The Buddhist Analysis of Mind

Y. Karunadasa

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The present work is a systematic exploration of consciousness and mental phenomena as presented in the early Pali discourses, the Abhidhamma texts, their commentaries and sub-commentaries. It rejects the notion of Self and argues that the perceived Self is constructed. It is the ignorance of conditioning nature which gives rise to the notion of Self. The book is structured into thirteen chapters, each dealing with different aspects of consciousness and mental phenomena. The author leads the readers to explore various consciousness and mental phenomena in different contexts as presented in the Pali literature, occasionally in comparison with other Buddhist traditions. The volume is a profound presentation of the Buddhist analysis of the mind without resorting to any metaphysics.

Y. Karunadasa, Ph.D. (London), Ph.D. Honoris Causa (Mahamakut), D.Litt. Honoris Causa (Kelaniya), is Professor Emeritus, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, and former Director of its Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies. He has held teaching positions in various universities around the world, including Visiting Professor at SOAS of the University of London, Distinguished Numata Chair Professor at the University of Calgary, Tung Lin Kok Yuen Visiting Professor at the University of Toronto, Visiting Professor at the University of Hong Kong and Visiting Professor at the Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong. Karunadasa has published extensively on early Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism and Abhidhamma. Among his works are *Theravada Abhidhamma: Its Enquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality* (2014), *The Buddhist Analysis of Matter* (2015) and *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice* (2017).

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The Buddhist Analysis of Mind

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Cover image: Buddha Painting in Islamabad Museum, Pakistan.
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Foreword

In late 2023, Professor Karunadasa's message arrived with the welcoming news that he had completed a draft of his latest work, *The Buddhist Analysis of Mind*. His request to publish with the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong, represented a natural continuation of a longstanding scholarly partnership. Our Centre, his academic home for many years as Visiting Professor and mentor to our faculty and students, has maintained the distinction of being the first to make his groundbreaking research accessible to the broader public.

The Centre has previously published his seminal works in Buddhist studies: *Early Buddhist Teachings: The Middle Position in Theory and Practice* (2017), *The Buddhist Analysis of Matter* (2015), and the first comprehensive work of its kind, *The Theravada Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality* (2014). Our Centre sponsors the publication of academic monographs in Buddhist Studies, with commitment to scholarly dissemination that extends beyond English-language publications, as evidenced by our sponsorship of Chinese translations-editions of both *Early Buddhist Teachings* and *The Theravada Abhidhamma*.

Upon reviewing *The Buddhist Analysis of Mind*, as a non-specialist, I discovered a work of exceptional scholarly merit—a systematic exploration of consciousness and mental phenomena as understood within the exegetical tradition of the Buddha's teachings in Pali. Given Professor Karunadasa's distinguished reputation and the manuscript's evident scholarly merit, we were delighted to move forward quickly with a publishing agreement in February 2024. Professor Karunadasa chose to work with our Centre because he shared our commitment to making important Buddhist scholarship accessible to the widest possible readership through our Open Access series.

The present online published version would not have been possible without the editorial care of the Centre's publication's team Dr Jnan Nanda Tanchangya and Mrs Christina Partsalaki (MPhil). They devoted over a year to the meticulous process of editorial refinement, ensuring both scholarly rigor and stylistic clarity. Their careful attention to content and presentation has made possible this critically reviewed first online edition.

It is with great pleasure and honour that I write this preface, which serves as a modest introduction to Professor Karunadassa's latest work and testament to the complexities and nuances of Buddhist thought and practice on the subject of mind from a morally solid and philosophically lucid Buddhist perspective.

Georgios Halkias
Director and Professor
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Preface

The work presented here is on the Buddhist analysis of mind, a subject, central and pivotal to the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism is an out-and-out psychology, an analysis of mind.

Buddhism is not a philosophy but a meta-philosophy, a philosophy that explains the very nature of philosophy. All philosophical speculations, theological and theosophical views are, from the Buddhist perspective, due to the notion of the self, a notion categorically rejected by the Buddha.

If Buddhism is not a philosophy, it is not a religion either. Religion has been defined in many ways. However, if we go by what is common to many religions, religion can be defined as the "belief in and reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe."[1] It is the response to a transcendental reality, voluntary subjection of oneself to God, or as the recognition of all our duties as divine commandments; as human beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute.

If we go by these definitions, none of them can fully explain Buddhism as a religion. As a matter of fact, Buddhism provides a definition of religion, if it could be defined as a definition of religion. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddhist book of ethical verses, we read:

> People driven by fear, go for refuge to many places,
> To hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines.
> This indeed is no refuge; this is not the refuge supreme.
> Not by resorting to such refuge is one released from all suffering.[2]

If Buddhism is not a philosophy, it is not a religion, either. The best way to define Buddhism is to define it as a psychology, an analysis of mind. As Buddhism says the notion of self is the one and only base for all materialist and spiritual speculations. Since Buddhism rejects the notion of the self, all philosophical speculations, theological and theosophical views fall asunder.

Buddhism does not endorse dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies, even if they are right. It is the root cause of the belief: this alone is true, all else is false.[3] It is this kind of mentality that provides a fertile ground for bigotry sand dogmatism. Its external manifestations, as we all know, are acts of fanaticism and militant piety, religious persecution and fundamentalism.

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1 *American Heritage Dictionary*.

2 Dhp 188, 189.

3 See *Caṅkī-sutta*. M ii 164.

From the Buddhist perspective, therefore, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies is very much more detrimental than our greedy attachment to material objects. If Buddhism does not encourage dogmatic attachment to views, it is because from the Buddhist point of view, a view is only a guide to action. The Buddha tells us that his teaching should be understood not as a goal unto itself, but as means to the realization of the goal. A view has only relative value, relative to the realization of the goal.

What actually matters for Buddhism is not the nature of the world per se, but the world as interpreted and constructed through the lens of our egocentric perspectives: our views and beliefs, our speculative theories and dogmatic assertions. What comes to an end when *nibbāna* is realized is not the nature of reality, but a wrong interpretation of the nature of reality.

When Vacchagotta, the itinerant philosopher, asked the Buddha: but has the Venerable Gotama a view of his own? The Buddha replied:

> The Tathāgata, O Vaccha, has given up all views. However, the Tathāgata has viewed thus: this is materiality, this is feeling, this is perception, these are mental formations, and this is consciousness. This is how they arise. This is how they cease.[4]

If views are fabricated and proclaimed, it is because they satisfy our compulsive cravings and desires. As long as the self view persists as our ideational framework, there is the ingression of the egocentric perspective. Then we see what we desire to see, what we want to see, not what is actually there.

The final conclusion thrust upon us is that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is not to have a view, but to view. To view means seeing clearly, without judging, editing, interpreting, and rationalizing. All forms of judging, editing, and interpreting and rationalizing involve grasping and clinging.

Y. Karunadasa
Colombo, Sri Lanka
February 2025

4 *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*. M i 486.

ABBREVATIONS

A	*Aṅguttara-nikāya*
AA	*Manorathapūraṇī* (*Aṅguttara-nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*)
ADS	*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (see CMA)
ADV	*Abhidharmadīpa*
ADVT	*Abhidhammattha-vibhāvinī-ṭīkā*
AKB	*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*
AKVy	*Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*
BJE	Buddha Jayanti Edition
CDB	The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi
CMA	*A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidharma*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi
D	*Dīgha-nikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada* (with verse number)
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*
Dhs-a	*Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*
Expositor	*The Expositor (Atthasālinī)*, trans. Maung Tin
It	*Itivuttaka*
JPTS	*Journal of the Pali Text Society*
Kvu	*Kathāvatthu*
LDB	*The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Maurice Walshe
M	*Majjhima-nikāya*
M-a	*Papañcasūdanī Majjhima-nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*
Mil	*Milindapañha*
MLDB	*The Middle length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi
Paṭis	*Paṭisambhidāmagga*
Paṭis-a	*Saddhammappakāsinī* (*Paṭisambhidāmagga Atthakatha*)
PTS	Pali Text Society
PTSD	*Pali-English Dictionary*, PTS
S	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*
Sn	*Sutta-nipāta* (with verse number)
Ud	*Udāna*
Vibh	*Vibhaṅga-ppakaraṇa*
Vibh-a	*Sammohavinodanī*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*
VismE	*The Path of Purification*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli
Vism-ṭ	*Visuddhimagga-ṭīkā*
Vy	*Sphuṭārthā Abhidharma-kośa-vyākhyā of Yaśomitra,* Ed. U. Wogihara

Introduction

The world is led by the mind; the world is activated by the mind.
Mind is the one thing that has all under its control.[1]

The work here presented is primarily based on early Buddhist discourses, the Abhidhamma treatises, and the post-canonical commentarial exegesis.

"The world is led by the mind; the world is activated by the mind."[2] This quotation demonstrates how Buddhism brings into focus the primacy and centrality of mind as the fundamental reality of human existence, the ever-changing sequence of thoughts, feelings and perceptions which comprise our conscious experience. What is emphasized, however, is not only a grasping aright of the nature of mind in bondage, but more importantly, the immense potentialities the mind possesses to realize higher cognitive capacities, as well as to elevate itself to the highest level of freedom. If bondage means to come under the control of one's own mind, freedom means to have a mind under one's own control. Both bondage and freedom have mind as their common locus. To free the mind from bondage, it is necessary to develop the mind; to develop the mind, it is necessary to know the mind. This is the rationale for Buddhism's preoccupation with psychology, and for the relevance of psychology to Buddhism as a religion.

There are three terms used in early Buddhist discourses and in the Abhidhamma treatises to mean what we understand by 'mind'. These are *citta, mano*, and *viññāṇa*. Very often they are used as near-synonyms, as overlapping and complementary. Thus, we have: 'this is *citta*', 'this is *mano*', and 'this is *viññāṇa*' and also what is called *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*. It is only by examining their contextual usage that we can understand their minor differences of nuance.

Viññāṇa seems to occur in an elementary sense to mean basic awareness. In the sentence, "depending on the eye and the visible, arises visual consciousness,"[3] the expression 'visual consciousness', seems to mean 'mere seeing'. This meaning of *viññāṇa* can also be seen when it occurs as 'consciousness-element' in a list together with five other elements, earth-element, water-element, fire-element, air-element and space-element. This list seems to have been intended to refer to the most basic factors of the world of experience, an idea confirmed by an exegetical gloss where it is described as 'the basic data of

1 *Cittena nīyati loko — cittena parikissati;*
cittassa ekadhammassa — sabbeva vasam anvagūti. S i 39.

2 *Cittena nīyati loko — cittena parikissati*. S i 39.

3 See *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta*. M i 59.

individual existence'.[4] The usage of *viññāṇa* in this elementary sense explains why, unlike *citta* and *mano*, it is never ethically qualified as wholesome or unwholesome. There is also no evidence to suggest that, in contrast to *citta* and *mano*, *viññāṇa* is something to be developed and cultivated. It is also in this sense that *viññāṇa* functions as one of the four nutriments that maintain the empiric individuality in its saṃsāric wayfaring. In the commentarial exegesis, the term used for both death-consciousness and rebirth-linking consciousness is *citta* (*cuti-citta, paṭisandhi-citta*).[5] The term *mano* occurs often to mean 'mind' when it functions as a sense-faculty. When used to connote a sense-faculty, *mano* is called either mind-base (*manāyatana*), or mind element (*mano-dhātu*). When the empiric individuality is analyzed into six internal and six external bases (*āyatana*), the sixth internal base is called mind-base (*manāyatana*). When the individual is analyzed into eighteen elements, the 'mind-element' (*mano-dhātu*) represents mind as a sense-faculty.

The term *citta* often occurs in a sense to mean consciousness in general. Sometimes it is used to mean consciousness in combination with its concomitant mental factors. It is in this twofold sense that *citta* occurs in the treatises of the Abhidhamma *piṭaka* as well. When it occurs in the first sense, the term is used in the singular. When it occurs in the second sense, the term is used either in the singular or in the plural. For there can be many kinds of consciousness in the second sense, depending on the mental factors with which it comes into combination. This explains why in the Buddhist discourses as well as in the Abhidhamma treatises, the term *citta* is found in singular as well as plural forms. In contrast to *citta, viññāṇa* and *mano*, as noted by the PTS dictionary,[6] do not occur in the Buddhist discourses in the plural form. When it comes to mental culture, *citta* is the term often used. It is *citta* that should be cultivated, developed, and elevated to its highest level of perfection.

The Buddhist analysis of mind, as we find it in the early Buddhist discourses, recognizes three basic principles. First is the 'dependent arising' of consciousness in the well-known expression: "apart from conditions, there is no arising of consciousness."[7] Consciousness is not a potentiality residing in the heart and becoming actualized on different occasions. Nor is it a static entity, without undergoing any change. Consciousness always springs up on a duality:

> In the case of eye-consciousness, for example, eye, the visual organ, which is impermanent, changing and becoming-other, and visible objects which are impermanent, changing, and becoming-other. Such is the transient, fugitive duality of (eye-cum visible objects), which

4 Cf. *Dhātunirdeśa*, AKB.

5 See CMA 228–229.

6 *Pali-English Dictionary*.

7 See *Upaya-sutta*. S iii 53.

> is impermanent, changing, and becoming-other. Eye-consciousness, too, is impermanent. For how could eye-consciousness arisen by depending on impermanent conditions, be permanent? The coincidence, concurrence, and confluence of the three factors, viz. the eye, the eye-object, and eye-consciousness, which is called sensory contact, and those other mental phenomena arising in consequence, are also impermanent.[8]

Just as the friction of two sticks produces fire, in the same way, consciousness springs up from the interaction of sense-organs with sense-objects. Depending on whether it springs up in respect of the eye, or the ear, or any other sense-organ, it is named accordingly.

From the Buddhist perspective, therefore, to have a consciousness means to be aware of an object. It is of course true that consciousness needs many factors for it to arise. Nonetheless, it is to the object that importance is given. Therefore, in the post-canonical Buddhist exegesis, consciousness came to be defined as 'that which grasps its object' (*ārammaṇika*). This definition is intended to refute the idea that consciousness can arise without an object (*nirālambanavāda*).[9]

Another basic principle of the Buddhist analysis of mind is that consciousness does not exist in complete isolation. It always exists in conjunction with the other four aggregates into which the individual being is analyzed. The Buddha says:

> Monks, though someone might say: 'apart from corporeality, apart from feeling, apart from perception, apart from volitional formations, I will make known the coming and going of consciousness, its passing away and rebirth, its growth, increase ad expansion — that is impossible.[10]

Although consciousness cannot be separated from the other four aggregates, nevertheless it can be made distinct from them. This is the reason that makes it possible to define and describe consciousness as well as the other four aggregates.

The third basic principle of the Buddhist analysis of mind is the reciprocal dependence of consciousness, on the one hand, and mentality-materiality (*nāma-rūpa*), on the other. 'Mentality' in 'mentality-materiality' denotes five mental factors, namely, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), sensory contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*).[11] These are the five basic non-rational mental factors that necessarily arise together with every type of consciousness. Such factors come within the aggregates of feeling,

8 *Pañcavaggiya-sutta*. S iii 67–68.

9 ADVT 5.

10 CDB 890.

11 *Vibhaṅga-sutta*. S ii 3–4.

perception, and mental formations. The idea behind this categorization is that as the knowing or awareness of an object, consciousness cannot arise as a solitary condition. It must be simultaneously accompanied at least by five mental factors that exercise more specialized tasks in the act of cognition. 'Materiality' in the compound 'mentality-materiality' denotes the four great elements of matter (*mahābhūta*), along with the matter that is dependent on them (*upāda-rūpa*). It refers to the organic matter, as for example, the five physical sense-faculties, that enter into the composition of a living being.

