2 ILL-WILL

Ill-will (*byāpāda*) is annoyance, agitation, resentment, hate, disgust, and/or dissatisfaction aimed at oneself, other people, objects, or situations. How does anger arise towards other people while meditating? When the mind is well concentrated on the breath, some meditators may loudly walk in or out without due consideration for others, so owing to the mind's distraction we get angry at that person. A meditator once reported: "My neighbor kept massaging her leg (because of the pain), disturbing me so much!" In this case, instead of paying attention to the breath, one was pampering her body with a massage, while the other was meditating on someone else's doings and causing herself to become angry. If both of them could practice awareness of their unpleasant feelings — the former being aware of unpleasant feelings associated with physical discomfort and the latter with unpleasant feelings associated with mental distress — and accept them with understanding without self-identification with them, their minds would not be harassed by ill-will.

At times we may remember the wrongs others have done, and reflecting in this way, the mind becomes agitated. Practicing forgiveness lets go of resentment. It might be the result of our own past unwholesome karma; in which case, learning to accept it with equanimity is the best course.

At times, anger may arise towards oneself. The more one exerts effort in meditating, the more restless one becomes, due to expectations and an excess of energy. As one fails to meet one's expectations, one gets angry at oneself. Be kind and gentle to yourself. Let go of expectations and practice with equanimity

instead. Results do not come from harboring expectations but from right effort, which means being mindful of the breath all the time. Then, the result will unfold itself. Whenever anger arises, the mind becomes hot like boiling water. How can calm and concentration develop with a “hot” mind?

There are other ways to soothe anger as well:

- reflecting on the fact that karma is one’s own property,
- sympathetic and helpful companionship of noble friends,
- stimulating talk that assists one in developing thoughts of love, serenity, patience, bliss, and tolerance that supplants anger.

### 3 SLOTH AND TORPOR

Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*) is dullness and drowsiness, which means physical tiredness (sloth) and mental sluggishness (torpor). Both lack zest, interest, and driving power. When we are overcome by sloth and torpor, little progress can be expected. It manifests as head drooping, nodding, and body swaying. We cannot feel or grasp the breath at all. Usually sloth and torpor arise because of a lack of interest in the practice. As a result, one soon is overcome by boredom, disinterest, and inattention. Why would someone lack interest in the practice? It is because one does not understand the tremendous benefits of concentration. Concentration is the proximate cause for wisdom. Wisdom based on deep concentration penetrates things and sees them as they really are. Training in concentration is a very great task, a worthy task. To undertake the training, one needs superior effort. Bearing

in mind the worthiness of the outcome, effort never shrinks from the task. Confronted with a job requiring great energy, diligence, and persistence, we rise to the occasion.

How do we overcome sloth and torpor? We can wisely reflect on inspiring stories of monastics and meditators rousing effort to overcome all difficulties. For instance during the Buddha's time, there was a man who, awakening to the hallucinatory nature of life in the world, renounced his property and became a monk. He practiced with great persistence. He was afraid he might fall asleep during meditation, so in the middle of the night, he would walk and walk instead of sleeping, so much so that the soles of his feet bled and he was unable to continue his walking meditation. So he started to crawl on the ground. A hunter saw him and, mistaking him for an animal, pierced his back with a spike. It caused him severe pain but even then, he neither gave up nor relaxed his effort. Tales of such heroic effort often inspire in us a greatness we did not know we were capable of until we met the challenge. They uplift the mind and cast out torpor. It may be for this reason that Siddhartha's austerities and struggle under the bodhi tree grow more awesome with every retelling, infusing listeners with the spirit of a warrior who overcomes all obstacles.

The Buddha urged us to contemplate the suffering in impermanence to rouse a sense of spiritual urgency:

**"In a monk who grows accustomed to seeing the suffering in impermanence and who is frequently engaged in this contemplation, there will be established in him a keen sense of the danger of laziness, idleness, lassitude, indolence, and thoughtlessness, as if he were threatened by a murderer with drawn sword."**

(AN VII:46)

The Buddha prescribed a sequence of means to overcome sloth and torpor. The cause is unwise attention. So the first means is not to pay attention to thoughts that cause lassitude. If one does not succeed by this means, one might reflect on the excellence of the Dharma (the teachings that lead to enlightenment and Nirvana). This stimulates a dull mind. If this fails, one may pull one's ears, rub one's limbs, get up from one's seat mindfully and refresh one's eyes with cold water, give attention to the perception of light to cultivate a mind full of brightness. Or one might walk up and down, being aware of going forward and back. By doing so it is quite possible drowsiness will vanish.

If none of these means prove useful, the antidote is to nap for a short while, keeping in mind the thought of rising, because it may be due to physical fatigue from sleep deprivation.

Overeating or following the wrong diet may be the cause of dullness and sluggishness. Eat moderately, particularly on retreat, taking only enough to sustain the body for the day's striving rather than eating until you have to loosen your belt!

Sloth and torpor is likened to stagnant water overgrown with water plants. In such water one cannot see one's reflection; likewise, a mind obsessed with sloth and torpor loses its clarity. One cannot see one's own good, the good of others, or the good of both.

#### 4 RESTLESSNESS AND REMORSE

Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) occur when the mind is either planning for the future or recollecting the past. It is a scattered and distracted state of mind going every which way like a heap of embers and ash hit by a stone. Such a mind has no power. As soon as it tries to focus on the breath, it quickly loses attention. Restlessness drives the mind from thought to thought. The mind behaves like a monkey jumping from branch to branch without stopping. This is common for an untrained mind long accustomed to indulging in sense pleasures. All the mind has known for so long is being scattered, restless, and frustrated in its efforts to find enduring happiness. Now that we are instructed to focus on a single breath object, in the beginning it finds no enjoyment in it at all. Instead, the mind prefers to dash about wildly looking for fresh pleasure as it was formerly used to getting. Like a fish tossed out of a pond and onto dry land, it jumps and struggles, wanting nothing more than to go back into the water.

So in place of strong effort we need *persistent* effort, loving perseverance, and patience to gently bring the mind back again and again from external interests to what is soon to be its greatest interest, the breath. With the rope of mindfulness we anchor attention on the breath

If we let our mind go according to its will, nothing can be accomplished. Restlessness is the mind's powerlessness. We need to tame the mind to make it powerful. The process is like taming a calf. One ties it with a rope to a firm post in the ground. Naturally, in the beginning the calf will pull away and do everything but sit



still. It wants to be wild and slavishly obey its instincts. It resists taming and training. But with the rope securely tied to the post, there is a limit on how unruly the calf can be. After struggling for some time, sometimes quite wildly, the calf tires, grows calm, and is still. It is now ready to train, which makes it useful and opens up the possibility for a greater happiness than it could ever know behaving impulsively and recklessly.

Likewise, if we wish to tame the mind, we tie it with the rope of mindfulness and anchor it to the breath. If this is maintained, a miracle happens: the mind gradually grows calm and contented, experiencing a serenity and stillness it has never known.

Excessive effort also provokes restlessness. When there is an excess of energy or “over-focus,” the nose becomes hard and the head tightens. Even if the motivation is good, check the mind: “Am I too excited? Am I holding on to the breath too hard? Am I frustrating myself? Do I expect something to happen? Am I anxious that the breath is not clear?” Expectation nourishes anxiety and results in restlessness, all of which oppose serenity. Let go of them. When restlessness becomes overwhelming, be mindful of it without giving in to frustration or self-criticism. When effort becomes excessive, it is time to cultivate the enlightenment factors of tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity to calm and appease it, just as we might toss wet grass, wet timber, and cool water to extinguish a bonfire. Just look on the breath with equanimity.

Remorse is another facet of this hindrance that blocks progress in serenity and insight meditation. We may regret misdeeds of the past or fret over good left undone. Before we came to

know the Buddha's liberating Dharma, we may have killed or beaten, stolen or taken what was not given, had inappropriate sexual relations that harmed others, lied in order to cheat people, or indulged in intoxicants that led us unwittingly to be heedless and do things we now regret. Now having come to know the Buddha's teaching, we understand that these are unwholesome deeds that can produce unwelcome consequences when their time ripens. So we experience remorse. But one must reflect whether remorse or worry now for those past misdeeds is wise or beneficial. Will it help us now or hinder us?

Some may feel remorse over good deeds left undone; for instance, feeling sorry one did not start the practice earlier in life. Now the body seems too old and weak to sit for long enough to feel a satisfying pace of progress. Each person has different reasons to feel remorse. Remorse disturbs the mind. The best way to overcome remorse is to recognize its unwholesomeness and let go of it. The fact that it is possible to let go of it is exemplified by the case of Venerable Āṅgulimāla. He was a mass murderer who, it is said, had killed 999 people. The Buddha saved him from ruin, as he was about to kill his own mother. Nonetheless, he did not permit remorse to overwhelm his heart. He became a monk and practiced restraint until his attainment of full enlightenment. If it is possible for someone with that much to regret to let go and concentrate on what good can be done now, there is hope for us all.

Sometimes we worry about what has not yet happened. We worry the house will be burglarized, pets will go unfed, the stock market will drop.... It is wise to take precautions but unwise to

worry. What will happen will happen, what will not happen will not happen. Has worrying ever changed the outcome? It is a cognitive distortion to imagine that if we stop worrying then bad things will happen, as if the worrying itself were keeping them at bay. We must recognize that worry is just a drain on our energy! Best to let go of it. The Buddha likened restlessness and remorse to agitated water whipped up by the wind, on account of which one cannot see one's own reflection. When the mind is filled with restlessness and remorse, one cannot see one's good, the good of others, or the good of both.

There are other ways to let go of restlessness and remorse:

- knowledge of the teachings,
- questioning,
- association with elders more experienced in the practice of virtue, concentration, and wisdom,
- sympathetic and helpful companions,
- stimulating talk that helps develop calm and confidence.

## 5 SKEPTICAL DOUBT

Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) is uncertainty, indecision, and a lack of confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Enlightened beings. A doubtful person, when instructed to concentrate on the breath, may think: "What's the use? What benefit is there to just be aware of the breath? How can I attain *jhāna* by simply concentrating on the breath?"

If the mind is obsessed with skepticism, one will lack devotion, energy, and perseverance. And one will be unable to commit oneself to any course of spiritual training, let alone succeed in it. The best way to begin the practice is with trust and confidence in the Dharma, following a qualified teacher's instructions. When doubt arises, approach the teacher with questions. Listen to relevant talks and engage in discussions to clarify any arising doubts. The Buddha likens skeptical doubt to muddy water lacking clarity. Just as one cannot see one's reflection in it, so a mind obsessed with doubts about the practice will not see how the practice is a benefit to oneself and others.

The Buddha states that reflecting on what is wholesome and unwholesome, blameworthy and blameless, to be practiced and not to be practiced, of low and high value, when done intensely, keeps out fresh doubt and expels doubt that has already come into existence.

It is important for meditators to be clear that these are the five corruptions of mind that hinder concentration and insight. Corrupted by them the mind is not malleable but unwieldy, not radiant but brittle, and unready for attaining *jhāna*. When these hindrances arise, if possible, just be aware and let go of them. If they persist, there are antidotes to apply to overcome them. Sometimes it is also useful to take these hindrances as objects of observation. Simply being watchful of their presence allows wisdom to see their passing away. Moreover, it is also a good idea to know what causes them to arise and avoid it. Dealing with causes is more effective than effects. After surpassing these hindrances, the mind will concentrate well on the breath.

## V

**APPROACHING  
ACCESS CONCENTRATION**

When one is able to concentrate well on the long and short breath, it is time to proceed to the third stage. One trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the entire body [or extent of the breath]; I shall breathe out experiencing the entire body [of the breath]." This means that one remains aware of the entire breath from beginning to end. It does not mean following the breath in or out of the body. One does not allow attention to lapse during any part of it, even the pause between breaths. If attention and effort are continuous in this manner, mindfulness will not forget the breath, instead it sinks deeply into the breath continuously for one or two hours. This gives rise to another beautiful mental factor of concentration or one-pointedness of the mind. It is unification of the mind on the breath object. Let concentration be continuous in this manner as long as one can.

To progress smoothly on the path, one must from time to time give attention to three factors: concentration, effort, and equanimity. If one gives exclusive attention to concentration, it is possible that the mind may fall into indolence. At this time, it is advisable to balance the mind with the three enlightenment factors of investigation, effort, and joy. Giving exclusive attention to energy may result in the mind becoming restless and overheated. At this time it is good to balance the overheated mind with another three enlightenment factors of tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity by just looking at the breath. If one pays

exclusive attention to equanimity, the mind may not become well concentrated. But if from time to time one gives attention to each of these three qualities then one's mind will become wieldy, pliant, lucid, and well concentrated. Just like a goldsmith, while taking the gold with a pair of tongs and putting it into a furnace, from time to time he blows on it, from time to time he sprinkles water on it, from time to time he examines it closely. If the goldsmith were to blow on the gold continuously it might be heated too much. If he continuously sprinkles water on it, it would be cooled. If he were only to look on it, the gold would not come to perfect refinement. But if, from time to time, the goldsmith attends to each of these three functions, the gold will become pliant, workable and bright; and it can easily be molded. (AN III:100)

When the mind is well concentrated for some time, move to the final stage: "I will breathe in calming the bodily formation; I will breathe out calming the bodily formation." One should make a mental wish: "May my gross breath be calm." Incline the mind in the direction of the subtle breath, which is difficult to perceive and requires stronger mindfulness. Gradually the breath will become smooth, subtle, and calm all by itself. If the breath becomes subtle and the mind settles and rests calmly on it, most meditators, by the power of concentration, do not feel the nose or body. There exists only the breath and the mind concentrating on it.

At this moment there is no "I" or "other," only the concentrated mind fixed on the breath. Mere mind and matter. If the mind remains calm and concentrated on the subtle breath for an hour, then for that period all worry, anxiety, agitation, depression, and unwholesome states of mind are temporarily cut off. This state is

rather close to access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). However, when the concentration is deep but effort is lax, one may fall into indolence.

## VI

### APPEARANCE OF THE SIGN OF CONCENTRATION

The sign (*nimitta*) may arise at this stage. If the sign appears, do not immediately shift attention to it; continue to be aware of the breath under the nose. Just before the sign appears, many meditators encounter difficulties: most find that the breath becomes so subtle that it is unclear to the mind. If this happens, keep awareness at the place where the breath was last noticed and wait for it there.

There is no need to be perplexed or to think your meditation has regressed. Every other meditation subject gets more evident as one goes on giving it attention. But for mindfulness of breathing with continuous mindfulness, breathing becomes more peaceful and subtle. Therefore, stronger mindfulness together with understanding, perseverance, and patience are necessary at this stage.

Do not try to make the breath clearer. It is going in the right direction (subtler). Follow it there. The meditator increases in mindfulness as the breath diminishes in clarity. If one makes the breath coarser and more obvious, one will not develop further concentration. Be aware of the subtle breath just as it naturally

is. Heighten the level of mindfulness. Even if one thinks one is not breathing at all, stay calm and stay mindful. Reflect: "I am certainly not a dead person. I am in fact breathing. And it is because of the weakness of my mindfulness that I am unable to be aware of the subtle breath." If one calmly applies mindfulness and understanding in this way, the breath will appear again. At this stage the sign may appear.

At first it appears as a gray color, like a puff of smoke, near the nostrils. This is the preparation sign (*parikamma nimitta*). Please note that the light may appear at different places around the body, but it is considered the sign of concentration only if it appears around the nostril or in front of the face. When the sign first appears, most meditators get excited or frightened by this new "extraordinary experience." They perplex: "Am I imagining?" "Am I out of my mind? Why don't I peep?" As a result of this distraction, the sign disappears. The sign is usually not stable in the beginning. If you keep on peeping at it or shift your awareness from the breath to the sign as soon as it appears, the sign will definitely go away from you. You should learn not to get distracted by the first appearance of the sign.

The sign disappears owing to the instability of concentration, which could be due to doubt, inattention, elation, inertia, fear, an excess of energy or the deficiency of energy (MN 128). Abandon all these imperfections of the mind.

Just continue to concentrate on the breath. That is how you got here, and that is how you will get to where you are meant to go. When concentration deepens and strengthens, the sign comes back again. For the beginner, the sign comes and goes



very often. Many meditators, once they experience the sign, unconsciously develop the desire for the sign to come back again. They meditate with great expectation, but end up in disappointment. This is because their observing mind is now tainted with greed. Having learned the lesson, they give up the expectation and practice with equanimity. Very soon, the sign comes back. This time, the color changes; it whitens and becomes like cotton. This is called the learning sign (*uggaha nimitta*). It is not very bright yet.

The sign appears to different people in different ways, which is due to differences in perception. These differences are not important. The sign can look like a white thread, a long white light, a star, a wreath of flowers, a stretched out cobweb, a chariot wheel, a cloud, or a tuft of white cotton. It may appear to some as covering the entire face, or like the sun or moon, or like a pearl or red ruby or a yellow color. Even though mindfulness of breathing is only one meditation subject, it can produce various types of signs depending on an individual's perception.

At this stage, guard this sign of concentration, this *nimitta*, carefully, as a king's chief queen guards the child in her womb. It is important not to give attention to its color or play with it. The meditators very often discover they can play with the sign by intentionally changing its shape or appearance. What fun! But soon they find their concentration regresses because the mind no longer sinks into a single object, which is still the breath. The sign has taken the place of the breath. The sign appears because one was single-mindedly on the breath, and it will disappear if that is lost. Then comes the question of when one should shift the attention from the breath to the sign?

When the sign is stable for about half an hour and the mind, all on its own, naturally becomes fixed on it, then simply leave the mind on it. Sometimes one will find that, like a magnetic force, the sign pulls the observing mind to it. This is good. Just sink the mind into it. If the sign appears far from the nostrils, do *not* pay attention to it! If you do, it will probably disappear. Simply continue to concentrate on the breath. By doing so, one will find that the sign comes back and stays under the nostrils. The appearance of the sign is the outcome of deep concentration. It cannot be coerced or forced.

Sometimes, one may find the sign moving in and out along with the breath. And it appears as if the sign is the breath and the breath is the sign. This is excellent. Nothing else has changed. The sign took the place of the breath by coming where attention was kept, so one may simply be aware of the sign and forget the breath. Only in this way, by changing attention from the breath to the sign with sustained attention, is further progress to be expected.

When the mind remains fixed on the sign of concentration for one or two hours, it becomes clear, bright, then brilliant like a crystal or diamond or morning star. It can be so brilliant that it makes one shed tears. This is called the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). At this point let the mind fix on it continuously for one, two, or three hours. Then one will reach either access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) or *jhāna* (*appanā samādhi*). Access concentration is close to, or in the “neighborhood” of, and precedes *jhāna* concentration.

Both of these types of concentration take the counterpart sign as their object. The difference between them is that in access concentration, the factors of *jhāna* are not completely developed to full strength. As a result, when access concentration has arisen, the mind first makes the counterpart sign its object and next falls into *bhavaṅga* mind state, going back and forth. This is just like a small child who is too weak to stand by him or herself. The toddler will fall down again and again. Sometimes due to weak mindfulness, the mind may also fall into the *bhavaṅga* mind state with no awareness of the counterpart sign. One feels peaceful and, to one's mind, it seems as if everything has stopped. One knows nothing and may even fall under the delusion that this temporary peace is Nirvana.

But in reality, at such times, *bhavaṅga* consciousness is still successively arising and passing away. As previously mentioned, *bhavaṅga* consciousness takes the object of the near-death cognitive process of the previous life. But the meditator does not have sufficient skill to discern this due to the subtlety of these states.

To avoid dropping into this state and to make further progress, one needs the help of the five controlling faculties — faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — to balance and uplift the mind, and fix it on the counterpart sign. One must have faith that mindfulness of breathing can lead to the attainment of *jhāna*. Effort must be raised to keep the mind on the counterpart sign repeatedly. Mindfulness must be present in order not to forget the counterpart sign. Concentration must be fixed on the counterpart sign. And wisdom must know the counterpart sign well.

## VII

ATTAINING JHĀNA  
CONCENTRATION

When these five controlling faculties are sufficiently developed and balanced, concentration will go beyond access to *jhāna*. The factors of *jhāna* become strong, and the stream of *jhāna javanas* flows uninterrupted for a long time. It is just as if a man with strong feet could stand for a whole day.

This extremely serene state is called *jhāna* because it closely contemplates the object. There is also a derivation of the term *jhāna* suggesting that it “burns up” the five hindrances, which are adverse states opposed to concentration.

When reaching *jhāna* in this way, the mind continuously knows the counterpart sign without interruption for one, two, three hours, or even all night. At this time one neither hears sounds nor falls into the *bhavaṅga* mind state. Some meditators may say that they can hear sounds while in *jhāna*. While there is a good reason why it may seem this way, it is in fact not possible. Why is that? The *jhāna* cognitive process takes the counterpart sign as its object, whereas the ear-door cognitive process takes sound as its object. When the ear-door cognitive process arises, the *jhāna* cognitive process cannot arise. But it is possible to momentarily slip out of *jhāna*, cognize a sound or sense impression, and re-enter *jhāna* again. And for the meditator new to *jhāna*, it may well seem as if both occurred simultaneously. Without realizing it, one has emerged from *jhāna* for a split second and re-entered. Unable to discern that the *jhāna* cognitive process and ear-door cognitive

process are occurring alternately, not simultaneously, one proclaims that one can hear sounds in a blissful state of *jhāna*.

When the mind is well concentrated on the counterpart sign, secluded from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states, one abides in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by initial application of mind and sustained application of mind, with joy and happiness born of seclusion.

There are five factors of first *jhāna*:

1. Initial application of mind
2. Sustained application of mind
3. Joy
4. Happiness
5. One-pointedness of mind

## VIII

### THE FIVE FACTORS OF JHĀNA

1. **Initial application of mind** (*vitakka*) is the directing and placing of the mind on the object, the counterpart sign.
2. **Sustained application of mind** (*vicāra*) is keeping the mind anchored on the object. Initial application is the first striking of the mind on the object, like a bee diving towards a lotus, whereas sustained application is continued pressure like the bee buzzing around the lotus after it has dived towards it.