The three basic principles of Buddhist psychology, which we have discussed so far, combine to dispense with the notion of a mental substance. In lieu of these three principles, there is no-thing-in-itself beneath or behind the mental phenomena into which the mental continuum is analyzed. Strictly speaking, consciousness is neither that which cognizes (agent), nor that through which cognition takes place (instrument) but is only the process of cognizing an object. Consciousness is not an entity that exists, but an event that occurs, an event due to appropriate conditions. It is an activity, yet an activity without an actor behind it. The point being emphasized is that there is no conscious subject behind consciousness. Consciousness is in no way a self or an extension of a self-substance. Hence the Buddha says:

> It would be better, monks, for the uninstructed worldling to take as self this body composed of the four great elements of matter rather than the mind. For what reason, because this body composed of the four great elements is seen standing for one year, for two years, for three, four, five or ten years, for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, for a hundred years, or even longer. But that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night. Just as a monkey roaming through a forest, grabs hold of one branch, lets that go and grabs another, then lets that go and grabs still another, that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night.[12]

Mind and the threefold analysis of individual existence into aggregates (*khandha*), bases (*āyatana*), and elements (*dhātu*): the Buddhist analysis of individual existence into aggregates, bases, and elements, yields more material on the nature of mind. The five aggregates are corporeality (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). In the Abhidhamma, consciousness is called *citta*, to mean bare awareness, while feelings, perceptions, and mental formations are called *cetasika*, concomitants of consciousness. This division into *citta* and *cetasika* is not an Abhidhamma innovation. In the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* we read that, feelings, perceptions are mental factors (*cetasikā dhammā*) and, that they are conjoined with consciousness (*citta-paṭibaddhā*).[13] This shows

12 CDB 596.

13 *Saññā ca vedanā ca cetasikā ete dhammā citta-paṭibaddhā*…. M i 301.

that consciousness as the knowing, or awareness of an object, can never arise in its true separate condition. It always arises in immediate conjunction with mental factors, such as feeling, that perform more specialized tasks in the act of cognition.

Aggregate of feeling represents the affective dimension of our psychological experience. It has sensory contact as its immediate condition because sensory contact means the immediate descent of consciousness on the object.

There cannot be any cognitive act which is not affected by the object of cognition. The affective tone of feeling could be pleasant, painful, or neutral, depending on the response to the object of cognition. The third species of feeling indicates the line that divides the affective quality into pleasant and painful. This affective neutrality is not the same as equanimity, or balance of mind (*tatramajjhattatā*). The latter is not a variety of feeling. It is a higher intellectual state included in the aggregate of mental formations.

Feeling is a faculty (*indriya*) as well, that is, as a phenomenon exercising control over its associated phenomena. When analyzed as a faculty, the threefold feeling, pleasant, painful, and neutral, becomes fivefold. The pleasant feeling of the threefold division is here arranged into two as pleasure (*sukha*) and joy (*somanassa*). The first is bodily while the second, mental. Similarly, the painful feeling of the threefold division is arranged here into two as pain (*dukkha*) and displeasure (*domanassa*). The former is physical and the latter, mental. Feeling that is neither painful nor pleasant is as a faculty called neutrality (*upekkhā*).

Third is the aggregate of perception. Its connection with feeling is shown by the statement: what one feels that one perceives.[14] Perception means the recognizing of the object appearing at any of the sense-doors or at the mind-door. It recognizes what is blue as blue, what is yellow as yellow and so on. Perception is our ability to relate present sense stimuli to past experience and thereby recognizing the sense data. A commentarial gloss likens it to a carpenter's recognizing a piece of wood by the mark he had made on it, or to our recognizing a man by the sectarial mark on his forehead, which we have noted, and say he is so and so.[15] It may be noted here that the Pāli word for *saññā* means not only perception but sign, symbol, or mark as well.

As Nyanaponika Thera observes, the function assigned to perception, shows the vital role it plays in the arising of memory. Memory is not listed as a mental factor either in the Buddhist discourses or in the Abhidhamma treatises. This is perhaps because memory is a complex process and as such it cannot be assigned to a single mental factor. Remembering is connecting

14 *Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi*. M i 112.

15 Dhs 110.

with the past, and it is a function of cognition in general. However, among the many mental factors involved in a cognitive act it is perception (*saññā*) that plays the initial role. Therefore, perception (*saññā*) is cognition as well as recognition.[16]

Next are mental formations or volitional constructions (*saṅkhārā*) as the fourth aggregate. In contrast to the previous two aggregates, feeling and perception, volitional constructions stand for something more complex. *Saṅkhārā* occurs in a variety of contexts suggesting many connotations. Here we will be limiting ourselves to what it connotes as the fourth aggregate of individual existence. Volitional constructions represent the most dynamic and the constructive component of the human personality. Its standard definition takes the following form:

> They construct constructed material form as material form.
> They construct constructed feeling as feeling.
> They construct constructed perception as perception.
> They construct constructed volitional construction as volitional construction.
> They construct constructed consciousness as consciousness.
> They construct the constructed.
> Therefore, they are called volitional constructions.[17]

The above definition shows that although volitional constructions are one of the five aggregates, they construct not only other aggregates, but they construct themselves. What this definition clearly demonstrates is that, from the Buddhist perspective, what we call individual existence is a process of construction, a construction based on the threefold appropriation: this is mine, this I am, and this is my self. This is precisely why *nibbāna* is defined as de-construction (*visaṅkhāra*), a deconstruction due to the destruction of passion, aversion, and delusion.[18]

Consciousness, the fifth aggregate, is bare awareness. Bare awareness cannot arise in its true separate condition, without being simultaneously accompanied by mental factors. It arises in immediate conjunction with at least five mental factors, namely, feeling, perception, volition, sensory contact, and attention. When correlated to the five aggregates, the first two mental factors represent the two aggregates of feeling and perception, while the last three represent the aggregate of mental constructions.

Volition, contact, and attention are necessarily present in any cognitive act. Volition is the most dynamic mental factor, being the conative or motivating aspect of cognition. Its nature and intensity can vary depending on the feeling or affective mode in which the object is experienced. If the feeling is one of

16 Nyanaponika 2007: 129ff.

17 *Khajjanīya-sutta*. S iii 86.

18 CDB 915.

pleasure due to a pleasant object, then there will be the decision to possess that object. If the feeling is one of displeasure due to an unpleasant object, then there will be the decision to repel from that object. If it is due to the presence of a neutral object, the feeling is neither pleasant nor unpleasant; there will be some sort of indecision.

Contact means sensorial or mental impression. It is the correlation between the sense-faculty, sense-object, and the sensory awareness. Sometimes it is more elaborately defined as 'the coincidence, concurrence, and confluence' of the three factors.[19] Considered in relation to the three factors, whose correlation is sensory contact, sensory contact itself divides into six types as eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact. They are further distinguished into two as resistant contact (*paṭigha-samphassa*) and designation contact (*adhivacana-samphassa*). The term 'resistant' applies to the five physical sense-organs because they, so to say, collide with their objects, which are also physical. Resistant contact is so called because it arises with the fivefold physical sensory apparatus as its base. What is called 'designation-contact' is another expression for mind-contact. Why it is called 'designation-contact', there is no satisfactory explanation in the commentarial exegesis. If we go by the Sanskrit Buddhist exegesis, we can find a satisfactory explanation for the term. Here it is said that designation (*adhivacana*) is another expression for name: speech bases itself on names; it illuminates the meaning of names. Therefore, designation means name. Name is the object par excellence of contact associated with mind-consciousness. It is said, through visual consciousness one 'knows blue' (*nīlam vijānāti*), but one does not know 'it is blue'. Through mental consciousness one 'knows blue' (*nīlam vijānāti*) and one (also) knows 'it is blue' (*nīlam iti ca vijānāti*).[20]

According to another, but similar explanation, only mental consciousness is activated in relation to its objects or applies itself to its objects, through expression or speech. Therefore, mental consciousness is called 'designation-contact.'[21]

What both explanations show is the intimate association between language and mental consciousness. If mental consciousness recognizes blue as 'this is blue', this activity involves some kind of judgement and the participation of language, verbalization at a very subtle level in the act of recognizing the object. Both explanations suggest that language has no role to play in the five kinds of contact based on physical sense-organs.

The last factor of mentality is attention (*manasikāra*). In this instance, 'attention' means advertence to the object. Without this mental factor, no cognitive act can arise. Three conditions are necessary for any act of cognition

19 *Dvaya-sutta*. S iv 169.

20 AKB 144.

21 Ibid. 244.

to take place. The first is that the sense-faculty must be unimpaired, i.e., it must have the faculty of sight or hearing as the case may be. The second is that external objects must come within its range. Finally, there must be an appropriate act of attention (*tajjo samannāhāro*) to the object. Where any one of these conditions fails to operate, there will be no resulting cognition.[22]

A second analysis of individual existence is into the twelve sense-bases, six internal and six externals. The internal six are the six sense-faculties, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The six externals are the corresponding objective bases, the visible, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects. In this division, while the mind base (*manāyatana*) represents mind as a sense faculty, all its objective data is subsumed under the base of mind-objects (*dhammāyatana*). The three mental aggregates of feeling, perception, and mental formations also fall under the base of mind-objects. Since mind-base is internal and the base of mind-objects is external, as Stcherbatsky observes, the principle of externality of one element in relation to another is recognized in the mental sphere as well.[23] In this twelvefold division, while the mind-base (the mind-faculty) becomes the subjective part, such things as feeling, perception and so on are placed in the objective part (within the base of mind-objects). This Buddhist distinction between the internal and the external does not correspond to the modern distinction between the subjective and the objective. This situation is perhaps traceable to the Buddhist denial of a self-entity as the agent of experience.

The analysis into the twelve bases shows that what we call individual existence is a process of interaction between the internal sense-faculties and the external sense-objects.

The third analysis of individual existence is into eighteen elements (*dhatu*). It is an expansion of the analysis into twelve bases by the addition of six kinds of consciousness that arise from the contact between the sense-faculties and their objects. The six additional items are the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousness. In this analysis, consciousness as that which constitutes knowing, is represented by one element, i.e. the mind-element (*mano-dhatu*). The five kinds of consciousness based on the five physical sense-organs, refer to this same mind-element when it takes one of the five physical sense-organs as its physiological base. The sixth consciousness, which is mind-consciousness, is the consciousness having non-sensuous objects.

The relative position of the mind-element and the six kinds of consciousness shows that mind in its capacity as a sense-faculty performs two functions. One is its function as that which cognizes non-sensuous objects, i.e. as the

22 *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta*. M i 190.

23 Stcherbatsky 1923: 13.

sense-faculty sensitive to ideas. Second is its function as that which cognizes and integrates the separate experiences of the physical sense-faculties. While each separate sense is active in its own sphere, the mind is the resort of them all.[24]

One important idea we can elicit from the analysis into eighteen elements is that consciousness is neither a soul nor an extension of a soul substance. It is a mental phenomenon that comes into being as a result of certain conditions. There is no independent consciousness that exists in its own right.

24 *Mahāvedalla-sutta*. M i 298.

CHAPTER ONE

Analysis of Mind and the Denial of the Self-notion

The idea of the self can be subsumed under two main headings: the spiritualist metaphysical self and the annihilationist physical self. The first is based on the duality-principle, the duality between the self and the body, and the second, on the identity principle, the identity of the self and the body. The Buddhist idea of non-self is based on a denial of both versions. Buddhism does not admit either an abiding metaphysical self or a temporary physical self in the psychosomatic complex of the empiric individuality.

Some maintain that if the Buddha rejected the theory of the self, it was purely for pragmatic reasons, to provide a rational foundation for a selfless ethics. The Buddha's answer is that it is the very assumption of a self, both in its spiritual and materialist versions, that makes both possibilities impossible:

> Verily, if one holds the view that the self is identical with the body, in that case, there can be no holy life. If one holds the view that the self is one thing and the body another, in that case too, there can be no holy life. Avoiding both extremes the Perfect One teaches the doctrine that lies in the middle.[1]

If the self is identical with the physical body, then there is no possibility for the practice of the moral life. If the physical body is the self, then the physical body will completely determine the behavior of the mind. On the other hand, if the self is different from the physical body, then the need for the practice of moral life does not arise. For, the self always remains in pristine purity.

If Buddhism denies both versions of the self-notion, this means that the human personality is plastic and pliable and, therefore, wieldable, and amenable to change. It has the necessary wherewithal either to elevate itself to a higher level of moral perfection, or to descend down to the lowest levels of moral depravity. Strong individuality based on the self-notion is not the same as the indomitable strength of mind.

The characteristic of non-self is often presented together with two other characteristics, impermanence, and suffering. To perceive permanence in impermanence, satisfactoriness in un-satisfactoriness, and self-existence in non-self-existence is a perversion of perception, a perversion of thought, and a perversion of the ideological perspective.[2]

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1 *Avijjādipaccaya-sutta*. S ii 60-61.

2 *Anicce bhikkhave niccanti saññāvipallāso cittavipallāso diṭṭhivipallāso. Dukkhe bhikkhave*

As the first, logically but not chronologically, of the three characteristics of sentient existence, it is impermanence that provides the rational basis for the other two characteristics: what is impermanent is suffering; what is suffering is non-self. Thus, the concept of non-self is a necessary corollary of the fact of suffering.

The characteristic of non-self is sometimes directly derived from the verifiable characteristic of impermanence:

> If anyone regards the eye (i.e. seeing) as the self, that does not hold, for the arising and passing away of the eye is (clear from experience). With regard to that which arises and passes away, if anyone were to think 'myself is arising and passing away', (such a thought) would be contradicted by the person himself. Therefore, it does not hold to regard the eye as the self. Thus, the eye (or seeing) is (proved to be) non-self. The same goes for the other sense-faculties.[3]

Can feeling, for instance, be considered the self? If it could be so considered, then when a pleasant feeling gives place to an unpleasant feeling, one would have to admit that his self has changed — if it has not vanished completely. These two examples clearly demonstrate that it is from the verifiable premise of impermanence that the idea of non-self is derived.

Yet another aspect of what non-self means can be elicited from a debate between the Buddha and Saccaka on the idea of non-self. Saccaka argues on the premise that just as any kind of seed or vegetable grows and comes to maturity depending on the earth, whatever act a person does, whether it is good or bad, depends entirely on the five aggregates. He concludes, therefore, that the five aggregates constitute an individual's self.

In response to this, the Buddha says:

> when you assert that the five aggregates constitute your self, have you power over them, have you control over them, so that you can say: 'let my five aggregates be thus, let my five aggregates be not thus?

Saccaka fails to give a satisfactory answer and admits that he was sadly mistaken in this matter.[4]

We find this same idea expressed in a number of other discourses in a slightly different form:

> If, for instance, the physical body could be considered as my self, then this physical body would not be subject to affliction; one should

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sukhanti saññāvipallāso cittavipallāso diṭṭhivipallāso. Anattani bhikkhave attāti saññāvipallāso cittavipallāso diṭṭhivipallāso. Asubhe bhikkhave subhanti saññāvipallāso cittavipallāso diṭṭhivipallāso. A ii 52.

3 *Chachakka-sutta*. M iii 282.

4 *Cūḷasaccaka-sutta*. M i 237.

> be able to say (with practical results): 'Let my physical body be like this; let not my physical body be like that'. Because the physical body is non-self, therefore it is subject to infliction.[5]

If anything could be called my own self, then I should have full control over it, so that it behaves in the way I want it to behave. If something is really my own, I should be able to exercise mastery, full sovereignty over it. Otherwise, how can I call it my own? Since we do not have full control over our possessions, when something adverse happens to them, it is we who come to grief. So, it is our possessions that really possess us.

In a commentarial gloss, 'absence of control' is defined as 'absence of own-way' or 'absence of own-power' (*avasivattita*). Among phenomena that depend on impermanent conditions, none can exercise their own-way, their own-power.

Where the self-notion originates

The whole world of experience, as Buddhism understands, is comprised within the five aggregates of grasping. They are the totality of our experience. Therefore, if there were to be a self-notion, it should originate only on the basis of these five aggregates, taken selectively or collectively. If we assume materiality to be the self, such an assumption could manifest in four ways: (1) materiality is the same as the self, (2) the self possesses materiality, (3) materiality is within the self, or (4) the self is in materiality. This fourfold manifestation of the self-notion takes the following form:

> How does he see materiality as self?
> Just as if a man saw a lighted lamp's flame and colour as identical thus, 'What the flame is, that the colour is; what the colour is that the flame is'.
>
> How does he see self as possessed of materiality?
> Just as if there were a tree possessed of shade such that a man might say, 'This is the tree, this is the shade; the tree is one, the shadow another; but this tree is possessed of this shade in virtue of this shade.'
>
> How does he see materiality in self?
> Just as if there were a scented flower such that a man might say, 'this is the flower, this is the scent; the flower is one, the scent another; but the scent is in this flower.'
>
> How does he see self in materiality?
> Just as if a gem were placed in a casket; the gem is one, the casket another; but this gem is in the casket'.[6]

The same goes for the other four aggregates. Thus, there are in all twenty possible relations between the five aggregates and the hypothetical self. This is how Buddhism explains the origin of the belief in a self.

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5 *Pañcavaggiya-sutta*. S iii 66.