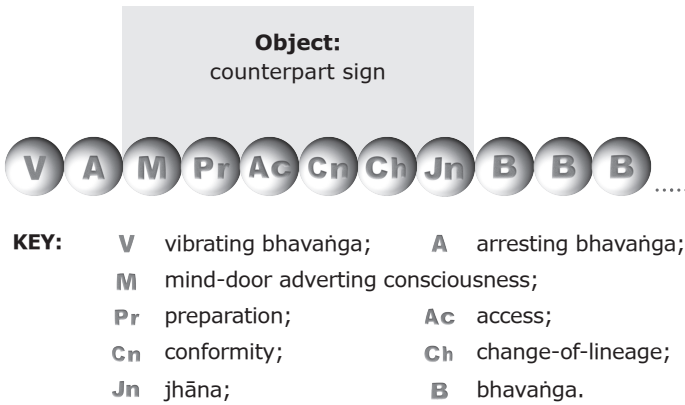
3. **Joy** (*pīti*) is keen interest, liking, and delighting in the counterpart sign. Its function is to refresh the body and mind, pervading it with thrill and joy.
4. **Happiness** (*sukha*) is pleasant feeling associated with experiencing the counterpart sign.
5. **One-pointedness** (*ekaggatā*) is fixing the mind firmly on the counterpart sign, which when well developed is known as concentration (*samādhi*).

One experiences these *jhāna* factors clearly in the first *jhāna*. When *jhāna* has been attained in this way, the meditator must discern the mode in which he or she attained it. When the *jhāna* is lost, the meditator will be able to recapture that mode and re-attain the *jhāna*. While familiarizing oneself with it, it is possible to then repeat the *jhāna* again and again.

## IX

JHĀNA COGNITIVE  
PROCESS

When one first attains *jhāna*, the *jhāna* cognitive process (*vīthi*) runs as follows:



**CHART 21 : Jhāna Cognitive Process — First Attainment of Jhāna**

When the counterpart sign appears at the mind-door, *bhavaṅga* consciousness vibrates and is arrested. Then mind-door adverting consciousness turns the mind to the counterpart sign, followed by:

- preparation, which prepares for the attainment of *jhāna*;
- access, which arises in proximity to the *jhāna*;
- conformity, which harmonizes the previous sense-sphere consciousness with the higher consciousness of *jhāna*; and

- change-of-lineage, which cuts the lineage of the sense-sphere consciousness and ushers in the higher fine-material-sphere consciousness. Immediately thereafter, the first-*jhāna* fine-material-sphere consciousness arises, only once, as *jhāna javana*, taking the same counterpart sign as object.

There are 33 mental factors associated with first *jhāna* consciousness:

1. **Contact** is the impingement of the counterpart sign with the first *jhāna* consciousness together with its associated mental factors.
2. **Feeling** experiences the bliss of the counterpart sign.
3. **Perception** makes a sign, "This is the counterpart sign."
4. **Volition** engages the counterpart sign and accumulates the wholesome karma of fine-material-sphere consciousness.
5. **One-pointedness** fixes the consciousness and its associated mental factors onto the counterpart sign.
6. **Life-faculty** sustains the vitality of the consciousness and its associated mental factors.
7. **Attention** directs consciousness and its associated mental factors towards the counterpart sign.
8. **Initial application of mind** places the consciousness and its associated mental factors on the counterpart sign.
9. **Sustained application of mind** anchors the consciousness and its associated mental factors on the counterpart sign.



10. **Decision** makes the decision, “This is the counterpart sign.”
11. **Effort** strives to support the consciousness and its associated mental factors to know the counterpart sign.
12. **Joy** is experiencing rapture due to the counterpart sign.
13. **Desire** is the wish to stay with the counterpart sign.
14. **Faith** is taking the counterpart sign as object with confidence in the attainment of *jhāna*.
15. **Mindfulness** makes the consciousness and its associated mental factors sink into the counterpart sign by not forgetting it.
16. **Shame of wrongdoing** is a wholesome attitude that is abashed at the mere idea of wrongdoing.
17. **Fear of wrongdoing** is a wholesome attitude that fears the ignominy of wrongdoing and has also been purified beforehand in the attainment of *jhāna* insofar as there is no desire to commit any wrongdoing.
18. **Non-greed** is non-attachment to the idea of “mine” with regard to the counterpart sign when the mind is focusing on it.
19. **Non-hatred** is being soft and gentle when one sees the counterpart sign.
20. **Neutrality of mind** balances the consciousness and its associated mental factors so they can function together, preventing any excess or deficiency.
21. **Tranquillity of consciousness** is serenity of consciousness.

22. **Tranquillity of mental factors** is serenity of associated mental factors at the time of taking the counterpart sign as object.
23. **Lightness of consciousness** is the ability of consciousness to take the counterpart sign lightly and swiftly.
24. **Lightness of mental factors** is the ability of mental factors to take the counterpart sign lightly and swiftly.
25. **Malleability of consciousness** is the pliancy of the consciousness.
26. **Malleability of mental factors** is the pliancy of its associated mental factors in taking the counterpart sign as object.
27. **Wieldiness of consciousness** is the adaptability of consciousness.
28. **Wieldiness of mental factors** is the adaptability of its mental factors in taking the counterpart sign as object.
29. **Proficiency of consciousness** is the skillfulness of consciousness.
30. **Proficiency of mental factors** is skillfulness of the mental factors in taking its associated mental factors as object.
31. **Rectitude of consciousness** is uprightness of consciousness.
32. **Rectitude of mental factors** is uprightness of its associated mental factors when taking the counterpart sign as object.
33. **Wisdom faculty** is knowing the counterpart sign clearly.

Thus there are 33 mental factors and one first *jhāna* fine-material consciousness at the attainment of the first *jhāna*. In total there are 34 mental phenomena.

When one attains the first *jhāna* for the very first time, only one impulsion *jhāna* consciousness moment arises due to a lack of skillfulness. It is so swift one may not even know it. With the dissolution of this first *jhāna* consciousness, *bhavaṅga* consciousness flows again as usual. With subsequent attainments of *jhāna*, owing to the skill one has mastered, one can enter into *jhāna* for a longer time, in which case the wholesome *jhāna javana* consciousnesses arise successively until one emerges from that *jhāna*, after which the mind lapses into *bhavaṅga* consciousness again.

If the *jhāna* consciousness arises for one hour, billions or trillions of wholesome consciousness-moments arise and pass away. Superior wholesome karma is thereby accumulated in abundance.

When the trained mind is well established in concentration, it becomes like pure gold: pliant, workable, wieldy, and adaptable for insight meditation. A meditator, after emerging from it, can discern mental factors associated with the first *jhāna* one by one as they occurred: “This is application of mind, this is sustained application of mind, this is joy,” and so on. One knows these mental factors as they arise, knows them when they are present, and knows them as they pass away. The Buddha speaks of Venerable Sāriputta’s practice in this way:

**“And those states in the first *jhāna* — the initial application of mind, sustained attention, joy, happiness, and unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness; the desire, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention — these states were defined by Sāriputta one by one as they occurred; known to him**

those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: 'So indeed, these states, not having been, they come into being; once having been, they cease.' Regarding those states, he abides unattached, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of obstacles." (MN 111)

X

PROCEED TO  
INSIGHT MEDITATION

It is mentioned in the ĀNĀPĀNASATI SUTTA (MN 118) that the meditator can practice *vipassanā* while mindful of the in and out breath:

**"He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in contemplating impermanence'; he trains thus: 'I shall breathe out contemplating impermanence.'"**

After emerging from *jhāna*, or whenever the meditator finds his mind is well concentrated, he can start defining those mental factors one by one as mentioned above. Those mental factors together with consciousness have the same characteristic of bending towards the in and out breath: the mental factor of attention directs the mind to the in and out breath, the mental factor of perception perceives the in and out breath, the mental factor of mindfulness always remembers the in and out breath, etc. These mental factors are not an entity or being. They are not an "I" nor are they a function of an "I." They are mind elements. When one clearly perceives this, purity of view is achieved. Later, one directs the mind to see how those mental factors arise dependent on

the breath. When the breath ceases, those dependently arising states will also come to an end. Seeing clearly thus, one understands the causal relationship of mind and matter. There is no controlling entity that governs the whole process. The right view of non-self is thus enhanced.

One proceeds to insight by contemplating the impermanence of each mental factor. When insight into the characteristic of impermanence becomes clear, one will also realize the characteristic of non-self, and the mind gradually turns away from the grasping of those mental factors.

One can also practice the five aggregates method by grouping all the mental phenomena and the breath into five aggregates. The mental factor of feeling associated with *jhāna* belongs to the feeling aggregate, the mental factor of perception associated with *jhāna* belongs to the perception aggregate, and the remaining mental factors associated with *jhāna* belong to the formations aggregate. Formation is a state where the mind is constructed, fabricated, formed, and built up while engaging with the breath. The formations pave the way for ongoing karma. The *jhāna* consciousness that knows the breath is the consciousness aggregate. The breath, which consists of four elements and has wind-element as the predominant factor, is the materiality aggregate.

Having grouped them into five aggregates, one understands them as objects of one's clinging by view and craving, the truth of suffering. Craving for the pleasure and existence of these five aggregates is the origin of suffering. The cessation, fading away, and relinquishment of that craving is the cessation of suffering.

The path is to contemplate repeatedly the changing, suffering, and impersonal nature of these five aggregates in order to become disenchanted with them, regardless of whether they are past, present, future, internal, external, superior, inferior, gross, subtle, far, or near. Being disenchanted, one becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, the mind is liberated from clinging.

However, if one desires to carry on concentration practice, then before approaching the second *jhāna*, one may practice the five masteries of the first *jhāna*.

XI

FIVE MASTERIES

1. **Mastery in adverting** is being able to advert to the factors of *jhāna* after emerging from the *jhāna*.
2. **Mastery in attaining** is being able to enter *jhāna* whenever one wishes.
3. **Mastery in resolving** is being able to stay absorbed for as long as one has determined to stay.
4. **Mastery in emerging** is being able to emerge from the *jhāna* at the time determined in advance.
5. **Mastery in reviewing** is being able to review the factors of *jhāna* from which one has just emerged.

## XII

## ATTAINING THE SECOND JHĀNA

When one becomes skilled in these five masteries, one proceeds to the second *jhāna*. If, without becoming proficient in the first *jhāna*, one tries to go to higher *jhānas*, one will not only miss the first *jhāna* but will be unable to attain the second. One loses both *jhānas*. To attain the second *jhāna*, one needs to enter the first *jhāna*, emerge from it, and reflect on its faults and the advantages of the second *jhāna*.

One considers that the first *jhāna* is close to the five hindrances and that the *jhāna* factors of initial application of mind and sustained application of mind in the first *jhāna* are gross. They make the mind unsettled compared with the second *jhāna*, which is free of these two factors. With the wish to remove these two factors and be left with only joy, happiness, and one-pointedness of mind, one continuously concentrates on the counterpart sign. In this way one's concentration progresses and reaches the second *jhāna*.

## XIII

## ATTAINING THE THIRD JHĀNA

One then practices to become proficient in the five masteries of the second *jhāna*. When one has succeeded and wants to develop the third *jhāna*, one reflects on the faults of the second *jhāna* and

the advantages of the third. Namely, the second *jhāna* is close to the first, and the factor of joy in the second *jhāna* is gross. This makes the mind less subtle than the more sublime third *jhāna*, which transcends joy. Reflecting in this way, after arising from the second *jhāna*, cultivate a desire to attain the third *jhāna*, and again concentrate on the counterpart sign until attaining the third *jhāna*, which is possessed of two *jhāna* factors: happiness and one-pointedness of mind. The happiness of the third *jhāna*, which is devoid of sensual pleasure, surpasses all mundane happiness.

**XIV**

**ATTAINING  
THE FOURTH JHĀNA**

Once successful in the five masteries of the third *jhāna*, proceed to develop the fourth *jhāna*. Reflect on the faults of the third *jhāna* and the advantages of the fourth. Consider that the happiness in the third *jhāna* is emotional compared to the subtlety of equanimity in the fourth *jhāna*. Reflecting in this way, after arising from the third *jhāna*, cultivate a desire to attain the fourth *jhāna*. Again concentrate on the counterpart sign until attaining the fourth *jhāna*, which is possessed of equanimity and one-pointedness of mind. Then practice the five masteries of the fourth *jhāna*.