6 Paṭis i 144-145. See also Ñāṇamoli 2008: 107–108.

If each aggregate is not a self, can their combination provide a collective basis for the self-notion? Here we need to remember that although Buddhism analyses the living being into several aggregates, it does not say that they just lump together to form the individual. The individual is the sum total of the five aggregates, when they are structurally organized according to the principle of dependent arising. It is dependent arising that ensures causal continuity and interdependent functioning. The individual is the aggregation (*saṅgaha*), collocation (*sannipāta*), and coming together (*samavāya*) of the five aggregates.[7]

What Buddhism denies is not the concept of person (*puggala*), but a self-subsisting entity within the person. The person is not an entity distinct from the sum total of the properly organized five aggregates, nor a substance enduring in time, nor an agent within the five aggregates. The person is the sum total of the five aggregates combined according to the principles of 'dependent arising'.

Non-self from another perspective

The idea of non-self comes into focus from another perspective, from the Buddhist teaching on nutriment. "All living beings," the Buddha says, "subsist on food" (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*). By food is meant not only what we eat and drink for the sustenance of our physical body, called morsel-made-food (*kabaḷiṅkārā-āhāra*), but three other kinds, sensory contact (*phassa),* mental volition (*mano sañcetanā),* and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).[8] As to sensory contact, there are six kinds: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact. It is through these six sensory contacts that our six sense faculties partake of food. What is visible is food for the eye, what is audible is food for the ear, and so on. If not for this kind of food, our sensory apparatus will suffer starvation, and not function at all. The third kind of food, mental volition, is the conative or motivating aspect. It is the most dynamic, indeed, the will to live. The fourth kind is consciousness, to be understood in the context of the saṃsāric process, the cycle of births and deaths. It is mainly this factor that functions as food/nutriment for the saṃsāric dimension of individual existence.[9]

Individual existence thus turns out to be a process of nutriment, a process of alimentation. It is kept going by four kinds of food. If there were a static, unchanging entity called self, it would not be necessary to keep it going by four kinds of food. It is like a burning fire, a dynamic process with no static entity. A fire cannot go on burning without being supplied by fuel.

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7 *Mahāhatthipadoma-sutta*. M i 191.

8 *Saṅgīti-sutta*. D iii 33.

9 *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha-sutta*. M i 91.

How the self-notion Emerges

As the Buddha says, the notion of the self does not occur to a "young tender infant, lying prone on its back. Such an infant has only a latent tendency to the self view."[10]

The emergence of the self view can, however, be traced to the cognitive process, the process through which we cognize sense-objects. In every cognitive act, consisting of a series of cognitive events, the latent tendency for the ego-consciousness awakens and gradually solidifies, eventually becoming fully crystallized at the final stage called conceptual proliferations (*papañca*). When the ego-consciousness arises, it cannot exist in a vacuum. It needs ontological support; it needs concrete form and content. In this regard, the unenlightened person identifies the ego-consciousness with one or more of the five aggregates into which individual existence is resolved. It takes the following forms: this is mine (*etaṁ mama*), this I am (*eso'ham asmi*), and this is my self (*eso me attā*). The first is due to craving (*taṇhā*), the second, to conceit (*māna*), and the third, to view (*diṭṭhi*). Craving, conceit, and view are three different aspects of the ego-consciousness.[11]

In this process of identification, 'this I am' is 'I conceit' (*asmimāna*), and 'this is my self' is to be understood as 'the self-view' (*attavāda*).

Why the self-notion persists

The self-view has a purely psychological origin. However, it can be buttressed and perpetuated by many other factors. Among them is our deep-seated craving that provides an emotional attachment to the belief in a permanent self:

> Here someone entertains this view: 'this is self, this is the world; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, I shall endure as long as eternity'. Then he hears a Tathāgata or a Tathāgata's disciple teaching the True Idea for the elimination of all standpoints for views, all decisions (about my self), insistencies, and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishment of all essentials (of existence: *upādhi*), for the exhaustion of craving, for fading out, cessation, extinction. He thinks thus: 'so I shall be annihilated; so I shall be lost! So I shall be no more'. Then he sorrows and laments, beating his breast, he weeps and becomes distraught.[12]

Two kinds of anguish (*paritasana*) are distinguished by the Buddha. One is anguish due to something external, as for example, when we do not have the tangible material objects that we want to have. The other anguish is more subtle and hidden. It is due to the absence of something within (*ajjhattam*

10 *Mahāmālukya-sutta*. M i 433.

11 *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*. M i 108. See also Ñāṇananda 1997: 11.

12 Op. cit. Ñāṇamoli 1956: 90–91.

asati). It is the anguish that a person who believes in a self experiences when he is told that there is no such thing. For the idea of an abiding self gives a person a sense of identity, security, and certainty. When he hears the true teaching that there is no self, he comes to grief, experiencing an inner vacuum, a sense of complete loss.[13]

Non-self and Emptiness

Both non-self and dependent arising, when taken together, show how early Buddhism understands the notion of emptiness. When Ānanda asked the Buddha: "Venerable Sir, it is said empty is the world, empty is the world. In what way, Venerable Sir, it is said 'empty' is the world?" The Buddha said in reply: "It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and what belongs to the self that it is said 'empty is the world'."[14] As the Buddha's reply shows, emptiness is not a separate characteristic. It is another expression for non-self.

Therefore, from the early Buddhist perspective, we can restate the saying, all things are non-self as all things are empty (*sabbe dhammā anattā*). All things (*sabbe dhammā*) embrace not only the conditioned (*saṅkhata*) but the unconditioned *nibbāna* as well. Both the world of sensory experience and the unconditioned reality are empty. This means that the characteristic of non-self or emptiness is more universal than even impermanence. So thorough is Buddhism's rejection of substantialism.

The putative over-self

We need to examine here the issue of the over-self. Is there a self that transcends the five aggregates, taken selectively or collectively? The question has no relevance. Buddhism explains the totality of phenomenal existence, and emancipation from it, in such a way that it rules out the very possibility of raising the question. However, the question is raised particularly by modern scholars with a Vedantic orientation and also by those who profess a perennial philosophy based on the supposed transcendental unity of all religions. In their view, when the Buddha says that the five aggregates are not our self, it means that none of them can be identified as our true self. The true self is besides the five aggregates, and could be discovered only by transcending the false, empirical self. If the false self, which is thus transcended, is impermanent, subject to suffering, and marked by non-substantiality, the true self has the opposite three characteristics, permanence (*nicca*), happiness (*sukha*) and the fact of being the true self (*atta*). If one suffers, so runs the argument, it is because of his estrangement from his true self. Therefore, attainment of *nibbāna* means a positive return of the self to itself.

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13 *Avijjādipaccya-sutta*. S ii 60.

14 *Suñña-sutta.* S iv 54.

One canonical passage often cited by those who speak of the true self is where the itinerant philosopher, Vacchagotta asks the Buddha whether the self exists or not. In each case the Buddha remains silent. This silence on the part of the Buddha has been interpreted in two ways. One is that it was because the Buddha did not want to shock a weak-minded hearer by saying there is no self. The other is that the logical conclusion from this would be that something is, though it is not the empirical self.[15]

The correct position can be seen from the same discourse when the Buddha told Ānanda as to why he decided to remain silent:

> If Ānanda, when Vacchagotta asked, 'is there a self' I had said, 'there is a self', then I should have been one of those who hold the doctrine of eternalism. But if I had replied 'there is no self', then I would have been one of those who hold the doctrine of annihilation. And if, when Vacchagotta asked 'is there a self', I had replied, 'there is a self', would it have been in accordance with the knowledge that all things are without the self.
>
> No, Lord.
>
> If I had said, 'there is no self', the bewildered Vacchagotta would have become still more bewildered, thinking, "then did my 'self' exist and now it does not exist any more."[16]

The only conclusion that we can draw from this is that Buddhism does not subscribe to the theory of self-recognized both in the eternalist and the annihilationist ideologies, not that the Buddha believed in a self.

What is most intriguing is that some scholars who quote this dialogue between the Buddha and Vacchagotta, either by design or by accident, bypass the Buddha's own explanation to Ānanda as to why he remained silent when Vacchagotta raised the question whether the self exists or not.

If the theory of the over-self is valid, it raises the question why the Buddha was silent on this matter. The teaching of the Buddha is not an esoteric doctrine confined to a select few. The Buddha himself says that he does not have the closed fist of the teacher (*ācariya-muṭṭhi*).[17] The theory of the over-self raises the equally important question why any of the Schools of Buddhist thought, belonging to the three traditions of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna have not arrived at such a conclusion. It leads to the most improbable situation that they all misunderstood the original teaching of the Buddha.

It is also instructive to note here that in the history of Buddhist thought, there has never been a School of Buddhist thought that has openly acknowledged a theory of the self. If there was one doctrine which every school was

15 Radhakrishnan 1927: 676.

16 *Ānanda-sutta*. S iv 400.

17 *Gilāna-sutta*. S vi 153.

committed to defend, it was the doctrine of non-self. Every Buddhist school was very sensitive to the charge of being criticized as upholding some sort of self-theory. It is true that some Buddhist schools may have developed certain theories which amounted to a veiled recognition of the self-theory. For instance, the Vātsīputrīyas admitted a sort of quasi-permanent self, neither identical nor different from the mental states. However, the Vātsīputrīyas themselves vehemently denied that their theory was some kind of self-theory in disguise. Despite their protests and denials, they nonetheless came to be rather sarcastically referred to by other Buddhists as heretics within our midst (*antascara-tīrthika*), outsiders masquerading as insiders.[18]

Buddhism recognizes different means of knowledge and different levels of knowledge. Besides sensory knowledge indicated by cognitive terms as bare awareness (*viññāṇa*), sensory perception (*saññā*), Buddhism refers to a higher non-sensuous knowledge, indicated by higher knowledge (*abhiññā*), comprehensive knowledge (*pariññā*), wisdom (*paññā*), and gnosis (*anna*). As to means of knowledge, Buddhism recognizes not only sensory perception and inductive inference but also extra-sensory perception, which enables one to cognize things that do not come within the ken of ordinary knowledge. Although Buddhism recognizes different means and levels of knowledge, it is not claimed that a permanent over-self (the true self) transcending the empirical self (the false self) becomes an object of such knowledge. If anything becomes the object of higher knowledge, it is the five aggregates of grasping (the empiric individuality), and not an elusive self that transcends them. One theme that we find often in the Buddhist discourses is that it is the five aggregates of grasping that become the object of higher knowledge.[19]

The Buddhist teaching on *jhāna* recognizes an experience gained through the higher stages of the mind's concentration and unification. The question that arises here is whether one who attains *jhāna* gets a glimpse of his true self, hidden to him in normal times. Can *jhāna* experience be interpreted as communion or absorption with a metaphysical reality? As Venerable Nyanaponika observes:

> A fertile soil for the origin and persistence of beliefs and ideas about a self, soul, God or any other form of an absolute entity is *misinterpreted meditative experience* occurring in devotional rapture or mystical trance. Such experience is generally interpreted by the mystic or theologian as revelation of a God, or union with some divine principle, or the manifestation of our true and eternal self.[20]

Buddhism does not interpret jhānic experience in a mystical or in a metaphysical sense. This is shown in the *Anupada-sutta* where Sāriputta analyses its content. Here the content of each *jhāna* is fully itemized, without leaving

18 See Priestley 1999: 80ff. Cf. *Poṭṭhapāda-sutta* (D i 178ff).

19 *Surāda-sutta*. S iii 81.

20 Nyanaponika 2007: 11.

any residue for mystical interpretation. What is significant is the observation made that the mental factors of each *jhāna* are said to arise in full awareness of the meditator: He is fully aware of their arising, their persistence, and their passing away. Then he comes to the conclusion that these mental factors, having not been, come to be, and having been, they pass away. It is further observed that, since Sāriputta fully comprehends the constituents of jhanic experience, he does not get attracted by them nor does he get repelled by them, nor does he get attached to them, or infatuated by them. Without getting overwhelmed by them he thus comes to the conclusion that there is an emancipation which is higher than the jhanic experience (*atthi uttari nissaraṇa'nti pajānāti*).[21]

This account of jhānic experience establishes three basic facts. One is that its content can be fully analyzed without leaving any residue. The second is that its constituents arise and vanish in full knowledge of the meditator. The third is the fact that it does not in itself constitute final emancipation. According to Buddhism, the jhānic experience too is impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and devoid of a self (*anattā*), conditioned (*saṅkhata*), and dependently arisen (*paṭicca samuppanna*). In point of fact, Buddhism seems to be aware of the possibility of misinterpreting jhānic experience on the basis of theological or metaphysical theories. This seems to be the reason why the meditator is advised to review the content of jhānic experience in the light of the three marks of phenomenal existence, as impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and as devoid of a self-subsisting entity (*anattā*).[22]

Another important aspect that we need to consider is the nibbānic experience. Does the nibbānic experience mean absorption with the transcendental over-self? For this purpose, it is sufficient to refer here to the position of the Tathāgata, the one who has realized *nibbāna* in relation to the five aggregates (*khandhā*). In this connection, it is maintained that the Tathāgata cannot be comprehended either with reference to the five aggregates or without reference to them. The first shows that the Tathāgata does not identify himself with any of the aggregates. The second shows that he does not identify himself with anything outside the five aggregates, i. e., something transcending them, as for example, the over-self. Both mean that the Tathāgata is free from all forms of self-identification.[23]

If there is a doctrine unique to Buddhism, it is the doctrine of non-self. From the very beginning Buddhism was aware that it was not shared by any other religious or philosophical system. This is shown in the Shorter Discourse on the Lion's Roar (*Cūlasīhanāda-sutta*).[24] It refers to four kinds of clinging:

21 *Anupada-sutta*. M iii 25–29.

22 Nyanaponika 1994: 295.

23 See Chapter Twelve on "Psychology of the Nibbānic Experience".

24 *Cūlasīhanāda-sutta*. M i 64–67.

clinging to sense pleasures (*kāma-upādāna*), clinging to speculative views on the nature of the self and the world (*diṭṭhi-upādāna*), clinging to rites and ascetic practices as a means to salvation (*sīlabbata-upādāna*), and clinging to a doctrine of self (*attavāda-upādāna*), that is, to a view of a truly existent self.

The discourse goes on to say there could be other religious teachers who would recognize some of the four kinds of clinging, and that at best they might the overcoming of the first three forms of clinging. What they cannot teach is the last type of clinging, which is the subtlest and the most elusive. As clearly articulated here, the doctrine of non-self is the unique discovery of the Buddha and the crucial doctrine that separates his own teaching from all other religious and philosophical systems. As Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli says, the title given to this discourse, 'Shorter Discourse on the Lion's Roar', is clearly intended to show that the Buddha's proclamation of the non-self-doctrine is "bold and thunderous, as a veritable lion's roar in the spiritual domain."[25]

When it comes to other Buddhist teachings, teachings on impermanence, suffering, *kamma*, re-becoming, causality, and so forth, we find Buddhism making reference to parallel teachings on the part of other religious teachers. However, when it comes to the doctrine of non-self, we do not find similar references to parallel doctrines. This clearly shows that the doctrine of non-self was not shared, in any form, by other religious teachers during the time of the Buddha.

That the doctrine of non-self is the most crucial that separates Buddhism from all other religious teachers is recognized in the subsequent Schools of Buddhist thought as well. Ācarya Yaśomitra, a celebrity of the Sautrāntika School, categorically asserts that in the whole world there is no other teacher who proclaims a doctrine of non-self.[26] Ācarya Buddhaghosa, the Theravāda commentator says that the characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*) and suffering (*dukkha*) are known whether Buddhas arise or not; but that of non-self is not known unless there is a Buddha; for the knowledge of it is the province of none but a Buddha. The Buddha, in some instances, shows no-selfness through impermanence, in some through suffering, and in some through both. Why is that? While impermanence and suffering are both evident, non-self is not evident and appears impenetrable, hard to illustrate, and hard to describe.[27]

If there is a doctrine commonly accepted by all Schools of Buddhist thought, it is the doctrine of non-self. If there is a doctrine on the basis of which we can speak of the transcendental unity of Buddhism, it is none other than the doctrine of non-self. If there is a doctrine which while uniting all Buddhist

25 Ñāṇamoli 1993: 7.

26 Vy 697.

27 Vibh-a 49–50.

Schools, separates Buddhism from all other religions and philosophies, it is, again, the doctrine of non-self. Finally, if there is a doctrine on the basis of which Buddhism explains the psychological genesis of all speculative theories, it is also the Buddhist doctrine of non-self. It is also through the doctrine of non-self that Buddhism sets itself aloof from the two perennial world-views of spiritual eternalism (*Sassatavāda*) and materialist annihilationism (*Ucchedavāda*). It is also the Buddhist doctrine of non-self that provided a new dimension to the concept of human personality and laid the foundation for a psychology without the psyche, if by psyche is understood a self-subsisting entity within the recesses of our mind. As Conze observes, the specific contribution of Buddhism to religious thought lies in its insistence on the doctrine of non-self.[28]

Buddhism's contributions to psychology and ethics have all flawed from the doctrine of non-self. If Buddhism shows why the idea of a self-entity is a wrong assumption, Buddhist psychology shows how it comes to be; if Buddhist ethics show how it can be got rid of, Buddhism's highest goal, which is *nibbāna*, shows the final state where it is completely eliminated.

28 Conze 2001: 18.

CHAPTER TWO

Analysis of Mind in the Context of the *Dhamma* Theory

The *dhamma* theory of the Abhidhamma is based on the principle that all the phenomena of empirical existence are finally reducible to elementary constituents, the ultimate realities behind manifest phenomena. These are introduced as *dhamma*s. Whatever that do not come under *dhamma* are called *paññatti*, mental constructions, with no corresponding objective reality. One descriptive term for *dhamma* is *paramattha* (ultimate), because of their objective existence and their cognizability in an ultimate sense. As to the causality of the *dhamma*s, there are three postulates. The first is that no *dhamma* arises fortuitously. The second is that no *dhamma* can arise from a single cause. The third is no *dhamma* can arise as a single effect. Their rejection shows that a multiplicity of *dhamma*s brings about a multiplicity of other *dhamma*s.

One clear implication is that *dhamma*s invariably arise as clusters. This is true of both mental and material *dhamma*s. Therefore, when consciousness arises, together with it arise at least seven mental factors.

The Abhidhamma analysis of mind begins by analyzing the continuous stream of consciousness into a number of cognitive acts. Each cognitive act is, in turn, divided into two component parts. One is bare consciousness, called *citta*, and the other a constellation of mental factors, called *cetasika*s. Consciousness as the knowing, or awareness of an object is counted as one. The mental factors that function as necessary concomitants of consciousness are fifty-two in number. Their relative position in relation to the twelve bases of consciousness is as follows. While consciousness corresponds to the mind-base (*manāyatana*), the mental factors come under the sphere of mental objects (*dhammāyatana*). This shows that the mental factors are directly apprehended by consciousness without the intermediate agency of any of the physical senses.

In the *dhātu* (element) analysis, consciousness (*citta*) is represented by seven items, namely mind (*mano*) and the six kinds of consciousness based on the five physical sense organs and the mind. Among them, the first is the mental organ as bare consciousness. The next five refer to this same mind (*mano*) when based on the five physical sense organs, namely, eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, and body consciousness. The sixth is mind consciousness, consciousness having non-sensuous objects. This shows that mind in its capacity as a cognitive faculty

performs two functions. The first is its function as that which cognizes non-sensuous objects, i.e. as the sense organ sensitive to ideas. The second is its function as the sensus communes, i.e. as that which organizes and integrates the individual experiences of the physical sense organs. We find this two-fold function recognized in the earlier scriptures as well, when they say that while each separate sense is active in its own sphere, mind is the resort of them all.

One important idea that can be elicited from the analysis into eighteen elements is that consciousness is neither a soul nor an extension of a soul substance. It is a mental phenomenon that comes into being as a result of certain conditions. There is no independent consciousness which exists in its own right. The distinction between consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*) as separate psychic events is very subtle. Just as it is not possible to separate off the different flavours in a syrup or soup and say here is sourness and here the saltiness and here the sweetness, even so both consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*) blend together harmoniously. This is true of a series of such psychic moments as well.

Their relationship is, therefore, described as one of con-yoked-ness, implying the following characteristics: concomitance, co-nascence, and con-joined-ness. Consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*) arise together, run together, cease together, exhibiting a harmonious unity. As it is said in the *Kathāvatthu* (ii 337), there are four characteristics common to consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*): simultaneous origination, simultaneous cessation, having a common object of attention. The fourth is that they have a common physical base.

Sometimes the relationship between consciousness (*citta)* and mental factors (*cetasika*) is explained under eight aspects: simultaneous arising, simultaneous cessation, having the same object, having the same physical base, concomitance, co-nascence, con-yoked-ness, and simultaneous occurrence.[1]

Both consciousness and mental factors show how a multiplicity of mental states combines to produce a single unit of cognition. An instance of cognition is neither a single isolated phenomenon nor a substantial unity. It is a complex of multiple mental states, each representing a separate function, and all combining toward the cognition of the object. Their internal combination is not based on the substance and quality distinction. Consciousness is not some kind of mental substance in which the mental factors inhere as its qualities. As the basic factors of psychological experience, they are coordinate. They are neither derivable from one another, nor reducible to a common ground. Their relationship depends entirely on the principles of conditionality.

1 Bodhi 2003: 76f.

Cognitive acts, unlike material clusters, the minimal units of matter (*rūpakalāpa*) do not arise in juxtaposition. They necessarily arise in linear sequence. There is only temporal sequence, but not spatial concomitance. In the Buddhist exegesis, matter is defined as that which is extended in three-dimensional space.[2] The same is not true of mind. Mental states have no spatial location of genesis, although it is possible to speak of physical sense organs and their objects as their places of arising. At a given moment there can be only one cognitive act.

2 Idid.

CHAPTER THREE

Consciousness

In the Abhidhamma analysis of mind we find consciousness defined in three different ways: the first is by way of agent (*kattu-sādhana*): "consciousness is that which cognizes an object." It is of course true that apart from the object, there are other conditions, such as immediate contiguity (*samanantara*) and support (*nissaya*) necessary for the genesis of consciousness. This is because even if they are present consciousness cannot arise without the object-condition. The prominence given to the object is shown by the definition of consciousness as 'that which grasps the object'. It is intended to refute the wrong idea that consciousness can arise without the object (*nir-ālambanavāda*).[1]

The second definition is by way of instrument: consciousness is that through which the concomitant mental factors cognize the object. Here consciousness becomes the instrument, while the mental factors become the agent. The third is by way of activity: consciousness is the mere act of cognizing the object. Only the third definition is valid, because consciousness is neither that which cognizes (agent), nor that through which cognition takes place (instrument). It is only the process of cognizing an object. Consciousness is not an entity but an activity, an activity without an actor behind it. The point emphasized is that there is no conscious subject behind consciousness. The two definitions by way of agent and instrument are only provisional devices.[2]

Another defining device is to specify the following: (a) the characteristic that sets it apart from other existents, (b) its function, the task it performs, (c) its manifestation, the way it presents itself within experience, and (d) its proximate cause, that is, the condition on which it depends. In the case of consciousness, its characteristic is the cognizing of an object. Its function is to serve as a forerunner of the mental factors. Its manifestation is as a continuity of dependently arising process. Its proximate cause is mental factors and material phenomena without which consciousness cannot arise as a solitary phenomenon.

The physical bases of consciousness

The six faculties are called doors (*dvāra*) as they serve as channels through which consciousness and mental factors gain access to the objects. However, in one important respect the first five differ from the sixth, the mind. While the first five are the physical bases of the five kinds of consciousness named

1 ADVT 4.

2 Vism-ṭ 462.

after them, obviously the mind cannot function as the physical base of the consciousness named after it. This means that door is not the same as base (*vatthu*). A door is the avenue through which consciousness and mental factors gain access to the object, whereas a base is the physical support for the occurrence of consciousness and its mental factors. If the mind too has a physical seat, what exactly is the relationship between the two? Since Buddhism gives a preeminent place to mind over matter, this is a delicate question to be solved. If mind is assigned a physical base, there is the possibility of matter determining the mind.

Within the Abhidhamma tradition, we find two different solutions to the problem. The Sarvāstivādins dispensed with the idea of a physical seat of mental activity. In their view, the mental organ is not a separate entity. It is a name given to the consciousness that has ceased immediately before the emergence of the present consciousness. Here we have a situation where the immediately preceding consciousness functions as a base for the immediately succeeding consciousness.[3]

In the Theravāda we find a different situation. The base of mind and mind consciousness are not mental but physical. In the *Paṭṭhāna*, the Abhidhamma treatise on conditional relations, we read:

> That materiality based on which the mind element and mind-consciousness element occur that materiality is a condition by way of base for the mind element and the mind-conscious element and the mental phenomena associated with them.[4]

In this quotation the physical base of mind and mind-consciousness is not specified. It is alluded to in a circuitous way: "whatever materiality on which mental activity depends." The term, as CAF. Rhys Davids observes, is 'guarded'.[5] However, we cannot agree with her when she further observes that 'the evasion is quite marked'. What we find here is not evasion but caution, a case of leaving the matter open. One possibility is that the physical seat of mental activity was complex, and therefore its location is not limited to a particular part of the physical body.

We find a similar theory attributed to the Mahāsaṅghikas:

> consciousness penetrates the entire physical body, and depending on its object and support, it can contract or expand. The subtle consciousness resides in the entire body, which is its support.[6]

3 AKB 22.

4 *Paṭṭhāna* i 2ff.

5 Davids 1914: 71.

6 Bareau 2005: 64.

In the commentarial exegesis we find a different situation. What the *Paṭṭhāna* has left unspecified the commentaries have identified as the heart-base (*hadaya-vatthu*):

> The heart-base has the characteristic of being the (material) support for the mind element and for the mind-consciousness element. Its function is to subserve them. It is manifested as carrying of them. It is to be found in dependence on the blood … inside the heart. It is assisted by the primaries (earthness, waterness, fireness, and airness) with their functions of upholding, and so on; it is consolidated by temperature, consciousness, and nutriment; it is maintained by life (faculty); and it serves as physical base for the mind element and mind-consciousness element, and for the states associated with them.[7]

The heart-base is a pre-nascence condition for the mind consciousness and its mental factors. A pre-nascence condition arises first and becomes a condition to something else that has arisen earlier. This is based on the view that the lifespan of matter is longer than that of mind.

The commentators' interpretation of the *Paṭṭhāna*'s allusion to the physical base of mind and mind-consciousness is an answer to a question left unanswered. As SZ Aung observes, had the *Paṭṭhāna* regarded the heart to be the seat of mental activity, it would have certainly mentioned it so, without alluding to it in such a guarded and cautious manner.[8] In the commentaries the heart-base is not elevated to the level of an *indriya*. An *indriya* is one that exercises a dominating influence on what is associated with it. If the eye is called an *indriya* (*cakkhundriya*), it is because its relative strength or weakness influences the consciousness named after it. If the heart-base is not an *indriya*, this means that mental activities are not controlled by it. It is the mind that depends on the heart-base that is elevated to the level of an *indriya* (*manindriya*). In this way the pre-eminence of the mind is maintained although it rests on a physical base. An example given is the boatman and his boat. The boatman has the boat as his physical support. However, it is the boatman who controls the boat. The mind is like the boatman and the boat, which is his physical support, is like the physical base of mind.

In recognizing the heart as the seat of mental activity, the commentators have followed an ancient Indian tradition recorded in the religious literature and in the medical tradition, as for example, Caraka and Susruta. As CAF Rhys Davids notes, the term *hadaya* (heart) finds a place in Buddhist popular psychology, in the sense of inmost, inwardness, and also thorough.[9] Thus, we have *hadaya-sukha* (inward happiness), *hadayaṅgam* (going deep into

7 Ñāṇamoli 1956: 696.

8 See Aung 1910: 277.

9 Davids 1923: lxxxvi.

the bosom of the heart), *dhammassa hadaya* (the heart of the doctrine). In the Abhidhamma, *hadaya* is sometimes used as synonymous with mind and mind-consciousness.[10]

There is no evidence in the antecedent Buddhist literature to justify the cardiac theory of the seat of mental activity. A passing comment by Ācārya Yaśomitra in his *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā* says that Buddhists in Sri Lanka (*tambapaṇṇiyā*) imagine that heart-base is the physical support of mind and mind-consciousness.[11]

10 Vbh 87.

11 Vy 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sense-sphere Consciousness

Consciousness is the knowing or awareness of an object. It divides itself into many types according to the mental factors with which it combines. According to one method of differentiation, there are eighty-nine, according to another, one hundred and twenty-one.

Sense-sphere consciousness divides itself into many kinds depending on its ethical quality.

Unwholesome consciousness

The analysis of unwholesome consciousness of the sense sphere is based on the three roots of moral evil: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). The first group is divided into eight types according to three principles of dichotomization. The first is its emotional value, that is, the tone of the feeling concomitant with the consciousness. The second is whether it is associated with or dissociated from wrong view. Wrong view is any belief or ideology in conformity with which the consciousness arises, providing an ideological justification for the consciousness rooted in greed. As Bhikkhu Bodhi observes, "the view itself may be an object of attachment in its own right."[1] The third is whether the consciousness rooted in greed occurs spontaneously, or is induced by an external factor, or on one's inclination or habit.

The eight classes of consciousness rooted in greed:

1. Accompanied by joy, associated with wrong view, spontaneous.
2. Accompanied by joy, associated with wrong view, induced.
3. Accompanied by joy, dissociated from wrong view, spontaneous.
4. Accompanied by joy, dissociated from wrong view, induced.
5. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with wrong view, spontaneous.
6. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with wrong view, induced.
7. Accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from wrong view, spontaneous.
8. Accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from wrong view, induced.[2]

The second class of unwholesome consciousness is rooted in hatred *dosa*. It is always accompanied by displeasure *dōmanassa* because hatred can never be accompanied either by joy or equanimity. Therefore, unlike the one rooted in greed, it cannot be differentiated into two types on the basis of feeling, nor does it arise in association with wrong view. Wrong view can

1 Bodhi 2003: 34.

2 Ibid.

give rise to acts of hatred, but it cannot exist together with hatred in one and the same consciousness. By its very nature hatred excludes the possibility of any view, whether it is right or wrong. In view of these reasons, the consciousness rooted in hatred can be differentiated only into two types, as spontaneous or induced.

9. accompanied by displeasure, associated with aversion, spontaneous.
10. accompanied by displeasure, associated with aversion, induced.

The third class of unwholesome consciousness is rooted in delusion (*moha*). Delusion is one of the three unwholesome roots and, as such, it is present in every type of unwholesome consciousness. In the class of unwholesome consciousness under consideration, only delusion is present as an unwholesome root. The sheet intensity of delusion here excludes both greed and hatred. It is, therefore, described as one involving delusion. The emotional value of both is not one of either pleasant or unpleasant feeling but one of equanimity. This is because when the mind is overwhelmed with sheer delusion, it is not in a position to evaluate the object as agreeable or disagreeable, and this prevents its being associated with pleasant or painful feeling.

The usual dichotomization as spontaneous and induced, too, does not appear here. Since these two types do not have natural acuteness, they are not spontaneous. And since they are rooted in sheer delusion, the question of deliberately arousing them does not arise.

The two types of consciousness rooted in delusion:

11. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with doubt.
12. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with restlessness.

Rootless consciousness:

One accompanied by doubt (*vicikicchā*) and the other by restlessness (*uddhacca*) are the two types of consciousness rooted in delusion.
The term root denotes mental factors that determine the ethical quality of volitional acts. These are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) and their opposites, non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*). Rootless consciousness is devoid of roots. Unlike the rooted, it is comparatively weak. It is a consciousness not motivated by any of the six roots. It divides itself into eighteen types: fifteen are resultant (*vipāka*) and the other three, functional (*kiriya*).

The term resultant describes the types of consciousness that arise due to volitional activity (*kamma*). They are not kammically differentiated as wholesome or unwholesome. If they can be so differentiated, the results of *kamma* also become *kamma*. This will give rise to a situation where one *kamma* gives rise to another, and the latter in turn to still another, resulting in an interminable process of *kammic* determinism.

There are fifteen types of sense-sphere resultant consciousness, divided into two groups. The first consists of seven types, called unwholesome resultant consciousness. The term unwholesome shows that they are results produced by unwholesome *kamma*. It does not mean that the results themselves are unwholesome or wholesome. Of the seven types, the first five are the fivefold sense consciousnesses based on the five physical sense organs.

The other two types of resultant consciousness are (1) receiving consciousness accompanied by equanimity and (2) investigating consciousness, also accompanied by equanimity. The first is so called because in a cognitive process, it receives the object that has impinged on the sense organ. The second investigates the object of cognition received by the first.

The second group arises as results of wholesome *kamma.* It includes eight types, seven of them corresponding to the seven types mentioned above.

The last three types of rootless consciousness belong to a category called *kiriya*. They are neither the results of *kamma* nor do they have *kammic* effect. The first two play a role in the series of mental events of a cognitive process. One is called five sense door adverting consciousness. It adverts to a sense object impinging on any of the physical sense organs. The second, mind-door adverting consciousness, adverts to an object appearing at the mind-door and sets in motion mental events leading to the cognition of a mental object.