This completes the fourth and final stage in the development of mindfulness of breathing: "Calming the breath body I will breathe in," and, "Calming the breath body I will breathe out."



## XV

## WHAT IS THE SIGN OF CONCENTRATION (NIMITTA)?

Some people say that the Buddha did not mention the *nimitta* in the Suttas. They argue that the experience of the *nimitta* is taken from the ABHIDHAMMA or COMMENTARIES. Here I would like to quote some passages from the discourse IMPERFECTIONS (MN 128), in which the Buddha describes to Anuruddhā perception of light and a vision of forms:

**“Anuruddhā, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too perceived both light and a vision of forms.... On the occasion when concentration is immeasurable, my vision is immeasurable, and with immeasurable vision I perceive immeasurable light and see immeasurable forms, even for a whole night or a whole day or a whole day and night.”**

Where does the *nimitta* or “sign” come from? Most mind states that arise dependent on the heart-base produce breathing. A *nimitta*, which comes from the breath, is the outcome of a deep, intensified, and profoundly concentrated mind. The ordinary mind cannot produce a *nimitta*.

What is this sign of concentration, the brilliant light, experienced in meditation? It is not magic. I remember talking about this light once in California, and the American audience thought I was talking about stage magic. In Chapter 5, I have mentioned how such light manifests. However, it is worthwhile to refresh your memory again.

Every consciousness that arises dependent on the heart-base can generate a great deal of consciousness-born *kalāpa* (particles). In each *kalāpa* there are eight inseparable elements (earth, water, fire, wind, color, smell, taste, and nutritive essence). Serenity-meditation-consciousness (*samatha-bhāvanā-citta*), which transcends sensual pleasures, can produce many powerful consciousness-born *kalāpas* internally. The color element in those *kalāpas* becomes very bright. The more powerful the serenity-meditation-consciousness and insight-meditation-consciousness are, the brighter the color. Because these *kalāpas* arise simultaneously and in succession, the color of one *kalāpa* and the color of another arise so closely together that, like electrons in an electric bulb, light occurs.

Furthermore, in each *kalāpa* produced by serenity-meditation-consciousness, there is fire-element, which can also produce many generations of new *kalāpas*. These are called temperature-born *kalāpas*. Likewise, the color in those *kalāpas* is bright due to the power of concentration. When the brightness of one color and the brightness of another color arise closely together, it manifests as light. This occurs not only internally but also externally, that is, outside of the body. Therefore, the meditator sees brilliant light under the nostrils or in all directions. A darkened room may appear bright to someone in possession of the sign. However, that same light can spread in all ten directions and encompass the entire world system or go even farther, depending on the power of the serenity-meditation-consciousness. The Buddha's great disciple Anuruddhā's divine-eye-consciousness produced light up to 1,000 world systems (AN III.128).

After emerging from the fourth *jhāna*, a meditator can proceed to the four higher immaterial *jhānas* if he wishes. Immaterial *jhānas* belong to wholesome immaterial-sphere consciousness. This will make one's foundation in concentration even more stable and add power to one's insight practice.

The Buddha defines Right Concentration as the first four *jhānas*.

## FOUR ELEMENTS MEDITATION

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## I

FOUR ELEMENTS  
MEDITATION

**A**s for the four elements detailed in Chapter 3, how does one realize them in meditation, and why is it important to do so? In an ultimate sense, the body consists only of four elements. When we do not realize this ultimate truth, we cling to the body as me, myself, or mine. This brings suffering as the body alters and changes. The four elements belong to the materiality aggregate of clinging that must be fully understood in order to bring suffering, distress, and dissatisfaction to an end.

There are two ways to practice four elements meditation, in brief and in detail. The Buddha taught the first method to the Kuru people, who were very sharp and quick to understand, in the famous FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS discourse. There the Buddha states,

**“A recluse reviews this very body, however it is positioned or placed, as consisting of just elements thus: ‘There are in this body just the earth-element, the water-element, the fire-element, and the wind-element.’”** (MN 10)

Such concise instruction is beyond the comprehension of most of us.

The Buddha also taught this subject in detail in THE GREAT DISCOURSE OF ADVICE TO RĀHULA (MN 62) and THE ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS (MN 140). In these two middle-length discourses, he skillfully uses conventional truth to bring about a realization of ultimate truth. His instruction runs as follows:

“Monks, what is the earth-element? The earth-element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth-element? Whatever internally belonging to oneself that is solid, solidified, and clung to, that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solidified, substantial, and clung-to; this is called the internal earth-element.

“What is the internal water-element? Whatever internally... is liquid, fluid, and clung to, that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, joint oil, and urine.

“What is the internal fire-element? Whatever internally... is fire, fiery, and clung to, that is, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested.

“What is the internal wind-element? Whatever internally... is airy, in motion, and clung to, that is, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, as well as in-breath and out-breath.”

Here the 32 parts of the body are used to realize the characteristic of the first two elements, earth and water.

In order to clearly understand this meditation subject, it is crucial to understand the characteristic, function, and manifestation of each of the four primary elements. The earth-element has the characteristic of hardness, the function of acting as a foundation (for the other primary elements), and the manifestation of receiving. The water-element has the characteristic of trickling or flowing, the function of intensifying coexisting elements and of congealing matter, and the manifestation of holding matter together. The fire-element has the characteristic of temperature

(both heat and cold, which are simply relative ends of a spectrum), the function of maturing or ripening matter, and the manifestation of continuously supplying softness. The wind-element has the characteristic of supporting and distending, the function of causing motion and the movement of limbs, and the manifestation of conveying. In short, the earth-element has the characteristics of hardness and roughness; the water-element, flowing and cohesion; the fire-element, heat and maturing; the wind-element, supporting and pushing.

To master this meditation, one begins by learning how to discern each of the qualities or characteristics of the four great elements one at a time. Each characteristic must first be discerned in one place. It can then be discerned throughout the body.

## II

### FOUR ELEMENTS MEDITATION USING 32 PARTS OF THE BODY

Start with the earth-element. Keep attention at the top of the head, scanning down through the body. Whatever part of the body one feels as hard or rough is the earth-element characteristic. One mentally notes, "Earth-element, earth-element." While repeatedly scanning the body, if the characteristic of hardness or roughness remains unclear, one should discern the first 20 parts of the body: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach,

feces, brain. It is advisable to learn these 20 parts of the body by heart before actually practicing.

These 20 parts have earth-element as their predominant factor. Discerning part by part in order, one gradually feels the hardness associated with each part. However some parts, such as bone marrow, diaphragm, or spleen may not be clear. One should discard whichever part is unclear. Instead, pay attention to whatever part is clear. Hardness is usually easily discerned in head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and bone. When moving attention from one part of the body to another, hardness and roughness gradually become clear. Then pay attention to hardness as “mere earth-element, simply earth-element, not a being.” Why should one contemplate in this way? The purpose is to uproot the perception of the existence of any “being or entity.” Once hardness becomes clear, move on to the water-element. Do not stay on hardness for an entire day or hardness will become excessive: the body might become hard like a stone. And that hardness will turn out to be unbearable, and one’s meditation will regress as a result.

To become familiar with the water-element, scan the body again from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet. Feel the flowing of blood or heat energy (*chi* in Chinese) throughout the body. Recognize this as “water-element, water-element.” At this time it may be possible to feel the body’s binding force. This is cohesion, which is another characteristic of the water-element. If cohesion is not clear, pay attention to skin, flesh, sinew, and bone to see how the body is bound by them. Recognize this binding force as “water-element, water-element.” But if these two characteristics are not clear, recite the remaining 12 body parts: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, joint oil,



and urine. All of these parts share the characteristic of flowing. When recited in this way, the flowing characteristic will become clear throughout the body.

Move on to the fire-element. The fire-element is apparent through the characteristics of heat and maturing. Pay attention to bodily temperature from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet. As a little warmth is felt, mentally note, "Fire-element, fire-element." Cold, relatively speaking, is also part of the fire-element. Pay attention to the digestive fire in the stomach thinking how food is broken down by digestive fire. When the fire-element is clear throughout the body, move on to the wind-element.

The last is the wind-element. Discern how air is moving in and out of the nostrils. Become aware of the characteristic of pushing as the abdomen or chest expands when breathing. Mentally note, "Wind-element, wind-element." Whatever is in motion in the body or exhibits movement belongs to the wind-element. Discern how your erect posture is founded on another characteristic of the wind-element, supporting.

After meditating on each element, contemplate it as simply an element. Whether it is earth, water, fire, or wind, it is simply an impersonal element. Dispassionately contemplating these characteristics as simply impersonal elements is "wise attention." It is ennobling to regard them as they truly are, merely elements, not my body, not a being, not an enduring self. Having discerned the four elements internally, one extends that knowledge externally. There are two types of external earth-element. One is animate, bound up with life, the other inanimate, devoid of an obvious association with life. All external matter, of course, consists of the

four great elements. But here more attention is paid to animate beings such as wife, husband, son, daughter, one's enemy and so on. The purpose is to let go of intense grasping of both the loved and hated, to whom if we cling, will ultimately bring us only suffering. It is due to not clearly seeing what they are that we find ourselves bound up in illusion and suffering. How does one practice to externally realize the four elements? Whatever one experiences internally as the four elements by direct knowledge, that very discernment is reviewed externally. After meditating on the internal and external four elements, both are seen as simply "elements, not a being."

After scanning the four elements from head to toe again and again, they may become so clear that scanning the body in this way becomes unnecessary. Simply take the body as a whole, like a snapshot, as if one were to stand on top of a hill looking down at a house. See the entire house at once. Take the body as a whole, seeing the four elements one by one. Sometimes when noticing the earth-element, it may be possible to see the water or fire-element. Eventually, when attending to more than one, all of the elements may be noticed together. This is very good; however, they must also be distinguished one by one as earth, water, fire, and wind-element. In this way, they will not get mixed up. As one keeps discerning the earth, water, fire, and wind-element, again and again, seeing them as mere elements, one gradually loses the perception "living being." The mind establishes itself upon the elements. Just as a butcher, so long as a cow is kept, sees it as a cow and does not lose the perception of cow, so one remains perceiving the body as a compact, unified whole. But when the cow is slaughtered and divided into parts and sold to

other people, the butcher loses the perception of cow. He does not think, “I am selling a cow,” but instead thinks, “I am selling meat.” Just so, one loses the perception of body and sees instead a composite, divided into constituent parts.

As concentration and wisdom develop, the discernment speeds up and one reaches a point when the body appears as billions of vibrating particles, incessantly arising and passing. The entire body is in a state of radical flux. There is no solidity at all. For some meditators the body may appear to be bubbling. In the LUMP OF FOAM discourse (SN 22.95), the Buddha likens the body, this internal materiality, to foam: **“It is hollow, void, insubstantial.”** Another may experience the elements breaking up, or breaking to pieces. One feels weary and humiliated with this uncontrollable occurrence. One sees the impermanent, suffering and inevitably impersonal nature of the body. Such seeing is seeing it rightly, just as it is in truth.