The third type of *kiriya* is devoid of both wholesome and unwholesome roots. It pertains exclusively to the experience of the Buddha, Pacceka Buddha, and the Arahant. It is the smile-producing consciousness because it causes them to smile about sense sphere phenomena.[3]

Wholesome consciousness

All morally wholesome consciousness is traceable to the three roots, non-greed or generosity (*alobha*), non-hatred or loving kindness (*adosa*), and non-delusion or wisdom (*amoha*). There are eight types of wholesome consciousness. In differentiating them, three criteria are adopted. First is the emotional value or tone of the consciousness. The second is whether the consciousness is associated with knowledge or dissociated from it. The third classifying criterion is whether the consciousness is spontaneous or non-spontaneous, whether it is prompted or unprompted. The eight types of consciousness are as follows:[4]

1. Accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, spontaneous.
2. Accompanied by joy, associated with knowledge, induced.
3. Accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, spontaneous.

3 See Chapter Nine on "Cognitive Process".

4 ADS 46.

4. Accompanied by joy, dissociated from knowledge, induced.
5. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, spontaneous.
6. Accompanied by equanimity, associated with knowledge, induced.
7. Accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from knowledge, spontaneous.
8. Accompanied by equanimity, dissociated by knowledge, induced.

Resultant consciousness with roots:

There are eight types, all with roots. They are the exact counterparts of the eight types of sense sphere wholesome consciousness. However, there is a difference: the former are wholesome, and the latter, indeterminate.

Functional consciousness with roots:

This category consists of eight types, all with roots. The eight in question are the exact counterparts of the eight types of sense sphere wholesome consciousness, with this difference. The eight wholesome are experienced only by the worldlings and trainees; i.e., those who have not yet realized *nibbāna*. The eight types of *kiriya* consciousness arise only in those who have realized *nibbāna*.

Fine-material-sphere consciousness:

These are the two types of consciousness that obtain in the two meditative attainments, *rūpa-jhāna* and *arūpa-jhāna* and in the two planes of existence, *rūpa-loka* and *arūpa-loka*. Here consciousness becomes more centered and more unified, until it reaches complete unification and quietude. The *jhāna* experience of the fine materiality has five stages, arranged in an ascending order of mind's unification. In the first *jhāna* there are five factors: *vitakka* (initial application), *vicāra* (sustained application), *piti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness), and *ekaggatā (*one-pointed-ness). The progress upward through the other stages consists in the successive elimination of the first four factors. In the second *jhāna, vitakka* is eliminated, in the third *vitakka* and *vicāra* are eliminated, in the fourth *vitakka, vicāra*, and *piti* are eliminated. In the fifth, *sukha* is abandoned and substituted by *upekkhā* (equanimity). The successive elimination of *jhāna* factors results in *ekaggatā,* one pointedness of mind getting more and more intensified until it reaches the highest point of intensity in the fifth *jhāna*. The substitution of happiness with equanimity results in a hedonically neutral stage of pure concentration. It is the fifth *jhāna*, with the supreme perfection of equanimity and mindfulness that is the foundation *jhāna* for realizing the six kinds of higher knowledge, namely, psycho-kinesis (*iddhividha)*, clair-audience (*dibbasota*), telepathic knowledge (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*), retro-cognitive knowledge of past existences (*pubbe-nivāsānussati-ñāṇa*), knowledge of the decease and survival of beings (*cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*), and knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*). The first five are mundane. The last is supra-mundane.

CHAPTER FIVE

Immaterial-sphere Consciousness

There are four types of immaterial-sphere consciousness. They differ from each other in eliminating their objects of concentration.

1. The base of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*).
2. The base of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*).
3. The base of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*).
4. The base of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

Each succeeding *jhāna* arises by surmounting the object of the preceding. In terms of subtlety and refinement, the succeeding one is higher than the preceding one. However, as to the number of *jhāna* factors, there is no difference among them. They all have in common the two *jhāna* factors of equanimity and one-pointedness. Since these are the two *jhāna* factors that constitute the fifth *jhāna* of fine materiality, the four immaterial *jhāna*s are a further extension of it.

The four types of immaterial *jhāna*-consciousness become twelve under the three aspects of wholesome (*kusala*), resultant (*vipāka*), and functional (*kiriya*). The kammically wholesome are experienced by worldings and trainees who develop immaterial *jhāna*s here in this world. The kammically neutral resultants arise only in the immaterial planes of existence. The kammically neutral five *kiriya* types are experienced only by the Buddha, the Pacceka-Buddha, and the arahant when they experience *jhāna.*

The *jhāna* experience is analyzable in the same way as any other type of consciousness. The factors into which it is analyzed do not have among them any unverifiable, mysterious entities. The transition to higher reaches of mind's unification is a causal process, a process of dependent origination. The *jhāna* experience does not represent a stage where the world of mind and matter is transcended. In the final analysis, *jhāna* experience too is conditioned and dependently arisen. And since *jhāna* experience is also conditioned, it is not complete emancipation from suffering.

As Nyanaponika Thera observes, similar experiences are interpreted by others as some kind of absorption or union with a transcendental reality, or as its manifestation within the meditator.[1] They are said to provide evidence for a trans-empirical reality in the form of a personal god or impersonal godhead. The Buddhist doctrine of non-self means the non-recognition of a noumenon in its microcosmic or macrocosmic sense. Nyanaponika

1 Nyanaponika 1994: 294.

Thera further elaborates that Buddhism recognizes the likelihood of falsely interpreting the *jhāna* experience in a manner not warranted by facts. This seems to be the reason why the meditator on rising from his *jhāna* experience is advised to review its content in light of three marks of sentient existence, impermanence, liability to suffering, and absence of an abiding ego or a persistent substance.

Supra-mundane consciousness

Supra-mundane consciousness pertains to the process of transcending the world. World means the totality of our experience, consisting of the five aggregates of clinging: corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.

There are eight types of supra-mundane consciousness, distinguished into two groups as path-consciousness (*magga-citta*) and fruition-consciousness (*phala-citta*). The eight types of supra-mundane consciousness pertain to four stages of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), once-returning (*sakadāgāmī*), non-returning (*anāgāmī*), and arahant (*arahatta*). Each stage involves two types of consciousness. Path-consciousness eradicates defilements and gives access to each stage. Fruition-consciousness experiences the liberation made possible by the corresponding path.

To transcend the world is to eliminate the fetters. There are ten fetters: (1) belief in an ego-entity, (2) skeptical doubt, (3) clinging to mere rites and rituals as a means to emancipation, (4) sensual desire, (5) ill-will, (6) craving for fine-material existence, (7) craving for immaterial existence, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance. Of the four types of path-consciousness, the first (stream-entry) has the function of cutting off the first three fetters. The second (once-returning), while not eliminating fetters, attenuates the grosser forms of sensual desire and ill-will. The third (non-returning) eradicates the fourth and fifth fetters. The fourth (arahant) destroys the remaining five fetters. The four types of fruition-consciousness have the function of experiencing the stage of liberation made possible by the corresponding path consciousness.[2]

The eight types of supra-mundane consciousness are sometimes counted as forty by taking into consideration the five stages of *rūpajjhāna*. Any of these five *jhāna* stages could be made the basis for the realization of the four stages of enlightenment. It is on this basis that the eight types of supra-mundane consciousness are arranged into forty types. This explains why the Abhidhamma refers to all types of consciousness sometimes as eighty-nine and sometime as one hundred and twenty-one.

2 Bodhi 2003: 65.

Beautiful consciousness

Beautiful consciousness (*sobhana-citta*) is an expression for all consciousnesses other than the twelve unwholesome and the eighteen rootless. The category is so called, because it is invariably accompanied by beautiful mental factors, to be examined below. Beautiful consciousness includes twenty-four types of sense-sphere-consciousness as well as the fifteen and twelve types of consciousness experienced in second and third planes of existence, and the eight types of supra-mundane consciousness.

Ethically variable mental factors

Consciousness does not arise in its true separate condition. It arises together with the mental factors. The concomitant mental factors exercise specialized tasks in an act of cognition. There are in all fifty-two mental factors. They can be subsumed under four broad headings:

1. Seven universals, i.e., ethically variable mental factors common to all types of consciousness (*sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa*).
2. Six occasionals, i.e., ethically variable mental factors occurring only in some types of consciousness (*pakiṇṇaka*).
3. Fourteen unwholesome (*akusala*) mental factors.
4. Twenty-five beautiful (*sobhana*) mental factors.

Here we propose to examine the ethically variables, the universals and the occasionals.

The seven universals are contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vēdanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cētanā*), one-pointed-ness (*ekaggatā*), mental life-faculty (*arūpa-jīvitindriya*), and attention (*manasikāra*). These are the basic non-rational factors invariably present in every type of consciousness. What led to the universals can be traced to Buddhist discourses where, it is said that consciousness and *nāma-rūpa* are mutually dependent. *Nāma* in *nāma-rūpa* means the five mental factors: feeling (*vēdanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cētanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*). *Rūpa* in *nāma-rūpa* means the material phenomena, consisting of the four great material elements and the materiality depending on them. The five mental factors, referred above, are called universals in the Abhidhamma. To this list, two more factors, attention (*manasikāra*) and mental life faculty (*arūpa- jīvitindriya*), are added. Thus, the list of universals consists of seven mental factors. These are the non-rational basic factors invariably present in every type of consciousness. The sequence of their enumeration does not correspond to a chronological sequence in their occurrence. They all occur simultaneously with every consciousness.

Of the seven universals, contact (*phassa*) is the first. It connotes sensorial or mental impression. *Phassa,* as defined in the Buddhist discourses, is the correlation set up between the sense organ, the sense object, and the sensory

awareness. Sometimes it is defined as the coincidence, concurrence, and confluence of the three factors. Whether this means *phassa* is another expression for the correlation of the three, or something else was a controversial question. The Theravada position is that *phassa* is not the mere correlation, but what results from it. The same interpretation is recognized by the Vaibhāśikas. On the other hand, for the Sautrantikas, sensory contact is not a separate factor, but is an expression for the correlation itself. *Phassa* is also defined as the initial awareness of the objective presentation, as it initiates the entire cognitive process. *Phassa* divides itself into six types: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact. These six factors are separated into two groups as compact-contact (*paṭigha-samphassa*) and designation-contact (*adhivacana-samphassa*). The first refers to impressions that occur as a result of external stimuli, such as sights and sounds. *Paṭigha* means impact, or the ability to react. The five physical sense organs and their objects are called materiality having the characteristic of resistance. On the other hand, designation-contact is called so because it arises with the non-corporeal four aggregates as its basis. Designation contact (*adhivacana -samphassa*) is the same as mind-contact (*mano-samphassa*).

Why mind contact is called designation contact, there is no explanation in the commentarial exegesis. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya,* of Ācārya Vasubandhu[3] we find two somewhat similar explanations. According to one, *adhivacana* is another explanation for name: speech bases itself on names; it illuminates the meaning of names, therefore *adhivacana* means name. Name is the object par excellence of contact associated with mental consciousness. In fact, it is said: through visual consciousness one knows blue, but one does not know this is blue. Through mental consciousness one knows blue and also one recognizes blue as this is blue. If mental consciousness recognizes blue as blue, this involves some kind of judgement and the participation of language in the act of recognizing the object.

We find a similar idea recognized in the Theravada Abhidhamma as well. In a cognitive process, eye-consciousness, for example, does not identify the object of sight. Its function is mere seeing (*dassana-matta*). At this stage, the object is experienced in its bare immediacy and simplicity prior to all identificatory cognitive operations. It is best described as seeing without knowledge of what is seen. What the commentarial exegesis means by mere seeing is not different from what the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* says.

The second universal mental factor is feeling (*vēdanā*). Contact as noted above, is the initial descent of consciousness on the object, the encounter between consciousness and object. There is a close connection between contact and feeling: conditioned by contact, arises feeling. Feeling is the affective tone that necessarily and simultaneously arises with contact. The

3 AKB 244.

affective tone can be pleasant, painful, or neutral. The third species indicates the line that divides the hedonic quality into pleasant and painful. There cannot be any cognitive act which is not hedonically affected by the object of cognition. Therefore, feeling too becomes a universal mental factor. When it comes to experiencing the flavour of the object, all other mental factors experience it partially and derivatively. In the case of contact, there is mere touching; in the case of perception, there is mere perceiving; in the case of volition, there is mere coordinating; and in the case of consciousness mere cognizing. In the case of feeling, feeling alone experiences the object directly and fully.

In terms of its affective quality, feeling divides itself into three as pleasant, painful, and neutral. Because feeling has contact as its immediate condition, contact divides itself into six, as eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, and mind-contact. Feelings based on the first four physical senses are neutral. Feelings based on the sense of touch are pleasant or painful, never neutral. We need to understand this difference in the light of the Abhidhamma teaching on sense perception. The first four physical sense-organs and their objects are a species of dependent material elements (*dhamma*s). Their impact is not strong enough to produce physical pain or pleasure.

Feelings associated with mind-contact can be pleasant, painful, or neutral. Feeling is a faculty (*indriya*) as well, that is, as a phenomenon exercising control over its associated phenomena. When analyzed as a faculty, the threefold feeling, pleasant, painful, and neutral becomes fivefold. The pleasant feeling of the threefold is here arranged into two as pleasure (*sukha*) and joy (*pīti*). The first is bodily and the second mental. Similarly, the painful feeling of the threefold division is arranged into two as pain (*dukkha*) and displeasure (*domanassa*). The former is physical, and the latter mental. Feeling neither painful nor pleasant is arranged here as a faculty called equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The connection between feeling and the next universal, perception (*saññā*) is shown by what one feels, that one perceives. Perception (*saññā*) means the perceiving of the object appearing at any of the sense doors or at the mind door. It notes an object as blue, green, and so on and recognizes what has been noted. The role of perception (*saññā*) as a universal is to isolate and recognize the object of cognition. As Nyanaponika Thera observes, the characteristic and function assigned to perception (*saññā*) shows the vital role it plays in the arising of memory. Memory is not listed as a mental factor. Nyanaponika Thera further explains that the reason is that memory is a complex process. As such, it cannot be represented by a single mental factor.

> Remembering, which is connecting with past, is a function of perception in general. Among the mental factors in a process of perception it is perception (*saññā*) that plays the initial role in this complex process. Therefore, perception (*saññā*) is cognition as well as recognition.[4]

Volition (*cētanā*) is the next universal. It is the most dynamic, being the driving force, the motivating factor leading to realization of goals. It is volition that organizes the other mental states associated with it on the object of cognition. It represents the conative or volitional aspect of cognition. The role of volition (*cētanā*) as a universal and volition (*cētanā*) as *kamma* needs clarification. *Kamma* as a condition in the system of conditional relations is of two kinds. One is co-nascent and the other asynchronous. In the former the conditioning factor is volition (*cētanā)* arising with every consciousness. The conditioned states are consciousness and mental factors arising together with it. As a universal, its function is to coordinate and to organize the mental states to act on the object.

In the case of asynchronous, the condition is a past volition (*cētanā*). The conditioned states are mental and material elements arising as a result. As a universal, volition occurs in all consciousnesses.

The next universal is the one-peaked condition or one-pointed-ness of mind (*ekaggata*). It is the focusing of the mind on the object. Its role as a universal is shown by some level of concentration and is present in every consciousness. It is the factor that fixes the mind on the object. It prevents the co-nascent mental states from dissipating. Its function is to bring together the mental states arising with it.

The sixth universal is psychic life-faculty (*arūpa-jīvitindriya*). It controls the mental states arising with it. It infuses life into the mental states arising together with it and sustains them. It watches and controls the mental states. Its function is to be seen in the uninterrupted continuity of the mental process.

The last universal is attention (*manasikāra*). Attention presents the object to consciousness. Attention drives the mental states toward the object and joins mental states to the object. Attention on the object is necessary for any perception to arise. Three conditions are necessary for any perception to take place. First, the sense-organ must be unimpaired, that is, it must have the faculty of sight or hearing, and so on. Second, external objects must come within its range. Third, there must be an appropriate act of attention. Where any of these fails to operate there will be no resulting consciousness.

4 Nyanaponika 2007: 119.

CHAPTER SIX

The Occasionals

There are six mental factors in this group: initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), resolve (*adhimokkha*), energy (*viriya*), zest (*pīti*), and desire to act (*chanda*). They become ethically qualified according to the kind of consciousness with which they are associated. A parallel group is not found in the Sarvastivāda Abhidharma. What comes closest is a category called the indeterminate (*aniyata-bhumi-dharma*). Only *vitakka* and *vicāra* are common to both systems of Abhidharma; the rest are mutually exclusive.