However, for those who strongly cling to identity view, a doctrine of self in terms of conventional truth, this truth, this discovery can seem shocking. It may even be frightening. Once in Florida, a yogi came to me weeping. She said she was terrified not seeing a “self” as she discerned the four elements throughout her body. I was very pleased and exclaimed, “Congratulations, you reached the height of this practice!” By seeing the true nature of the body, one becomes disenchanted and dispassionate. Being dispassionate, one is liberated from attachment to this impersonal body. One sees it rightly, cares for it, and uses it wisely without clinging. Attachment arises from the distorted perception, the misguided assumption, the wrong view that this body

is me, my true self, mine. When the body is no such self, what is it one will become attached to?

From time to time the elements may go out of balance. As a result, a very strong sense of suffering arises. Excessive hardness, cohesion, and heat may appear like a murderer with a raised sword. Others may experience the four elements like poisonous snakes, attacking one from all directions. The four elements seem stressful, insufferable, and very undesirable. At that time it is very useful to contemplate the suffering and oppressive nature of this body. Having realized the true nature of the body, proceed to contemplating the much more subtle mind element. Mind has the characteristic of knowing or cognizing, or of being conscious. Having a mind that knows the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal nature of this body is also distressing. The associated feeling feels the same suffering, the perception perceives the same suffering, and the formations engage in the same suffering. How peaceful it would be to be without such mind elements! One would not have to experience this constant rise and fall, the incessant arising and passing away of the four elements, and the pain and suffering associated with impermanence. It is only due to mind that one suffers the stress of the body. Without the mind cognizing the body, the body is but a corpse. Seeing the distressing nature of both mind and body is to know suffering fully.

One understands,

**“Whatever arises is the arising of suffering. Whatever ceases is the cessation of suffering.”** (SN 12.15)

It is not a person, being, or self that arises and ceases. One comes to the realization that with the complete cessation of

mind and body, suffering ceases completely. The mind inclines to Nirvana and the wish arises, “May both body and mind cease.”

### III

## FOUR ELEMENTS MEDITATION TAUGHT IN PA-AUK FOREST MONASTERY

Another way of practicing Four Elements Meditation is successfully taught by Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw in Myanmar. One begins by learning how to discern each of the 12 qualities or characteristics of the four great elements, one at a time: hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, lightness, flowing, cohesion, heat, cold, pushing and supporting. Usually the beginner is first taught those characteristics that are easier to discern, then the more difficult ones.

The 12 characteristics are usually learned in this order: pushing, hardness, roughness, heaviness, supporting, softness, smoothness, lightness, heat, coldness, flowing, and cohesion.

1. To discern **pushing**, begin by being aware (through the sense of touch) of the pushing in the center of the head as you breathe in and breathe out. When you can discern this characteristic, concentrate on it until it becomes clear to the mind. Then move your awareness to another nearby part of the body and discern the pushing there. In this way it is possible to slowly discern pushing first in the head, then neck, trunk of the body, arms, legs, and feet. This must be done

again and again, many times, until wherever you place your awareness in the body you can easily discern pushing.

If the pushing of the breath in the center of the head is not easy to discern, focus on the pushing as the chest expands when breathing or as the abdomen moves. If these are not clear, discern the pulse as the heart pumps, or locate any other obvious form of pushing in the body: wherever there is movement there is also pushing. Wherever you begin, you must slowly continue to develop understanding so as to discern pushing throughout the body. In some places it will be obvious, in other places subtle, but it is present throughout the body. Wherever you may look, there it is. As concentration improves, its presence becomes obvious.

2. When you are satisfied with that result, then start to discern **hardness**. Begin with the hardness in the teeth. Bite down and feel how hard the teeth are against each other. Relax the bite and be aware of the teeth's hardness. When you have a strong impression of this hardness, discern hardness throughout the body, such as the bones, in a systematic way from head to feet, just as you discerned pushing. Particular care should be taken not to deliberately tense the body. *It is not necessary to be very hard, just a little hardness is enough.*

When you are able to discern hardness throughout the body, again look for pushing throughout the body. Alternate between pushing and hardness, again and again, discerning pushing throughout the body then hardness throughout the body, from head to feet. Repeat this process many times.

3. You will find that **roughness** is also becoming clear. If it is not clear enough, rub your tongue over the edges of the teeth, or brush your hand over the skin of your arm, and feel roughness. Now start to discern roughness throughout the body in a systematic way as before. When you can discern roughness, continue to discern pushing, hardness, roughness, one at a time, again and again, throughout the body from head to feet.
4. When you are satisfied that you can discern these three characteristics, feel the weight of the body. This is **heaviness**. It is the easiest to feel the heaviness of the head by simply bending it forward. Practice systematically until you can discern heaviness throughout the body. Then continue to discern these four characteristics of pushing, hardness, roughness, and heaviness, in turn throughout the body.
5. When you are satisfied that you can discern these four characteristics, sense **supporting** throughout the body. Begin by relaxing your back so that the body bends forward. Then straighten your body and keep it erect and straight. The force that keeps the body straight, still, and erect is supporting. Practice systematically until you can discern supporting throughout the body from head to feet. If you have difficulty doing this, discern supporting together with hardness. This makes it easier to discern supporting. When you can easily discern supporting, sense pushing, hardness, roughness, heaviness, and supporting throughout the body.

6. When these five become clear, discern **softness** by pressing your tongue against the inside of your lower lip to feel its softness. Then physically relax and practice systematically until you can discern softness throughout the body. Softness and hardness are of course relative. Sometimes it is a judgment call. If it is not too hard then it is soft. You do not have to practice until the entire body is as soft as fluffy cotton. Feeling a bit soft is sufficient. Now discern pushing, hardness, roughness, heaviness, supporting, and softness throughout the body.
7. Next discern **smoothness** by wetting your lips and rubbing your tongue over them. Practice as explained above until you can discern smoothness throughout the body as if it were being rubbed with oil. Smoothness and roughness are also relative. When it is not too rough, it is smooth. Then discern the seven characteristics throughout the body one at a time.
8. Next discern **lightness** by lifting a single finger up and down and feeling its lightness. Practice until you can discern lightness throughout the body. Lightness and heaviness are also relative. Discern all the eight characteristics as previously explained.
9. Next feel the **heat** (warmth) throughout the body. This is usually very easy to do. Now discern these nine characteristics.
10. Next discern **cold** (coolness) by feeling the coolness of the breath as it enters the nostrils. Then discern it systematically throughout the body. Heat and cold are also relative. Now discern all ten characteristics.



**NOTE:** *Whereas the ten characteristics so far are all known directly through the sense of touch, the last two characteristics, flowing and cohesion, can only be known by inference based on these ten. That is a good reason to learn them last.*

11. To discern **cohesion**, pay attention to how the body is being held together by the skin, flesh, and sinews. Blood is being held in by skin, like water enclosed in a balloon. Without cohesion the body would fall to pieces. The force of gravity that keeps the body stuck to the Earth is also cohesion. Develop it as before.
12. To discern **flowing** begin by being aware of the flowing of saliva through the mouth, the flowing of blood through blood vessels, the flowing of air in and out of the lungs, and the flowing of heat throughout the body. Develop it as before.

If you experience difficulty discerning flowing or cohesion, discern the previous ten qualities again and again, one at a time, throughout the body. When you have mastered this, you will find that the quality of cohesion also becomes clear. If cohesion still does not become clear, pay attention again and again to just the qualities of pushing and hardness. Eventually you should feel as if the whole body is wrapped up in the coils of a rope. Discern this as the quality of cohesion.

If the quality of flowing does not become clear, look at it with the quality of coldness, heat, or pushing. You should then be able to discern the quality of flowing.

When you can clearly discern all 12 characteristics throughout the body from head to feet, continue to discern them again and again in this same order until you are satisfied that you can change the order to hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, lightness (earth-element), flowing, cohesion (water-element), heat, cold (fire-element), supporting, and pushing (wind-element). Now discern each characteristic in this new order, one at a time, from head to feet. Develop this until you can do it quite quickly, making at least three rounds in a minute.

While practicing meditation in this way, for some meditators the elements will not be balanced. Some elements may become excessive and unbearable. This is particularly true for hardness, heat, and pushing, which can become excessively strong. If this occurs, pay more attention to the opposite quality than the one in excess, and continue to develop concentration in this way. You may find that this rebalances the elements. It is for this reason that these 12 characteristics were taught in the first place. When the elements are balanced, it is easier to attain concentration.

For the sake of balancing the elements, the opposites are:

- hardness and softness
- roughness and smoothness
- heaviness and lightness
- flowing and cohesion
- heat and cold
- supporting and pushing.

Again, if one member of a pair is in excess, balance it by paying attention to the other. For example, if flowing is in excess, pay more attention to cohesion. If supporting is in excess, pay more attention to pushing.

Having grown skilled in the discernment of these characteristics, discern them throughout the entire body. When these characteristics become clear everywhere, note the first six (at least two) together at one glance as the earth-element, the next two (at least one) as the water-element, the next two (at least one) as the fire-element, and the last two (at least one) as the wind-element.

Continue to discern earth, water, fire, and wind in order to calm the mind and attain concentration. Do this again and again hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of times. At this point, a good method to employ is to take an overview of the body all at once and to continue to perceive the four elements.

In order to keep the mind calm and concentrated, do not move awareness from one part of the body to another as before. Instead, take an overall view of the body. It is usually best to take this overview as if you were looking on from behind the shoulders or as if you were looking down from above the head.

As you continue to develop concentration based on the four elements and begin to approach access concentration (*upacāra samādhī*), you will see different kinds of light.

For some meditators this light begins as a smoke-like gray. If you continue to discern the four elements in this gray light, it will become whiter, like cotton, then bright white like clouds. At

this point, your entire body will appear as a white form. As you continue to discern the four elements in this white form, you will find it becomes transparent like glass or a block of ice.

If you continue to discern the four elements in this transparent form, you will find that it sparkles and emits light. When you can concentrate continuously for at least half an hour, you have reached access concentration. This state is called purification of mind, according to the PATH OF PURIFICATION.

If one continues to meditate and discern the space element in this transparent form which is done by looking for space in it, one will find that the transparent form breaks down into many small specks, which are in fact fine particles. These particles incessantly arise and pass away in the body.



# INSIGHT MEDITATION: MOMENT-TO-MOMENT PRACTICE

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	R — RECOGNIZE IT	
	A — ACCEPT IT	
	D — DEPERSONALIZE IT	
	I — INVESTIGATE IT	
	C — CONTEMPLATE IMPERMANENCE	
	L — LET IT GO	

**“Just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, so this Dharma and Discipline has but one taste, the taste of liberation.”**  
(AN VIII:19)

The Buddha views the world as an illusion. Bound to it, one is unable to free oneself from suffering. He therefore shows the path that leads one to see the true nature of the world, which consists of the Five Aggregates of Clinging. By following the path true vision arises, and one awakens. This is the path of insight meditation.

Nowadays there are many different approaches to Insight meditation, such as that taught by Pa Auk Sayadaw, Mahāsi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sayagyi Goenka, Ajahn Chah, and many others. Here I would like to introduce an easy approach that is especially applicable in daily life. This practice becomes extremely easy when it is supported by concentration. Concentration makes the mind radiant, supple, malleable and workable, and consequently the dharma manifests swiftly. Once having achieved a certain degree of concentration, one proceeds to insight. To practice insight two important mental factors are needed, mindfulness and wisdom.

## I

## MINDFULNESS

**MINDFULNESS** comes face to face with the object of focus and does not forget. Mindfulness is free from judgment, bias, prejudice, and preference. Instead, keeping the mind centered, mindfulness simply observes, recognizes, allows, and accepts phenomena arising in the present moment for what they are, neither embellishing them nor detracting from them.

For example, when anger is present, one recognizes that it is present. One simply observes it, is aware of it, and knows it as it persists. The same holds when observing other mental and material phenomena. The simple act of recognition skillfully detects the subtle hindrances that might block progress if left unnoticed. Before his Enlightenment Venerable Anuruddhā, in relating to Venerable Sāriputta the profound event of his practice of the divine eye, the relentlessness of his effort, and his hitherto inability to realize Nirvana, in fact did not recognize in his report the subtle manifestation of conceit, restlessness and worry. Similarly, some meditators do not realize they practice with attachment and that this in fact has caused subtle agitation in the mind that blocks their progress.

Without mindfulness the untrained mind will react with craving to pleasant objects, with aversion to unpleasant ones, and with ignorance to neutral objects. Such reactions agitate both mind and body. There is no inner peace or happiness. And fresh karma is accumulated, which is bound to bring us and others woe.



Mindfulness is like a car's braking system. Imagine a car without brakes. Driving it one would certainly meet with accidents. Mindfulness brings the mind under control and protects it from its habitual patterns of reacting.

Mindfulness allows and accepts what is happening at this moment without reacting further. Acceptance means accepting 'what is' just 'as it is' without passing judgment. Biased judgment distorts our picture of reality. For example, when one feels irritated by the mistakes one repeatedly makes, instead of mindfully accepting the fact at this moment, one becomes upset even to the point of developing a feeling of self-hatred. This reaction is harmful. But if one can accept the fact in a dispassionate way as "a mere mental factor" without passing judgment or compulsively reacting, one will be free of that miserable state of self-loathing. Accept whatever states arise objectively, without emotional involvement.

Non-acceptance means creating a conflict between what is real at this moment and what we want things to be or how we would have them turn out. So mindfulness covers two aspects, recognizing and accepting.

Mindfulness slows down mental activity, which allows wisdom to directly see the transient nature of phenomena. As Buddha said:

**"Just as a farmer has to plough the ground in order to be able to sow, so too mindfulness fulfils an important preparatory role for the arising of wisdom."** (AN III)

## II

## WISDOM

**WISDOM** dispels the darkness of ignorance. Such darkness conceals the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and impersonality of mind and body.

In insight practice, the Five Aggregates of Clinging are the objects of mindful observation and investigation. These five are form (body), feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness (mind). The Five Aggregates are subject to clinging by view and craving.

Why do we crave for the Five Aggregates? Because we do not yet see their faults and the danger inherent in them. An innocent child fascinated by the beauty of fireworks develops an intense craving for them, and grasping them out of curiosity, gets burned. Then the child becomes disillusioned and realizes that fireworks are dangerous and are not to be held on to. As a result, he turns away from grasping. Likewise, before the danger of the Five Aggregates is realized, one perceives them in a distorted way. One regards them as permanent, able to satisfy, and under one's control, and thus develops craving for them.

Until insight knowledge arises and penetrates their true nature — as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal (not-self) — their danger remains concealed. But when insight succeeds, their nature is revealed. One becomes disillusioned and gets disenchanted with their reality. By directly knowing and seeing the danger inherent in the aggregates one has been clinging to, one becomes willing to abandon the origin of suffering — craving.

The practice starts when any of the six sense-objects impinge on the six sense-bases. Various mental formations are formed owing to such impingements. So it is crucial to watch the mind's reaction at the moment of contact. After all, mind precedes all states. Physical and verbal actions follow the command of the mind. When mind reacts negatively, we suffer. To free oneself from the torment of identifying with the mind, watch the mind.

Letting go of grasping the body is relatively easy compared to our clinging to mind. Growth and decline, birth and death, such things are easily seen in the body. But as for the mind, most beings are unable to experience revulsion. They are unable to become dispassionate towards it. Why? Because for a long time, mind has been grasped and held to as mine, I, and myself. It is for this reason too, we contemplate the mind repeatedly to see its conditionally arising nature. You may ask, "Who is the one who watches the mind?" There is no one. Each succeeding consciousness is aware of the preceding consciousness in an unbroken continuity of processes. Mind is not a compact entity. It is a composite of ever-changing constituent factors.

Use the following moment-to-moment practice summarized in the acronym **RADICL** to easily remember the practice:

**R** **RECOGNIZE IT.**

Recognize phenomena (anger, joy, greed, heat, confusion, tension, fear, sleepiness, pain, happiness, depression, stiffness, remorse...) as they arise. Let them be what they are, merely impersonal mental and material events.

**A ACCEPT IT.**

Accept what is just as it is. Resisting the unpleasant activates the underlying tendency of anger. Do not resist. Clinging to the pleasant activates the underlying tendency of greed. Do not cling. Embellishing the present activates the underlying tendencies of confusion and restlessness. Do not become deluded by fantasizing that it is other than the way it is. Accept whatever arises with equanimity, and breathe a sigh of relief that phenomena do not have to be otherwise to gain liberation.

**D DEPERSONALIZE IT.**

Identity view stubbornly remains intact, contaminating our mental stream, a habitual reaction to almost everything that arises as body and mind. If delusion leads us to spontaneously grasp at emotions and bodily pain as mine, or myself, the remedy is to dis-identify and see phenomena as impersonal. Self-grasping and false identification gives rise to more suffering. For example, if, when experiencing sorrow, we identify it as me or mine, how can we be free from that sorrow? In fact, the dependently arisen sorrow intensifies, owing to our grasping. It is not tenable to view sorrow as self, for sorrow soon passes away. If it were, it would follow that "I pass away along with sorrow." All emotions are impermanent, and to regard them otherwise is the wrong way of perceiving things, giving rise to more suffering. When we regard our emotion as self, we indeed "freeze" or "pause" the emotion. The nature of arising and passing away of the emotion is interfered with or interrupted. As a result, that emotion seems lasting and "real" owing to our holding on to and engagement

with it. When insight arises, one will see that emotion is “unreal.” It is real at the very moment of arising and soon it disappears, leaving no trace in the heart. To depersonalize or dis-identify is to mentally note arising emotions repeatedly as “not me,” “not mine,” “not myself,” and “mere emotion.” Look upon these states dispassionately. See whatever arises as foreign, as a third party, as empty or devoid of self. In this way, one frees oneself from entanglement. From a psychological point of view, this way of looking at things allows one to step back. One separates emotionally and is thereby relieved of the worry and fear that, in truth, does not belong to one. In reality, physical and mental phenomena momentarily arise, perform a function, and naturally fall away.

### **I INVESTIGATE IT.**

Investigation is the mental factor of wisdom. Although it is one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, it is largely ignored in the practice of insight. To remedy this, it is sometimes helpful to ask: “If that phenomenon is not me or mine, what is it and where does it come from?” At times it is appropriate to investigate the proximate cause and root cause of it. For example, when the ear contacts abusive words, unpleasant feeling arises. After recognizing and allowing this unpleasant feeling, avoid the trap of spontaneously identifying with it. See unpleasant feeling as impersonal by investigating where it comes from. Such unpleasant feeling comes from unpleasant ear contact with abusive words. Ear contact is the proximate cause; unpleasant feeling the effect. It is merely cause and effect, conditionally arisen. When abusive words stop impinging, contact ceases, then feeling ceases. Of

course, most of us remain embroiled in unpleasant feeling due to abusive words even after ear contact has ceased. What is the root cause of this continuous suffering, then? The root cause is misidentifying and clinging to feeling as mine or myself. Due to this, memory repeatedly impinges on the mind-base rather than the ear and has a much longer life. By tracing the causes and conditions of suffering, we tackle them at their root and free ourselves from suffering. Neither cause, condition, nor effect is a self. Without discerning cause and effect, one might fall prey to the illusion of a static, unchanging self, as happened to Venerable Channa.

Venerable Channa, after listening to the discourse of a senior monk, connected with the impermanent and non-self nature of the five aggregates, thinking to himself: “I do understand five aggregates are impermanent and non-self, but still my mind does not leap up, grow confident, steadfast, and released in the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation. Instead, agitation and clinging arise, and my mind turns back, thinking, ‘But who, then, is my self?’”(MN 22.90) Venerable Channa was full of doubt and perplexity.<sup>1</sup> With the help of Venerable Ānanda, he finally made a breakthrough in the Dharma.

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<sup>1</sup> It is said in the commentary that Venerable Channa had started to practice insight meditation without having done discernment of conditions. His weak insight could not eliminate the grip of self, and thus when formations appeared to him as empty, agitation arose in him along with the annihilationist view, “I will be annihilated, I will be destroyed.” He saw himself falling into an abyss.

**C CONTEMPLATE IMPERMANENCE.**

Contemplate the impermanence of whatever arises at the six bases of sensory contact. Attend to it again and again as incessant change, alteration, and dissolution. In the discourse on THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS, Buddha repeatedly urged practitioners to contemplate the nature of arising and vanishing, either separately or together, in the body, feelings, mind, and mental states (MN.10). It is essential to contemplate impermanence constantly and continuously. Why? There are five reasons:

1. To resolve the perverted perception of permanence embedded in the mind, which prevents the mind from seeing phenomena as they actually are. Although during our day-to-day life drama we experience a constant fluctuation in our feelings and emotions, the perception of impermanence still does not deeply imprint on our mind. We fail to contemplate or note “impermanence” while experiencing whatever change is occurring in the moment.
2. To harmonize mind with reality, for as the Buddha repeatedly pointed out:

**“Impermanent are all formations,  
their nature is rising and ceasing.”**

The characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent when this constant rising and ceasing is not given attention. As impermanence is the reality, only by noting the impermanent as impermanent do we harmonize mind with reality and does the truth manifest clearly.

3. To avoid the arising of grasping and craving. Craving takes root when we regard whatever we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel, perceive, think, and fabricate as pleasurable, delightful, and permanent. When craving arises, it conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; and birth conditions aging, sickness, sorrow, lamentation, despair, and the entire mass of suffering, rotating the chain of Dependent Origination. The chain is broken by systematically contemplating the impermanence and danger of the six sense-objects, six sense-bases, six types of consciousness, six types of contact, and the six types of feeling born from the six contacts. When pleasant feeling fades away, craving ceases. In this way, craving is abandoned from moment to moment.<sup>2</sup>
4. To train the mind to let go of clinging to what is passing. The word "impermanent" teaches the sub-consciousness to let go of the clinging. This is because the mind is not inclined to take hold of things that are arising and disintegrating every moment.
5. To arouse revulsion towards the five aggregates or the six bases of contact. As the Buddha said:

**"Whoever dwells contemplating impermanence in  
the six bases of sensory contact, in him the revulsion  
towards sensory contact will be firmly established;  
this is its outcome." (AN V:30)**

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2 Buddha said: "Suppose, *bhikkhus*, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a man would not pour oil into or adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when a former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would be extinguished. So too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering." (SN 12.53)



The experience of revulsion towards the five aggregates or sensory contact is one of the important insight knowledges. It makes the mind turn away from grasping. Grasping the five aggregates with craving and identity view is the karma formation that produces the future five aggregates.

As one continuously contemplates impermanence, it comes to a point where one sees phenomena constantly arise and pass away very swiftly. The oppression of this constant arising and passing away, especially the arising or appearance of phenomena, comes to be seen as terror, stress, fear and insecurity. The cessation, on the other hand, comes to be seen as peaceful and secure. As this process of the arising and ceasing of formations is recognized as beyond one's control, one experiences what Buddha said:

**“Whatever arises is the arising of suffering;  
whatever ceases is the cessation of suffering.” (SN 12:15)**

Only suffering is seen, not a person who suffers. When one sees the formations in this way as danger and stress, devoid of satisfaction and a permanent self, one becomes disenchanted towards and takes no delight in any formation. The mind instead inclines and leans towards the state of non-arising and cessation. The non-arising is viewed as peace, bliss, relief, security — Nirvana.