Vitakka and *vicāra* are closely related. *Vitakka* is defined as the disposition, fixation, focusing application of the mind, and *vicāra* as the continuous adjusting or focusing of thought. They are two levels of a single process. *Vitakka* has as its characteristic lifting the consciousness and its concomitants to the object, and *vicāra* the further binding of consciousness and its concomitants to the object.

Vitakka-vicāra combination has a causal connection with vocal expression. They are defined as verbal constructions preceding vocal utterance (*vacī-saṅkhāra,*), verbal constructions or sub-conscious operations of the mind preceding vocal utterance. The close connection between *vitakka* and verbal expression is also indicated in the *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*, where we get the earliest Buddhist theory of perception.[1] In a thought process leading to perception, *vitakka* appears immediately before conceptual proliferation of concepts associated with language.

Another role assigned to *vitakka* and *vicāra* is as two factors of *jhāna* consciousness. Here *vitakka* has the capacity to inhibit sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), and *vicāra* the capacity to inhibit doubt. Both *vitakka* and *vicāra* are present in the first *jhāna*, in the second they get eliminated. Neither has a role to play in the other three higher *jhāna*s.

As two mental factors, the Sautrāntikas take a different position. In their view, what the Buddhist discourses say about them is clear enough. They are vocal constructions (*saṅkārā*) immediately preceding verbal utterance. They are not two separate *dharma*s, but two names given to a collection of *dharma*s, functioning as a necessary condition for verbal utterance.[2]

1 *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*. M i 108ff.

2 AKB 244.

Next is *adhimokkha*. It literally means 'a releasing on' of the consciousness and its concomitants towards the object. *Adhimokkha* means decision or resolve. It represents a positive state of mind, free from doubt and indecision due to the presence of an object calling for increased attention.

Adhimokkha is not found in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, one of the books of the Abhidhamma *Piṭaka*. It was introduced in the commentarial exegesis as one of the whatsoever other, or supplementary factors.

The next occasional is energy (*viriya*). It could be wholesome or unwholesome, depending on the consciousness with which it is associated. Wholesome energy (*viriya*) plays a vital role in Buddhist ethical teachings. It is one of the spiritual faculties and is described as the mental inception of energy, the striving and the onward effort, the exertion and endeavor, the zeal and ardor, the vigor and fortitude, the state of unfaltering effort, the state of sustained desire, the state of unflinching endurance, the solid grip of the burden.[3] Wholesome energy (*viriya*) is one of the five spiritual powers, one of the four means of accomplishing psychic power. It appears as right effort, as the four modes of supreme effort in the noble eightfold path. It is elevated to the sublime position of a factor of awakening (*bojjhaṅga*). As the commentarial exegesis says, right energy is the root of all attainments.

The next occasional is zest (*pīti*) or pleasurable interest. It has satisfaction as its characteristic, thrilling of the body and mind as its function, and elation as its manifestation.

Pīti (zest) and pleasure (*sukha*) are closely connected, with this difference between the two. Zest is a conative factor included in the aggregate of mental formations. Pleasure is a variety of feeling, included in the aggregate of feelings. *Pīti* as a conative factor is dissociated from any hedonic content. A commentarial exegesis explains their difference as, zest is delight that results from attaining a desired object, and pleasure is the enjoyment of the flavor of what is acquired.[4] Where there is zest, there is bound to be pleasure. Where there is pleasure, zest is necessarily present.

Because zest is ethically variable, it can be developed as a wholesome mental factor of *jhāna* experience. At this level, as Bhikkhu Bodhi observes, it is best translated not as zest but as rapture. Commentarial exegesis refers to five grades of zest which can be experienced when developing concentration. To quote from Bhikkhu Bodhi's rendering:

> Minor zest, momentary zest, showering zest, uplifting zest, and pervading zest. Minor zest is able to raise the hairs on the body. Momentary zest is like flashes of lightning. Showering zest

3 Cf. Analayo 2009: 691–695.

4 CMA 49.

> breaks over the body again and again like waves on the seashore. Uplifting zest can cause the body to levitate, and pervading zest pervades the whole body as an inundation fills a cavern.[5]

The last occasional is desire to act (*chanda*). It is not the same as sensual desire, one of the five mental hindrances. It is not greed (*lobha*) either. The potentiality of both desire to act and energy is shown by their elevation to the level of *adhipati*, a predominant factor having a dominating impact on the consciousness to which it belongs. Unlike *chanda, viriya* could function as a faculty (*indriya*) as well. Where a faculty differs from a predominant is that whereas the former has its range of control limited to its respective sphere, the latter's range of control applies to the whole consciousness. A predominant is likened to a king who has lordship over all his ministers, whereas the faculties are like ministers who govern their own respective districts.[6]

5 Bodhi 2003: 57.

6 CMA 95.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Unwholesome Mental Factors

This group has fourteen mental factors, namely, (1) delusion (*moha*), (2) moral shamelessness (*ahirika*), (3) moral fearlessness (*anottappa*), (4) restlessness (*uddhacca)*, (5) greed (*lobha*), (6) wrong view (*diṭṭhi)*, (7) conceit (*māna)*, (8) hatred (*dosa*), (9) envy (*issā*), (10) avarice (*macchariya*), (11) worry (*kukkucca*), (12) sloth (*thina*), (13) torpor (*middha*), and (14) doubt (*vicikicchā*).

Among these fourteen factors, *moha, ahirika, anottappa*, and *uddhacca* are invariably present in all unwholesome consciousness. *Moha* is delusion. It is mind's blindness. Its sway over the unwholesome is more extensive than that of greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*). While *moha* is present in the twelve kinds of unwholesome consciousness, *lobha* is present in eight and *dosa* in two. As one commentarial exegesis observes delusion is the root of all unwholesome[1]. If *lobha* and *dosa* cannot arise together it is because of their mutual exclusivity. *Lobha* is attachment to what is agreeable and attractive; *dosa* is repulsion to what is disagreeable.

The next two mental factors existing with all unwholesome consciousness are *ahirika*, absence of moral shame, and *anottappa*, absence of moral fear. They play a vital role in the causality of moral evil. This is seen in their opposites, moral shame, and moral fear, defined as guardians of the world.[2] If these two factors were not to protect the world, the world would descend down to the lowest level of moral depravity.

The fourth factor arising with every unwholesome consciousness is *uddhacca*, agitation or restlessness. It has mental excitement as its characteristic, like wind-tossed water; wavering as function, like a flag waving in the wind; whirling as manifestation, like scattered ashes struck by a stone; unsystematic thought owing to mental excitement as proximate cause. It is the distraction of the mind, the state of being distrait. However, *uddhacca* is not a mental property antithetical to attention. For attention is present in varying degrees of intensity in all consciousness irrespective of their ethical quality. Without some degree of attention to the object, no thought complex could arise at all. *Uddhacca* as mind's agitation is therefore the opposite of mental calm (*vūpasama*). The presence of mind's agitation in all unwholesome consciousness shows that a mind overcome by it is not a fertile ground for the

1 *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta.* M i 46.

2 *Lokapala-sutta.* A i 51.

emergence of wholesome qualities. *Uddhacca* is one of the five impediments (*nivāraṇa*), because it distorts the clarity of mind and weakens the capacity for proper understanding.

The four mental factors discussed so far are invariably present in all unwholesome consciousness. As unwholesome universals, they combine with other unwholesome factors to produce a given unwholesome consciousness. Among them the first is greed (*lobha*), one of the three cardinal roots of moral evil. It stands for all degrees of passionate clinging to both sensuous and non-sensuous objects. It is the self-centered desire to possess and gratify. An intensified state of greed is covetousness (*abhijjā).* It is the obsessive desire to acquire what others possess, to make others' property one's own.

The fifth unwholesome factor is *diṭṭhi.* It literally means view. Here it means wrong view. Wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) plays a complex role in the causality of unwholesome states of mind. It is one of the latent proclivities (*anusaya*) that becomes patent (*pariyuṭṭhāna*), when the appropriate conditions for its arising are there. As one on the mental intoxicants (*āsava*), it muddles the mind and causes the loss of mind's clarity, the clarity necessary for seeing things in their proper perspective. It stands for all wrong perspectives, views, opinions, speculations, and ideologies. *Diṭṭhi* as wrong view arises only in a consciousness primarily conditioned by greed, and not in a consciousness motivated only by delusion. Buddhism is aware of the impact of our desires on beliefs and views we entertain. We tend to believe in what is agreeable and palatable and reject what is disagreeable and unpalatable. This is psychological motivation of ideological positions. This seems to be the reason why Buddhism seeks to trace the origin of the eternalist (*sassatavāda)* and annihilationist (*ucchedavāda*) views to psychological factors. There are two main reasons for Buddhism's concern with wrong views. One is that dogmatic attachment to views (*diṭṭhi-parāmāsa*) gives rise to ideological perversion preventing us from seeing things in their proper perspective. The other is that wrong views are a source of wrong and evil aspirations, resulting in wrong conduct. The Buddha says:

> no other thing than evil views do I know, O monks, whereby to such an extent the unwholesome things already arisen are brought to growth and fullness. No other thing than evil views do I know whereby to such an extent the wholesome things not yet arisen are hindered in their arising, and the wholesome things already arisen disappear.[3]

The next unwholesome factor is conceit (*māna*). It is conceit at the thought 'I am the better man. I am as good as they — all such conceit, overweening, conceitedness, loftiness, haughtiness, flaunting a flag, assumption, desire of

3 See A i 17.

the heart for self-advertisement'.[4] The threefold conceit based on feelings of 'superiority, equality, and inferiority' are called 'the three modes of comparison' (*tisso vidha*).

The next four unwholesome factors are hatred (*dosa*), envy (*issā*), avarice (*macchariya*), and worry (*kukkucca*). *Dosa* is the vexation of spirit, resentment, repugnance, hostility, ill temper, irritation, indignation, antipathy, abhorrence, mental disorder, detestation, anger, fuming, irascibility, hate, hating, disorder, getting upset, derangement, opposition, hostility, churlishness, abruptness, disgust of heart.[5] Hatred could even arise groundlessly, without any reason. One gets annoyed, saying, it rains too much, it does not rain, the sun shines too much, it does not shine.[6]

Closely connected with hatred (*dosa*) is envy (*issā)*. It is the resentment at the gifts, the hospitality, the respect, the affection, reverence and worship accruing to others.

The next factor that goes with hatred is avarice (*macchariya*). It is meanness, niggardliness, selfishness, want of generosity, the inability to bear the thoughts of sharing with others. There are two varieties of avarice. One is the soft variety, called *vevicchā*, to be obsessed with too many wants. The other is the hard variety, called *abhijjā*, covetousness. It prevents another from giving to others. Avarice can occur in relation to things spiritual as well. It is called spiritual avarice (*dhamma macchriya*).

The last mental factor arising in consciousness mainly rooted in hatred is *kukkucca*, repentance over wrongly done acts. Together with the mind's turbulence (*uddhacca*), *kukkucca* is one of the five mental impediments.

The next two unwholesome factors are sloth (*thina*) and torpor (*middha*). Sloth is indisposition or unwieldiness of consciousness. Torpor is the morbid state of the mental factors. When consciousness is overcome by the morbid state called sloth, it becomes inert and hangs down like a bat from a tree. It is a form of mental density with no possibility of expansion, like a lump of butter too stiff for spreading.

The last unwholesome mental factor is doubt (*vicikicchā*). Its various nuances can be seen in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* definition: the doubt, the hesitating, the dubiety, which on that occasion is puzzlement, perplexity, distraction, standing at cross-roads, uncertainty of grasp, evasion, hesitation, incapacity of grasping thoroughly. Doubt (*vicikicchā*) as the commentarial exegesis says is the inability to decide which is which. It is also defined as a state of

4 See Saddhasena 1996: 596–597.

5 Cf. *Paṭhama-āghātapaṭivinaya-sutta*. A iii 185.

6 Expositor 472.

denseness and rigidity in a psychological sense. When one is overcome by perplexity due to indecision, the mind becomes stiff and dense, impeding effective thinking.[7]

7 See Anālayo 2009: 561–564.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Beautiful Mental Factors

Beautiful consciousness, as noted earlier, is Abhidhamma's expression for all consciousnesses, excluding the kammically unwholesome (*akusala*) and the rootless (*ahetuka)*. It also includes not only all kammically wholesome consciousnesses, but also the resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriyā*) consciousnesses that are kammically indeterminate (*abyākata*) but possessing beautiful mental factors, the mental factors that we propose to examine here.

The category of the beautiful, includes twenty-five mental factors. Among these factors, nineteen occur in all beautiful consciousnesses, namely, (1) faith (*saddhā*), (2) mindfulness (*sati*), (3) moral shame (*hiri*), (4) moral fear (*ottappa*), (5) non-greed (*alobha*), (6) non-hatred (*adosa*), (7) neutrality of mind (*tatramajjhattatā*), (8) tranquility of mental factors (*kāya-passaddhi*), (9) tranquility of consciousness (*citta-passaddhi*), (10) lightness of mental factors (*kāya-lahutā*), (11) lightness of consciousness (*citta-lahutā*), (12) malleability of mental factors (*kāya-mudutā*), (13) malleability of consciousness (*citta-mudutā*), (14) wieldness of mental factors (*kāya-kammaññatā*), (15) wieldiness of consciousness (*citta-kammaññatā*), (16) proficiency of mental factors (*kāya-pāguññatā*), (17) proficiency of consciousness (*citta-pāguññatā*), (18) rectitude of mental factors (*kāya-ujjukatā*) and (19) rectitude of consciousness (*citta-ujjukatā*).

There are six others that do not necessarily arise with beautiful consciousness: (1) right speech (*sammā vācā*), (2) right action (*sammā kammanta*), (3) right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), (4) compassion (*karuṇā*), (5) appreciative joy (*muditā*) and (6) non-delusion (*amoha*).

Among the first group of beautiful mental factors, the first is *saddhā*, often translated as faith. We can understand it as trust, or confidence which we repose on someone or something to result in certitude of mind and a sense of self-assurance in relation to what we want to undertake. *Saddhā* removes perplexity of mind due to self-doubting. In the Buddhist context, *saddhā* is faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha*. *Saddhā* functions as a spiritual faculty (*saddhindriya*) and as a spiritual power (*saddhā-bala*). *Saddhā* is a prerequisite as well for mental culture leading to the realization of the final goal.

The next is *sati*. In its literal sense, it means memory. In Buddhist psychology it means mindfulness, presence of mind, to be attentive and watchful. Its characteristic is not wobbling, not floating away from the object as a pumpkin in a stream. Although it is not the same as attention (*manasikāra*), both are

closely connected with *sati*. *Sati* is the ability to discriminate between good and bad. It is the proximate cause of solid perception, or the four foundations of mindfulness. For mindfulness to be properly established, it should have a strong perceptual foundation.

For the Sarvastivādins, mindfulness is a universal factor of consciousness. It could become wholesome or unwholesome depending on the consciousness with which it is combined. For the Theravādins, it is invariably beautiful. It does not occur in unwholesome consciousness. Mindfulness occupies a pivotal position both in Buddhist ethics and psychology. Its influence on other mental factors can be seen by its being presented under different ethico-psychological categories: it is a spiritual faculty (*indriya*), a spiritual power (*bala*), a factor of awakening (*bojjhaṅgā)*, and the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The next two mental factors are *hiri* and *ottappa*. They are always presented as a pair. *Hiri* is moral shame, *ottappa* is moral fear, in relation to both bodily and verbal misconduct. They combine to act as restraining forces against their opposites, shamelessness and fearlessness at evil doing. In the case of moral shame, what is of decisive significance is one's own self, one's own conscience, and one's own moral sense. In the case of moral fear, what is of decisive significance is about public opinion, what the world at large thinks and says about what one does. By public opinion Buddhism means neither the opinion of the majority nor the opinion of the minority, but the opinion of the wise people (*viññū purisā)*. Therefore, what is morally rewarding is described as praised by the wise (*viññuppasatthā*) and what is morally reprehensible as censored by the wise (*viññugarahitā*).[1]

If these two moral qualities are highly commendable, their absence is equally reprehensible. They are of decisive importance for protecting and stabilizing the moral foundation of society. Their absence leads to the erosion and collapse of the social fabric, resulting in anarchy in moral life.

The next two beautiful universal factors are non-greed (*alobha*) and non-hatred (*adosa*). They can be understood both negatively and positively. In the negative sense they are absence of greed and hatred. In their positive sense, the former signifies wholesome qualities as charity, liberality, and renunciation, the latter, amity, goodwill, gentleness, friendliness, benevolence, and loving kindness.

Non-greed has the characteristic of not clinging (*agedha*), or not adhering (*alaggabhava*) to the object, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. Non-hatred has the characteristic of absence of churlishness or resentment. When non-hatred is elevated to the level of one of the four divine abodes

1 *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. D ii 80.