Realizing impermanence is the doorway to Awakening. Buddha said:

**“The perception of impermanence, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit. It gains a footing in the Deathless, has the Deathless as its final end.”**

(AN VII:46)

Unless the impermanent nature of things is revealed, it will remain concealed in “continuity,” as we mistake the continuity of the process for stability, something lasting, satisfactoriness, and self. But when the continuity is disrupted, and the mind clearly perceives the arising and passing away of each phenomenon in succession, one feels the suffering and pain of being oppressed by the constant change one perceives, and the unsatisfactory nature of phenomena will also become evident. The mode of being continuously oppressed is the characteristic of *dukkha*. The five aggregates are now seen as *dukkha*. What is impermanent and suffering cannot be regarded as a permanent self, because there is no exercising of power over these phenomena, and one further realizes non-self. The mode of insusceptibility to the exercise of power is the characteristic of non-self.

### **L LET IT GO.**

Mentally note, “Letting go, letting go.” Try not to cling to anything, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Phenomena are allowed to come, are accepted as they are, and are allowed to go according to their nature. They cannot be prevented in either case. But struggling against reality creates a great deal of suffering. Non-clinging keeps the Five Aggregates from forming in the future. Let go of whatever arises. Let go of whatever changes. Let go of whatever passes. Let go of all phenomena as if they were simply clouds passing in the sky or churning waves in a river, observing them but not clinging to them. Do not let consciousness dwell on phenomena that come and go. Holding on to phenomena sustains consciousness. When consciousness is sustained, the


Five Aggregates continue to arise. When the Five Aggregates continue to arise, suffering follows.

Once one has gained familiarity with this moment-to-moment process, mindfulness quickly detects the appearance and wisdom immediately sees the cessation of any thoughts, emotions, and pleasant or unpleasant feelings arising from the sensory contacts. It is like raindrops that fall on a slightly sloping lotus leaf roll off immediately and do not remain there. However sluggish mindfulness may sometimes be in detecting arising mental states, the moment one contemplates their impermanence those phenomena would quickly cease. As one repeatedly contemplates impermanence, suffering, and the non-self nature of the five aggregates, if one's knowledge works keenly, one sees only the dissolution of the formations.

Finally one brings liberating wisdom to maturity by attending to the Five Aggregates from different perspectives: as impermanent, subject to destruction, breaking up, oppressive, painful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, a killer with raised sword, an affliction, a dissolution, alien, empty, void, and not a self, as instructed by Venerable Sāriputta (SN22.122). Seeing them from the perspective of being impermanent, subject to destruction, and breaking up, one abandons the perception of permanence; from the perspective of being oppressive, painful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, a killer with raised sword, and an affliction, one abandons the perception of pleasure; and from the perspective of being alien, empty, void, and not a self, one abandons the perception of self. For total detachment, this liberating wisdom also must be noted as impermanent, suffering, and empty of self.

The view belonging to one who contemplates like this is “right view,” which leads to right application of mind, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. With well-purified action, speech, and livelihood, one is developing the Noble Eightfold Path. One understands as it really is the impermanent (Five Aggregates) as impermanent, the suffering as suffering, the conditional as conditional, the selfless as selfless. One does not engage with, cling to, or stand upon any of the aggregates as self. Seeing nothing to be taken as I or mine, the mind becomes equanimous towards all formations. As one keeps on practicing, there may come a moment when insight knowledge reaches full maturity, one realizes Nirvana and the mind is liberated from clinging. One then lives happily with a mind inwardly peaceful.





**APPENDICES  
ABBREVIATIONS  
PĀLI-ENGLISH  
GLOSSARY  
BIBLIOGRAPHY**

# APPENDIX

## 1

### THE TWELVE UNWHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESSES (*akusalacittani*)

#### **A** EIGHT CONSCIOUSNESSES ROOTED IN GREED (*lobhamulacittani*)

1. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with wrong view, unprompted.
2. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with wrong view, prompted.
3. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from wrong view, unprompted.
4. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from wrong view, prompted.
5. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with wrong view, unprompted.
6. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with wrong view, prompted.
7. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from wrong view, unprompted.
8. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from wrong view, prompted.

The eight types of consciousness rooted in greed may be illustrated by the following examples:

- i. With joy, holding the view that there is no evil in stealing, a boy spontaneously steals an apple from a fruit stall.
- ii. With joy, holding the same view, he steals an apple through the prompting of a friend.
- iii–iv. The same as [i] and [ii] except that the boy does not hold any wrong view.
- v–viii. These four are parallel to [i] — [iv] except that the stealing is done with neutral feeling.

## **B TWO CONSCIOUSNESSES ROOTED IN HATRED** *(dosamulacittani)*

9. One consciousness, accompanied by displeasure, associated with aversion, unprompted.
10. One consciousness, accompanied by displeasure, associated with aversion, prompted.

These two may be illustrated by the following examples:

- i. With hatred one man murders another in a spontaneous fit of rage.
- ii. With hatred one man murders another after premeditation.



**C TWO CONSCIOUSNESSES ROOTED IN DELUSION**  
*(mohamulacittani)*

11. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with doubt.
12. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with restlessness.

These two types of consciousness involve sheer delusion and may be illustrated by the following examples:

- i. A person, due to delusion, doubts the enlightenment of the Buddha or the efficacy of the Dharma as a way to deliverance.
- ii. A person is so distracted in mind that he cannot focus his mind on any object.

## APPENDIX

2

### THE EIGHT SENSE-SPHERE WHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESSES (*kamavacara-kusalacittani*)

1. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
2. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, prompted.
3. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
4. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.
5. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
6. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, prompted.
7. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
8. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.

The eight types of sense-sphere wholesome consciousness may be illustrated by the following examples:

- i. A boy spontaneously and joyfully offers some food to a hungry dog, understanding that this is a wholesome deed.
- ii. A boy joyfully offers some food to a hungry dog, understanding that this is a wholesome deed, through the prompting of a friend.
- iii. A boy spontaneously and joyfully offers some food to a hungry dog, without understanding that this is a wholesome deed.
- iv. A boy joyfully offers some food to a hungry dog, without understanding that this is a wholesome deed, after prompting by another.
- v – viii. These types of consciousness should be understood in the same way as the preceding four, but with neutral feeling instead of joyful feeling.

## APPENDIX

3

### THE TWENTY-THREE SENSE-SPHERE RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESSES

#### THE EIGHT SENSE-SPHERE RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESSES

*(kamavacara-vipākacittani)*

1. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
2. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, prompted.
3. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
4. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.
5. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
6. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, prompted.
7. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
8. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.

## **THE SEVEN UNWHOLESOME-RESULTANT ROOTLESS CONSCIOUSNESSES**

*(akusalavipākacittani)*

1. Eye-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
2. Ear-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
3. Nose-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
4. Tongue-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
5. Body-consciousness accompanied by pain.
6. Receiving-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
7. Investigating-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.

## **THE EIGHT WHOLESOME-RESULTANT ROOTLESS CONSCIOUSNESSES**

1. Eye-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
2. Ear-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
3. Nose-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
4. Tongue-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
5. Body-consciousness accompanied by pleasure.
6. Receiving-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
7. Investigating-consciousness accompanied by joy.
8. Investigating-consciousness accompanied by equanimity.

## APPENDIX

## 4

**THE ELEVEN SENSE-SPHERE  
FUNCTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESSES**  
*(kamaṇṇā-kiriya-cittāni)*

1. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
2. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, prompted.
3. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
4. One consciousness, accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.
5. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, unprompted.
6. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, prompted.
7. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, unprompted.
8. One consciousness, accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, prompted.
9. Five-door advertent consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
10. Mind-door advertent consciousness accompanied by equanimity.
11. Smile-producing consciousness accompanied by joy.

## APPENDIX

5

### THE FIVE FINE-MATERIAL-SPHERE RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. First *jhāna* resultant consciousness together with initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
2. Second *jhāna* resultant consciousness together with sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
3. Third *jhāna* resultant consciousness together with joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
4. Fourth *jhāna* resultant consciousness together with happiness and one-pointedness.
5. Fifth *jhāna* resultant consciousness together with equanimity and one-pointedness.

## APPENDIX

### 6

#### THE FIVE FINE-MATERIAL-SPHERE FUNCTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. First *jhāna* functional consciousness together with initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
2. Second *jhāna* functional consciousness together with sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
3. Third *jhāna* functional consciousness together with joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.
4. Fourth *jhāna* functional consciousness together with happiness and one-pointedness.
5. Fifth *jhāna* functional consciousness together with equanimity and one-pointedness.



## APPENDIX

7

### THE FOUR IMMATERIAL-SPHERE RESULTANT CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. Resultant consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space  
(*ākāsānañcāyatana-vipākacitta*).
2. Resultant consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite consciousness  
(*viññāṇañcāyatana-vipākacitta*).
3. Resultant consciousness pertaining to the base of nothingness  
(*ākiñcaññāyatana-vipākacitta*).
4. Resultant consciousness pertaining to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception  
(*n'evasaññān' āsaññāyatana-vipākacitta*).

## APPENDIX

8

### THE FOUR IMMATERIAL-SPHERE FUNCTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESSES

1. Functional consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite space  
(*ākāsānañcāyatana-kriyācitta*).
2. Functional consciousness pertaining to the base of infinite consciousness  
(*viññāṇañcāyatana-kriyācitta*).
3. Functional consciousness pertaining to the base of nothingness  
(*ākīñcaññāyatana-kriyācitta*).
4. Functional consciousness pertaining to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception  
(*n'evasaññān'āsaññāyatana-kriyācitta*).

# ABBREVIATIONS

Names of Pāli Texts:

**AN**    **Aṅguttara Nikāya**

**DN**    **Dīgha Nikāya**

**MN**    **Majjhima Nikāya**

**SN**    **Saṃyutta Nikāya**

**Dhp**    **Dhammapada**

**Vsm**    **Visuddhimagga**

**Sn**    **Sutta Nipata**

# PĀḲI-ENGLISH GLOSSARY

## A

Abhidhamma	higher teachings of the Buddha
āciṇṇa kamma	habitual karma
adhigama-suta	direct knowledge
adhimokkha	decision
ādīnava-ñāṇa	knowledge of danger
ādīnava	danger
adosa	non-hatred
adukkhamasukha	neither unpleasant nor pleasant
agama-suta	learning knowledge
āhṛaja-rūpa	nutriment-born matter
ahirīka	shamelessness
ākāsānañcāyatana	base of infinite space
ākiñcāññāyatana	base of nothingness
ahosi kamma	defunct karma
akaliko	takes no time
akusala	unwholesome
akusalacetasika	unwholesome mental factors
akusalacittani	unwholesome consciousness
alobha	non-greed
amoha	non-delusion
anāgāmi	non-returner
aññasamanā-cetasika	variable mental factors
anattā	impersonal nature
ānāpānasati	mindfulness of breathing
aṅga	factor
anicca	impermanence
anottappa	fearlessness of wrongdoing
anuloma	conformity

anupadisesa	with the residue remaining
appanā	jhāna or absorption
aparāpariyavedanīyakamma	indefinitely effective karma
āpodhātu	water-element
ariya	noble one
ariya-citta	noble consciousness
ariya puggala	noble individual
ahirika	shamelessness
arūpabhūmi	immaterial planes of existence
arūpāvacaracitta	immaterial-sphere consciousness
asaṅkheyya	incalculable aeons
asaṅkhata dhamma	unconditioned dharma
āsanna kamma	death-proximate karma
asaṅkhata-dhātu	unconditioned element
asaṅṅa satta	non-percipient beings
asavas	taints
asuras	titans or demons
attavādupādāna	clinging to a doctrine of self
atīta-bhavaṅga	past bhavaṅga
avīci	the lowest hell
avijjā	ignorance
avinibbhoga-rūpas	inseparable matter

**B**

bhaṅga	dissolution
bhaṅga-ñāṇa	knowledge of dissolution
bhava	existence, becoming
bhāvanā-mayā-pañṅā	wisdom that comes from mental development
bhavaṅga	factor of existence, life-continuum consciousness
bhavaṅga-calana	vibrating bhavaṅga
bhavaṅgupaccheda	arresting bhavaṅga

bhaya	fearful
bhaya-ñāṇa	knowledge of the Fearful
bhikkhu	buddhist monk
bodhi	enlightenment
bodhisatta	buddha to be
brahma	inhabitant of fine-material-sphere realm & immaterial-sphere realm
brahmavihāra	sublime abiding
byāpāda	ill-will

**C**

cāga	generosity
cakkavāla	universe, world system
cakkhu-viññāṇa	eye-consciousness
carana	conduct
carita	temperature
cetanā	volition
cetasika	mental factors
chanda	desire
cintā-mayā-paññā	reflecting wisdom
citta	consciousness
cittaja-rūpa	consciousness-born matter
cittaja-rūpa kalāpa	consciousness-born particle
cittakammaññatā	wieldiness of consciousness
cittalahutā	lightness of consciousness
cittamudutā	malleability of consciousness
citta-niyāma	fixed law of consciousness
cittapāguññata	proficiency of consciousness
cittapassaddhi	tranquillity of consciousness
citta-visuddhi	purification of mind
cittujukatā	rectitude of consciousness
cuti-citta	death consciousness

**D**

dāna	charity
deva	heavenly beings
dharma (dhamma)	universal truths; teachings of Buddha
dhatu	elements
dibba cakkhu	divine eye
diṭṭhadhammavedanīya	current-life effective karma
diṭṭhi	view
diṭṭhupādāna	clinging to false views
diṭṭhi visuddhi	purification of view
domanasa	displeasure
dosa	hatred
dosamulacittani	consciousness rooted in hatred
dukkha	suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness
dukkhasacca	noble truth of suffering
dukkha-vedanā	unpleasant feeling

**E**

ekaggatā	one-pointedness
ekālambaṇa	taking the same object
ekanirodha	cease together
ekavatthuka	having the same base
ekuppāda	arise together

**G**

gandha	smell
garuka kamma	weighty karma
gati nimitta	sign of destination
ghānaviññana	nose-consciousness
gotrabu	change-of-lineage

**H**

hiri	shame
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**I**

iddhipāda	means of accomplishment
indriya	controlling faculty
issā	envy

**J**

janaka kamma	productive karma
jāti	nature, birth
javana	apperception, impulsion
janavāra	a course ending with javana
jhāna	absorption
jivhāvīñāna	tongue-consciousness
jīvitindriya	life faculty

**K**

kalāpa	particles
kalyāṇa mita	noble friends
kāmachanda	sensual desire
kāma-taṇhā	craving for sensual pleasures
kammassakata	karmas are one's owners
kammaja-rūpa	karma-born matter
kamma nimitta	sign of karma
kammaṭṭhāna	meditation subjects
kāmmāvacaracitta	sense-sphere consciousness
kāmuṇāda	clinging to sensual pleasures
kappas	aeons
karma	actions
karuṇā	compassion
kasiṇa	the device of meditation subjects
katattā kamma	reserve karma
kayākammaññata	wieldiness of mental body
kāyalahutā	lightness of mental body
kāyamudutā	malleability of mental body



kāyapāguññatā	proficiency of mental body
kāyapassaddhi	tranquillity of mental body
kāyaviññāṇa	body-consciousness
kāyujukatā	rectitude of mental body
khandha	aggregate
khandha parinibbāna	extinguishment of the aggregates
kiicca ghana	compactness of the functions
kilesa	defilements
kilesa parinibbāna	extinguishment of the defilements
kiriya	functional
kiriya citta	functional consciousness
kukkucca	worry or remorse
kusala	wholesome
kusala citta	wholesome consciousness

**L**

lakkhana	characteristic
lobha	greed
lobhamulacittani	consciousness rooted in greed
lokuttaracitta	supramundane consciousness

**M**

macchariya	avarice
magga	path
mahābhūta	great elements
mahā-kusala citta	wholesome sense-sphere consciousness
manasikāra	attention
māna	conceit
mano	mind or consciousness
maranāsanna vīthi	near-death cognitive process
maranānussati	recollecting of death
mettā	loving friendliness or loving-kindness
mettā bhāvanā	loving-kindness meditation

middha	torpor
moghavāra	futile course
moha	delusion
mohamulacittani	consciousness rooted in delusion
moditā	appreciative joy
muñcitukamyatā-ñāᅇa	knowledge of Desire for Deliverance

**N**

nāma	mind
nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāᅇa	knowledge of analysis of mind and matter
ñāᅇa	knowledge, insight
n'evasaññān āsaññayatana	base of neither-perception- nor-non-perception
nibbāna (nirvana)	deathless state
nibbidā	disenchantment
nibbidā-ñāᅇa	knowledge of disenchantment
nimitta	sign
nipphannarūpa	concretely produced matter
nirodha samāpatti	attainment of cessation
nīvaraᅇa	hindrances

**O**

ojā	nutritive essence
ottappa	fear of wrongdoing

**P**

paccaya	condition
paccaya-pariggaha-ñāna	knowledge of discerning causes and conditions
paccupaᅇᅇhāna	manifestation
padaᅇᅇhāna	proximate cause
pakiᅇᅇaka	occasionals

pañca-dvāravajjana	five-door adverting consciousness
paññā	insight, wisdom
paññā sikkhā	wisdom training
papanca	mental proliferation
paramatha sacca	ultimate truth
parikamma	preparation
parikamma nimitta	preparation sign
pāramī	perfection
parinibbāna (parinirvana)	final cessation
pariññeyya	that should be realized
paritta	protective
paṭṭhāna	law of Conditional Relations
pathaviḍhātu	earth-element
paṭibhāga nimitta	counterpart sign
paṭicca-samuppāda	dependent origination
paṭisandhicitta	rebirth consciousness
paṭisaṅkhā	reflective contemplation
paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa	knowledge of reflective contemplation
pavati	within lifetime
petas	hungry ghosts
phala	fruition
phala samāpatti	fruition attainment
phala samāpatti vīthi	fruition attainment cognitive process
phassa	contact
pīti	joy
puthujjana	worldlings

## R

rasa	taste
rūpa	matter
rūpabhūmi	fine-material existence
rūpa kalāpas	particle of matter
rūpakkhandha	aggregate of matter

rūparūpa	matter matter
rūpāyatana	visible object
ruppati	deformed
rūpāvacaracitta	fine-material-sphere consciousness

**S**

sabbacittasādhāraṇa	seven universals
sabbaññuta-ñāṇa	omniscient knowledge
sabhāva	intrinsic nature
sabhāvarūpa	matter possesses intrinsic nature
saddhā	faith
sakadāgāmi	once-returner
sakkāya-diṭṭhi	personality view
saṅkhāra	formations
saṅkhata dhamma	conditioned dharma
saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa	knowledge of equanimity towards formations
salakkhaṇarūpa	matter possesses three general characteristics
salāyatana	six sense bases
samādhi	concentration
samādhi sikkhā	concentration training
samatha	serenity meditation
samatha-bhāvanā-citta	serenity-meditation-consciousness
sammā ājīva	right livelihood
sammā diṭṭhi	right view
sammā kammanta	right action
sammāpatti	attainment
sammā saṅkappa	right thought
sammā samādhi	right concentration
sammasana	knowledge of comprehension
sammā sati	right mindfulness
sammā vācā	right speech

sammuti sacca	conventional truth
sampaṭicchana	receiving consciousness
samudayasacca	the noble truth of the origin of suffering
saṁsāra	cycle of birth and death
sandhāna	continuity of process
saṅkhāra	karmic formations
saṅkhārakkhandha	aggregate of mental formations
saṅkhārupekkhā	equanimity towards formations
saṅkhatadhamma	conditioned dharma
sañña	perception
saññākkhandha	aggregate of perception
saññā vipallāsa	perverted or distorted perception
santati-ghana	compactness of continuity
santīraṇa	investigating consciousness
sassata-diṭṭhi	view of eternalism
sati	mindfulness
sati-sampajañña	mindfulness and clear comprehension
saupadisesa	with the residue remaining
sīla	morality
sīlabbataparāmāsa	attachment to rites and rituals
sīla sikkhā	morality training
sīla visuddhi	purification of virtue
sobhanacetasika	beautiful mental factors
somanassa	joyful
sotāpanna	stream-enterer
sotāpatti magga vīthi	stream-entry path cognitive process
sotaviññana	ear-consciousness
suddha-manodvāra vīthi	bare mind-door cognitive process
sudha-vipassanā yānika	dry or pure insight vehicle
sukha	happiness
sukha-vedanā	pleasant feeling
suta-mayā-pañña	wisdom that comes from listening to the Dharma

sutta

discourse

**T**

tadārammaṇa

registering consciousness

tadārammaṇavāra

a course ending in registration

taṇhā

craving

tathāgata

the blessed one

tatramajjhataṭṭā

neutrality of mind

tāvatiṃsā

realm of the 33 gods

tejodhātu

fire-element

thīna

sloth

thīna-middha

sloth and torpor

ṭṭhiti

turning

tipiṭaka

three collections of Buddha's teachings

tusita

the delightful realm,  
one of the deva realms

**U**

uccheda diṭṭhi

view of annihilationism

udayabbaya

knowledge of rise and fall

uddhacca

restlessness

uddhacca-kukkucca

restlessness and remorse

uggaha nimitta

learning sign

upacāra samādhi

access concentration

upādāna

clinging

upapajavedanīyakamma

next-life effective karma

upekkhā

equanimity

upekkhā-vedanā

neutral feeling

uppāda

arising

utu niyāma

law of temperature

utuja-rūpa

temperature-born matter

utuja-rūpa kalāpa

temperature-born particles

**V**

vaṇṇa	color
vaya	dissolution
vayodhātu	wind-element
vedanā	feeling
vedanākkhandha	aggregate of feeling
vibhava-taṇhā	craving for non-existence
vicāra	sustained application of mind
vicikicchā	doubt
vijjā	knowledge
vinaya	code of discipline
viññāṇa	consciousness
viññāṇakkhandha	aggregate of consciousness
viññāṇacāyatana	base of infinite consciousness
vipāka	resultant
vipāka citta	resultant consciousness
vipassanā	insight meditation
vīriya	energy
visuddhi	pure
vitakka	initial application of mind
vīthi	cognitive process
vīthimutta	process-freed
vodanā	purification
votthapana	determining
votthapanavāra	course ending with determining

**U**

yoniso manasikāra	wise attention
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**NOTES**

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**NOTES**

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