(*brahmavihāra*), it is called *mettā*, loving kindness to all living beings. In this capacity it promotes the welfare of all living beings (*hitākārapavatti*). Its function is to prefer their welfare (*hitūpasaṃhāra*). Its manifestation is the removal of ill-will. Its proximate cause is seeing beings as lovable. The allaying of aversion is its attainment; the arising of selfish affection is its collapse (*sinehasambhavo vipatti*).[2]

The next beautiful factor is *tatramajjhattatā*, literally meaning middle-ness-there, with 'there' meaning in relation to all objects of cognition. It signifies a balanced state of mind due to an impartial view of all objects of experience. It means equipoise, equanimity, even-mindedness, or neutrality of mind. It is also called *upekkhā*, meaning equanimity. *Upekkhā* could also mean neutral feeling, the zero point between painful and pleasant feeling. It is another expression for the balanced state of mind in relation to the object. It is a neutral attitude, an intellectual, not hedonic, state of mind, enabling to maintain a balanced attitude.[3]

Next in the list of universal beautiful factors we find twelve items arranged into six pairs. They represent six qualities, each made twofold by extending it to *kāya* and *citta. Kāya*, which literally means body, refers to the body of mental factors that arise together with consciousness. *Citta* means consciousness. Each pair signifies a quality shared by both consciousness and its concomitants. These twofold six qualities are closely interconnected. They always arise together. The first pair is *kāya-passaddhi,* tranquility of the mental factors, and *citta-passaddhi*, tranquility of consciousness. These two characteristics pacify both groups and ensure an unwavering state of both.

The second pair is *lahutā* in its twofold aspect. *Lahutā* is lightness or buoyancy, opposite of sluggishness and inertia, the mind's capacity for quick transformation. Its characteristic is absence of heaviness; its function is to destroy heaviness. It is manifested as absence of rigidity; its proximate cause is the body of mental factors and consciousness. It is opposed to such defilements as sloth and torpor. This quality of lightness is the mind's capacity for quick transformation or modification, a quality useful for moral training and spiritual development.

The third pair is *mudutā* in its twofold aspect, applying to mental factors and consciousness. *Mudutā* is malleability, plasticity, absence of rigidity. Its characteristic is the absence of stiffness, and its function is to destroy stiffness. It manifests as nonresistance and has mental factors and consciousness as its proximate cause. Its presence means the absence of such defilements as wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) and conceit (*māna).*

2 VismE 318.

3 Ibid.

The fourth pair is *kammaññatā,* in its twofold extension to mental factors and consciousness. It literally means workableness or serviceableness. It is opposed to all mental hindrances that make consciousness unwieldy.

The fifth pair is *pāguññatā*. It is fitness, ability, competence, or proficiency as a quality of mind. Its characteristic is healthiness of the mental states and consciousness; its function is to eradicate the twofold unhealthiness. It is manifested as absence of disability. It is opposed to defilements such as absence of faith giving rise to mental unhealthiness.

The last pair is *ujukatā*, defined as rectitude, straightness, absence of deflection, twist, and crookedness. Its characteristic is uprightness; its function is to eradicate mind's crookedness. It is manifested as absence of crookedness and is opposed to such defilements as craftiness, which creates crookedness in the body of mental factors and consciousness.

Among the six pairs only the twofold *passaddhi* is mentioned in the Buddhist discourses. However, as Nyanaponika Thera says, the other five, except *pāguññatā*, are traceable to Buddhist discourses, although they are not formally introduced as in the Abhidhamma. The use in the Buddhist discourses of such terms as *lahu*, *mudu*, *kammaññatā*, and *uju* in describing the mind necessary for moral development shows the antecedent trends that led to the formulation of the six pairs.[4]

When the six pairs appear together, they represent a state of mind that is tranquil, agile, malleable, wieldy, proficient, and upright. Their presence ensures the absence of the five mental hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and skeptical doubt.

The nineteen mental factors we examined so far are universal beautiful factors. There remain six more. They are not universals but variable adjuncts not necessarily occurring in all beautiful consciousness. Among them, the first three are *virati* or abstinences. They are responsible for the deliberate abstinence from wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood. They correspond to right speech (*sammā vācā*), right action (*sammā kammanta*), and right livelihood (*sammā ājīva).*

If the three abstinences represent three factors of the noble eightfold path, what about the other five factors? To state briefly, right view is represented by non-delusion or wisdom. Right thought and right effort are represented by *vitakka* and *viriya* which, as noted earlier, are two of the ethically variable occasional factors. Right mindfulness is represented by the mental factor *sati*, the second in the list of beautiful factors. Right concentration is represented by *ekaggatā*, which is one of the seven universals. In this way, the eight

4 Nyanaponika 2007: 140.

factors of the noble eightfold path are represented in four sub-divisions of the list of mental factors: universals, occasionals, beautiful universals, and beautiful occasionals.

The next two occasional adjuncts of beautiful consciousness are *karuṇā* and *muditā*, compassion and appreciative joy. Appreciative joy is not merry making and it is not accompanied by excited feelings of elation or outbursts of emotional excitement over the success of others. They are two of the four sublime states called illimitable (*appamañña*) or divine abodes (*brahmavihāra*). *Karuṇā* allays suffering in others. *Mudita* is gladness when others succeed.

The last in the list of beautiful factors is *amoha*, non-delusion, also called *paññā* (wisdom) *or ñāṇa* (knowledge). It is knowledge in conformity with the nature of actuality. It combines with non-greed and non-hatred to form the well-known triad of the wholesome roots. Wisdom (*paññā*) has the characteristic of illuminating.

> As when a lamp burns at night in a four-walled house the darkness ceases and light manifests, understanding has illuminating as its characteristic. There is no illumination equal to the illumination understanding.[5]

5 Expositor 161.

CHAPTER NINE

The Cognitive Process

The early Buddhist teaching on cognition is based on two fundamental ideas. One is that mind is a process without an enduring substance. The other is that all psychological experience is a continuum of mental phenomena. Cognition is not the immediate result of the contact between the sense-faculty and the sense-object. It is the cumulative result of a continuum of cognitive events. The process begins from sensory contact and proceeds gradually to the apprehension of the object. There is no self or subject behind the cognitive process as an enduring entity experiencing the object or as an agent directing various mental activities. They take place naturally according to the principles of psychological order (*citta-niyāma*), each stage being conditioned by the immediately preceding one. Ācariya Buddhaghosa, after describing the process of cognition makes the following observation:

> There is no agent or director who, after the object has impinged on the sense organ, says: you perform the function of attention, or you perform the function of cognition.[1]

Each of the various acts, such as adverting attention to the object, functions according to its own law and the whole process is recognized as law of operation of the mind (*citta-niyāma*). The momentary mental events do not occur in the mind. Rather they themselves are the mind.

The process begins from sensory contact and proceeds by degrees until it reaches the final stage called conceptual proliferations (*papañca*):

> Depending on the eye and visible forms eye-consciousness arises. The correlation of the three (union) is sensory contact (impingement). With sensory contact as condition there is feeling. What one feels that one perceives. What one perceives that one examines. What one examines, that one conceptually proliferates. What one conceptually proliferates, due to that perceptions and notions born of conceptual proliferation beset a man with respect to past, future, and present visible forms cognizable through the eye.[2]

There are seven different stages in the cognitive process:

1. Eye consciousness arising in dependence on the eye and the visible.
2. Sensory contact, i.e. the correlation between the sense-organ, the sense-object, and the sense-consciousness.
3. Feeling.
4. Perception.

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1 Expositor 546.

2 Expositor 564.

5. Examining.
6. Conceptual proliferation.
7. The overwhelming impact, on the percipient individual, of the conceptual proliferation.

Eye-consciousness, the initial stage in the process of cognition, means not full cognition, but an elementary level of seeing. It is some kind of bare sensation, some sort of a noetic sentience. This meaning of the term as it occurs in this context is explained in a commentarial exegesis as 'mere seeing' (*dassana-matta*). 'Mere seeing', as described by Bhikkhu Bodhi, is the consciousness "by which the sense datum is experienced in its bare immediacy and simplicity prior to all cognitive operations."[3] Therefore, consciousness in this particular context is not ethically qualified as morally wholesome or unwholesome.

Sensory contact is the second stage in the cognitive process. It is the correlation set up between the sense-organ, the sense-object, and the sensory awareness. Sometimes, it is more elaborately defined as "the coincidence, concurrence, and confluence of the three factors."[4]

With sensory contact as its condition, the third stage in the cognitive process is feeling. It is the affective tone brought about by the object. This affective tone could be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. At this stage, the latent tendency for the ego-consciousness awakens. As Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda observes, the earlier stages are impersonal in the sense that they occur as a process of dependent arising.[5] Whereas for this stage, the words used are not 'feeling arises' but 'feels', suggesting the intrusion of the ego-consciousness as an agent in addition to the feeling. Strictly speaking, even here it is a case of dependent arising. The ego-consciousness is only a superimposition on a purely impersonal process. What the 'feeler' 'feels' could be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral depending on how the feeler responds to the stimuli.

As the fourth stage we find perception. When an unenlightened person perceives (*sañjānāti*), at that very same time, he conceives (*maññati*). The original percept is now converted into a concept.

Next comes initial examining. The Pāli word is *vitakka*. It is often translated as initial application of the mind on the object. Both initial application and sustained application have a causal connection with meaningful vocal expression. They are therefore defined as verbal constructions (*vaci-saṅkhāra*), i.e., sub-vocal operations of the mind preceding vocal utterance. Hence, we read, having first had initial thought (*vitakka*) and discursive thought (*vicāra*),

3 CMA 107.

4 *Pañcavaggiya-sutta*. S iii 67.

5 Ñāṇananda 2012: 5.

one breaks out into speech.[6] The reference to initial application (*vitakka*) in the cognitive process shows the participation, at least in a very subtle form, of language, the tendency to give a label to the object.

After initial examination come conceptual proliferations. At this stage, the latent ego-consciousness that awakened earlier becomes fully solidified and crystallized. This stage involves a more marked verbalization, a process of labeling the object, all resulting in a profuse proliferation of conceptual constructs. If the object is interpreted as pleasurable due to greed, the percipient individual will be assailed by greed-driven thoughts. If it is interpreted as something repulsive, due to aversion, he will be assailed by aversion-driven thoughts. If the object is interpreted as neither pleasurable nor repulsive, he will be assailed by delusion-driven thoughts.

Furthermore, the object of cognition reminds the individual of similar experiences that were in the past and similar experiences to be in the future. It is the past and the future, more than the present that engage the attention of the individual. What is of critical importance is that the individual is now engulfed, overwhelmed, and rendered powerless to control his own conceptual proliferations. At this stage, he comes under the control of his own mind, rather than having a mind under his own control.

The sixth and seventh stages, referred above, can be understood as the saṃsāric dimension of individual existence. In a way, *saṃsāra* means conceptual proliferation and its impact on the individual. This explains why *nibbāna*-experience is sometimes defined as absence of conceptual proliferation (*nippapañca*).

In the cognitive process sketched above, the original raw stimulus that impinged on the eye is not cognized as it is. In the cognitive process it triggers, the raw stimulus comes to be gradually edited and interpreted until it becomes a fully-fledged concept, dressed with a label. The external world is there, yet it is not cognized as it is. Our familiar world of substantial objects turns out to be a mass of conceptual constructs superimposed on the raw sense-data. From an epistemological perspective, this means that Buddhism sets equally aloof from both naive realism and idealism. What we cognize is not mind-made, but mind-interpreted.

The cognitive process, described in the Abhidhamma, is based on a formulated theory of moments and what is called *bhavaṅga-citta* the constituent of becoming. There are two streams of consciousness recognized in the commentarial exegesis. When the mind is active, i.e., when consciousness occurs in a cognitive process, it is called *vīthi-citta*. The other is passive, i.e., when the mind is free from the cognitive process. These two processes can be referred to as process-consciousness and process-free-consciousness.

6 *Kukkuravatiya-sutta*. M i 391.

The process-free-consciousness performs three functions. The first is its function as *bhavaṅga*. In this capacity it ensures the uninterrupted continuity of individual life through the duration of any single existence. Whenever the process-consciousness is interrupted, as for example, in deep dreamless sleep, it is immediately followed by the process-free-consciousness. It prevents the possibility of any gap in the continuous flow of consciousness. Whenever a cognitive process subsides, the *bhavaṅga*-consciousness supervenes. It intervenes between every two cognitive processes and thus separates them as two different cognitive processes.

The second function of process-free-consciousness is its function as death consciousness (*cuti-citta*), the last consciousness to occur in any individual existence. Its third function is as rebirth linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*), the consciousness that occurs at the moment of rebirth. Immediately after it has arisen and fallen away, it is followed by *bhavaṅga*-consciousness. It performs the function of preserving the continuity of individual consciousness.

The process-free-consciousness is not an unrelated entity existing by itself. As Sarachchandra observes, it is also a cognizing consciousness, although it does not cognize the external world. Nor is the process-free-consciousness an undercurrent persisting as the substratum of the process-consciousness. It does not function like a self-conscious soul, nor is it the source of the process consciousness.[7] The two streams of consciousness are not parallel movements functioning concurrently. The placid flow of the process-free consciousness must be interrupted if the active process consciousness were to operate. It only supervenes when process consciousness subsides. There is thus an alternative flow of the two streams of consciousness.

There are six doors for a cognitive process. The first five are based on the five physical sense-organs. They are called five-door processes. The sixth is the mind door (ideational) process. The five door cognitive processes follow a uniform pattern though they are based on five different sense-organs. The objects presented at each sense-door could vary on their degree of intensity. The objects are classified into four grades: very great (*ati-mahanta*), great (*mahanta*), slight (*paritta*), and very slight (*ati-paritta*). They differ on the force of the impact the objects can have on consciousness.

A cognitive process with a 'very great' object will give rise to a full cognitive process, whose temporal duration consists of seventeen mind-moments. Computed in relation to the mind, the life span of matter is equal to seventeen mind-moments. Therefore, if the cognitive process lasts for seventeen mind-moments, this means that it lasts for one moment of matter. A cognitive process with a very great object that enters the avenue of sense door remains until it is fully grasped by the cognitive process.

7 See Sarachchandra 1958: 50ff.

A cognitive process begins when the placid flow of the *bhavaṅga*-consciousness begins to vibrate owing to the impact of the sense-object entering the sense-door. This initial stage is called the vibration of the *bhavaṅga* (*bhavaṅga-calana*). In the second stage, the flow of the *bhavaṅga* gets interrupted. This is called the arrest of *bhavaṅga* (*bhavaṅga-upaccheda*). These two stages are, strictly speaking, not part of the cognitive process. They pave the way for its emergence. It is at the third stage that there arises the five-door adverting consciousness, so called because, it adverts attention to the object at the sense-door. This is the beginning of the stream-of-process consciousness that launches into the cognitive process. The next stage could be one of the five sense-consciousnesses that cognizes the impinged object. If it is visible, eye-consciousness will arise performing the function of seeing. If it is sound, ear-consciousness will arise performing the function of hearing and so forth. In this particular context, sense-consciousness is defined as mere awareness of the presence of the object. It does not produce knowledge of any sort. It is the initial level of consciousness, when the impinging object is experienced in its bare immediacy and simplicity, prior to the discriminative functions by the succeeding cognitive events. At this stage eye-consciousness is a form of nonverbal awareness. Through it one knows 'blue', but not 'this is blue'. To know 'this is blue' is the recognition that involves some form of verbalizing. It is known only by mind-consciousness.

Next in order of succession are the three types of consciousness performing the functions of receiving (*sampaṭicchana*), investigating (*santīraṇa*), and determining (*voṭṭhapana*) the object. It is at these three successive stages that the object comes to be gradually comprehended by the discriminative and selective functions of the mind.

After the stage of determining comes the most important cognitive event in the cognitive process. It is called *javana*, a technical term whose meaning is running swiftly. It 'runs' swiftly over the object in the act of apprehending it. It is at this stage that the object comes to be fully cognized. For this purpose, it is necessary for *javana* to have seven swift 'runs' over the object.

Javana has three main aspects. The first is cognitive, the second is affective, and the third is volitional. Its cognitive aspect is defined as experiencing the object (*anubhāvanā)*. After the seven acts of *javana* have fallen one by one in succession, there arises an emotion of attraction or aversion towards the object. *Javana*, as noted above, has a volitional (*cetanā*) aspect as well. Since all volitional activities can be morally qualified as wholesome or unwholesome, *javana* is the only stage that has an ethical aspect as well.

The final stage in a full cognitive process is called *tadārammana*, a term that literally means having that object. It takes as its object, the object that has been apprehended by the *javana*.

What has been examined so far, are the different stages in a full cognitive process occasioned by a 'very strong' stimulus. Such a cognitive process necessarily culminates in registration (*tadārammana*) and is therefore called a process ending in registration. If the stimulus is 'strong', it will set in motion a cognitive process leading only up to *javana*. Such a process is called *javana-vāra*, a process leading to *javana*. If the stimulus is 'slight', the cognitive process will end in *voṭṭhapana*, the 'determining' consciousness. Such a process is called *voṭṭhapanavara*, a process ending in 'determining' consciousness. If the stimulus is 'very slight' it will result only in vibration of the *bhavaṅga*-consciousness. It will not result in a cognitive process and is, therefore, called *moghavāra*, a sensory stimulation without effect.

A full cognitive process ending in registration contains nine different stages. To make it complete another stage called the past-*bhavaṅga* (*atīta-bhavaṅga*) is added to the cognitive process. The past-*bhavaṅga* is the mind-moment that occurs in the process-free-consciousness immediately before its vibration (*bhavaṅga-calana*) due to the impact of the object at the sense-door. The entire process beginning with past-*bhavaṅga* and ending with *tadārammana* takes place within seventeen mind-moments. The calculation is made by assigning a definite number of moments to each stage of the process, in the following manner:

Stages of the cognitive process	Moments assigned
Past-*bhavaṅga* (*atīta-bhavaṅga*)	1
Bhavaṅga-vibration (*bhavaṅga-calana*)	1
Bhavaṅga-arrest (*bhavaṅga-upaccheda*)	1
Five-door adverting (*pañca-dvāra-avajjana*)	1
Sense-consciousness (*viññāṇa*)	1
Receiving/assimilating (*sampaṭicchana*)	1
Investigating (*santīraṇa*)	1
Determining (*voṭṭhapana*)	1
Javana	7
Registration (*tadārammana*)	2
Total number of mind-moments	17

As noted earlier, seventeen mind-moments are equal to the lifespan of one moment of matter. A moment of matter that arises simultaneously with a moment of mind ceases together with the seventeenth mind-moment. As shown above, a cognitive process lasts for seventeen mind-moments. In other words, a complete cognitive process lasts for seventeen mind-moments.

Why the cognitive process is calculated in this way, becomes clear when we examine the Vaibhāṣika-Sautrāntika controversy on the causality of cognition. An act of cognition involves the participation of at least three things: the sense-object, the sense-organ, and the sense-consciousness. As to

the lifespan of mind and matter, Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas do not make a distinction. Causality involves a temporal sequence between the cause and the effect. How can a causal relationship establish between three equally momentary things? The Vaibhāṣikas solve this problem by their theory of simultaneous causation (*sahabhū-hetu*): the cause needs not precede the effect. Both cause and effect are co-existent. Causality is the concomitance of two or more things. The sense object, the sense-organ, and cognition arise simultaneously and operate as cause and effect.

The Sautrāntikas reject the theory of simultaneous causation because the cause must necessarily precede the effect. To speak of causality when the cause and the effect are co-existent has no meaning. Therefore, the object must precede the act of cognition. This whole situation is brought into focus by the following objection raised by the Dārṣṭāntikas:

> The organs and the objects of sense-consciousness, as causes of sense-consciousness, belong to a past moment. When, for example, a visible object and the eye exist, the visual consciousness does not exist. When the visual consciousness exists, the eye and the visible object do not exist. In their absence, during the moment of visual consciousness, there is no possibility for the cognition of the object. All sense perceptions are indirect.[8]

This led the Sautrāntikas to establish their theory of the inferability of the external object (*bahyarthānumeyavāda*). What is directly known is not the object, but its representation. The object is inferred from its correspondence to the impression perceived. The causal relationship between the object and its cognition is determined by the peculiar efficiency of the sense-object. This is known as the theory of representative perception (*sākāra-jñāna-vāda*).

This is how the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas solved the problem posed by the theory of moments to the causality of cognition. The Vaibhasika position is that the external object, though momentary, can be directly cognized as it activates simultaneously with the act of cognition. The Sautrāntika position is that the momentary object can never be cognized directly. It has to be inferred, because the object as cause has to arise before the act of cognition.

The Theravādins' solution to the problem takes a form different from both. What enabled them to solve the problem was their theory that the lifespan of a moment of matter is longer than that of a moment of mind. The theory makes it possible for a given material thing to arise before the arising of consciousness, at least before the occurrence of one mind-moment, and yet be the object of that very same consciousness. A material object allows itself to be fully cognized by a series of seventeen cognitive events. In this way the Theravādins were able to establish their theory of direct perception of the external object, despite their recognizing the theory of moments.

8 ADV 79.

If the Theravādins retain the theory of direct perception, this does not mean that conceptual activity does not contribute to the original bare sensation. As far as one single cognitive process is concerned the mind does not edit the raw data of perception. The mind only performs the function of selective discrimination so that the external object is more clearly seen as the result of mental activity.

This is true of a single cognitive process based on the physical sense-organs. Each cognitive process is not only repeated several times but is followed by several sequels of mind door (ideational) processes, which exercise a synthesizing function on what is cognized. It is only then, and then only, that a distinct cognition of the object occurs.

Another issue that divided Buddhist schools of thought was the agent or instrument of perception. In the case of visual consciousness, for example, what is that really sees the object. In this connection, Bhikkhu Dhammajoti refers to four different views. The Vaibhāṣikas maintain that it is the eye, the visual organ that sees. It can do so only when it is associated with visual consciousness. It is the visual consciousness that cognizes the object. However, it can do so when it relies on the force of the eye. This seems to mean that while the eye sees object, visual consciousness is aware of it. A distinction is made between seeing and cognizing. The second view is held by Ācārya Dharmatrata: it is the visual consciousness that sees the object. The third view, held by Acarya Ghosaka, is that it is understanding (*prajñā*) conjoined with consciousness that sees the object. The fourth is the view held by the Dārṣṭāntikas: it is the confluence of consciousness and its concomitants that act as the agent of seeing.[9]

The Theravāda view is similar to the one held by Ācārya Dharmatrāta. It is the visual consciousness, the consciousness dependent on the eye that sees the visible object. One reason given by those who say that eye sees is the *sutta* passage: on seeing a visible object with the eye (*cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā*). For the Theravādins, this is an idiomatic expression, an accessory locution, like "he shot him with the bow." It is a case of metaphorically attributing the action of that which is supported by (visual consciousness) to that which is the support (visual organ), as when one says "the cots cry" when in fact it means that the children in the cots cry. Therefore, the sentence has to be rephrased as 'on seeing a visible object with visual consciousness' (*cakkhu-viññāṇena rupam disva*).[10] The ancients say: the eye does not see a visible object, because it has no mind; the mind does not see because it has no eyes. It is argued that if the eye sees, then during the time a person having non-visual consciousness too should be able to see visible things. This is because the eye is devoid of volition. Were consciousness itself to see a visible object, it would be able to see things lying behind a wall as well.[11]

9 Dhammajoti 2007: 22.

10 Vism 17.

11 Cf. AKB 29f; AKVy 92f.

The whole controversy on whether the eye sees, or eye-consciousness sees seems to be a semantic issue. As one sub-commentary observes, when it is maintained by some that it is the eye that sees, they do not mean every instance of the eye, but the eye supported by consciousness. Likewise, when others maintain that consciousness sees, they do not mean every instance of consciousness, but consciousness supported by the eye. Both groups recognize the cooperation of both eye and consciousness. However, there is this difference between the Vaibhāṣika and Theravāda positions: according to the former, it is the eye supported by consciousness that sees, whereas according to the latter, it is the consciousness supported by the eye that sees. The whole controversy, as the Sautrāntikas say, is a case of devouring empty space: depending on the eye and visible objects arises eye-consciousness. Therefore, the question as to what it is that sees and what it is that is seen, does not arise. There is no agent or action. What we really see is the play of impersonal elements (*dhamma*s) appearing as causes and effects. It is in conformity with worldly expressions that we say, the eye sees, consciousness cognizes. This interpretation can be included in the Theravāda as well. Consciousness cognizes is an agent-denotation definition, on the model of subject-predicate sentence. "Depending on the eye and the visible arises visual consciousness," is in the language of causality.[12]

What exactly constitutes the object of perception is another issue that arose in the context of the theory of atoms, what the Theravāda calls material clusters. The issue is how an atomically analyzable physical object becomes the object of sensory consciousness. There were two views. The Vaibhāṣikas say that an agglomeration of atoms becomes the object of sensory consciousness. The atoms assembled together in a particular manner are directly perceived. The succeeding mental consciousness synthesizes the raw data of perception into a synthetic unity that determines whether the object is a jug or a pot. This theory ensures that the object of immediate perception is not an object of mental interpretation, but something ultimately real.

The Sautrāntikas object to this view on the ground that if a single atom is not visible, a collection of atoms, too, is not visible. It is the unified complex, or the synthetic unity of the atoms that becomes the object of sensory consciousness. The Vaibhāṣikas reject this view because the synthetic unity of the atoms is not real. It is a product of mental interpretation. It is a case of superimposing a mental construct on the agglomeration of atoms. This makes the object of sensory consciousness something conceptual.

The Theravāda position is in the main similar to the Vaibhāṣika view. It refers to two alternative positions, both of which are not acceptable. The first is to suppose that one single atom (material cluster) impinges on the eye, the organ of sight. Here the reference is to the colour associated in a single

12 See *Mahānidāna-sutta*. D ii 55ff.

material cluster. The second alternative is to suppose that several atoms impinge on the organ of sight. Here the reference is to the colour associated with several material clusters. Both possibilities are rejected. This does not amount to a rejection of the Vaibhāṣika view. What it seems to mean is that the object of sensory consciousness is not a mere collection of atoms, but a conglomeration of atoms assembled in a particular manner.

What we have discussed so far relates to the five-door cognitive processes, those that have as their bases the five physical sense-organs. What is called a mind-door cognitive process occurs when ideas or images come into the range of the mind. It is an ideational process that operates independently of the physical sense-organs. It is the bare mind-door process.

Four conditions are necessary for an ideational process: (1) the mind must be intact, (2) mental objects must come within the mind's focus, (3) dependence on the heart-base and (4) attention. The stimulus at a mind-door process is graded into two as clear (*vibhūta*) and obscure (*avibhūta*). Unlike the objects of the five-door processes, which belong only to the present moment, the objects of the mind-door processes could belong to any period of time — past, present, or future. They could even be free from any temporal reference, as in the case of conceptual constructs (*paññatti*) and *nibbāna*, the unconditioned.

A mind-door process with a clear object has this sequence of events: (1) vibration of the *bhavaṅga* when an object enters the avenue of the mind-door, (2) the arrest of the *bhavaṅga*-consciousness, (3) mind-door adverting consciousness, (4) seven moments of *javana*, and (5) two moments of registration, after which the cognitive process subsides into *bhavaṅga* consciousness. In the case of a mind-door process occasioned by an obscure object, the two moments of registration do not occur.[13]

There are two occasions when an object enters the range of the mind-door. The first is when mind-door processes arise in response to and in consequence of a cognitive process based on any of the physical sense-organs. They are called consequent or consecutive mind-door processes. They are due to the circumstance that when a five-door process has just ceased, its past object comes to the mind's focus and sets off many sequences of mind-door processes. These mind-door processes contribute to the distinct recognition of a sense-object. The cognition of a given object depends on a number of thought processes that grasp, among other things, its shape, name, and so on. They are all supplemented with an overall process of synthesizing the disparate elements into the perception of a unity. All these functions are performed by the mind-door processes that arise as a sequel to the five-door processes.

13 ADVT 163.

The other occasion is when an object enters range of the mind-door entirely on its own, or naturally, i.e., without being occasioned by an immediately preceding five-door process. These are ideational processes that take place without the antecedent sensory impingement. Commentarial exegesis identifies three occasions for the revival of such ideational processes. The first is when one revives in memory what one has actually experienced with the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The processes of reflection occasioned by such revival are called experience-based processes. The second type occurs when one revives in memory what one has reflected on information or knowledge gathered from a secondary source different from firsthand experience. The processes of reflection occasioned by such revival are called information-based processes. The third occasion when ideational processes could occur is when one imaginatively constructs an object on the basis of what one has actually experienced and also on what one has learned from information gathered from a secondary source. The processes of reflection occasioned by such imaginative construction are called processes based on both.[14]

In the Burmese tradition there is a slightly different classification of the occasions of ideal revival. When one revives in memory what one has actually experienced, it is called occasioned by what one has seen (*diṭṭhavāra*). When one constructs in imagination fresh things based on one's own experience, it is called experience associated (*diṭṭha-sambandha*). When objects are constructed out of and connected with information gained either by listening to others or reading books, it is called hearing associated (*suta-sambandha)*. "Any apparently a priori object that may enter the field of presentation from any other sources, except the last two, is classed as things 'cogitated' (*viññatā*)."[15] Sarachchandra observes that the third category is not found in the Abidhamma commentaries, compiled in Sri Lanka. He further observes, what seems to be included in the category of the cogitated (*vinnata*) are "abstract concepts, judgments, and all forms of thinking that cannot be regarded as based on sensory experience."[16]

The absence of the third category in the Pali commentaries is not without significance. It shows that according to the mainstream Theravāda view, the third category is not acceptable. What is ideally revived should be based on past experience. Only what has been experienced through the five physical sense-organs of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching can be revived as an image in the mind.

14 Dhs-a 74.

15 Sarachchandra 1958: 63ff.

16 Ibid.

CHAPTER TEN

Mind in the Conditional Relations

In the Theravāda we find two versions of conditionality. Earlier is *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent arising). The principle of dependent arising is expressed as, when this exists that comes to be; [therefore] with the arising of this, that arises. The opposite process of ceasing is: when this does not exist, that does not come to be; [therefore] with the cessation of this, that ceases.

It is the principle of dependent arising that early Buddhism makes use of to explain the causal structure of individual existence. In the Abhidhamma this principle is expressed as the arising of effects evenly in dependence on a conjunction of conditions.[1] This, in other words, means that nothing arises from a single cause, and nothing arises as a single effect. This conditional causal principle is called *paṭṭhāna-naya*, the method of conditional relations. The doctrine of conditionality is an integral part of the *dhamma* theory. *Dhamma* theory is the analysis of the world of experience into a number of *dhamma*s, (elements) which cannot be further analyzed. Only the *dhamma*s are real. What cannot be brought under *dhamma* is a conceptual construct, with no corresponding objective reality.

There are three postulates that the doctrine of conditional relations recognizes as axiomatic:

i. Nothing arises without the appropriate causes and conditions. It rules out the theory of fortuitous origination (*adhicca-samuppanna*), the theory that rejects all principles causality and conditionality.
ii. Nothing arises from a single condition. This means that the Abhidhamma dissociates itself from all monistic theories that seek to explain the origin of the world from a single cause, conceived as a personal god or an impersonal god-head. This serves as a critique of all metaphysical theories that attempt to reduce the world of experience to an underlying trans-empirical principle.
iii. Nothing arises as a single, solitary phenomenon.

It is by rejecting these three views that the Abhidhamma doctrine of conditional relations is based. This means: from a number of conditions arise a number of conditioned things.

One conclusion arising from this situation is that *dhamma*s arise as clusters. This is why whenever consciousness arises, together with it, arise at least seven mental factors: contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), one-pointed-ness (*ekaggatā*), psychic life (*arūpa-jīvitindriya*)

1 Paṭis-a 251.

and attention (*manasikāra*). No psychic instance can occur with less than eight constituents, i.e., consciousness and its seven universal concomitants. Even the smallest psychic unit turns out to be a complex correlational system.

There are two other basic principles. One is that no mental or material *dhamma* can propel itself into existence by its own power. *Dhamma*s are completely devoid of own power. This amounts to the rejection of self-causation. The other is that no mental or material *dhamma* can be brought into being by a power external to the *dhamma*s. *Dhamma*s alone help other *dhamma*s to arise. Cessation of *dhamma*s is not due to causes and conditions. A *dhamma* that arises necessarily ceases.

In the Abhidhamma, while *paccaya* (condition) is used as a term for condition, *hetu* is exclusively used to mean roots, factors that determine the kammic quality of volitional acts. There are six roots: greed, hatred, and delusion and their opposites, non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. The first three are exclusively unwholesome. The other three are either wholesome or indeterminate. They are wholesome when associated with wholesome consciousness, indeterminate when they arise in resultant and functional consciousness. The conditioned states are consciousness and the mental factors associated with roots and the co-nascent material *dhamma*s.

Object condition (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*) causes the conditioned states to arise. The reference is to the six sense-objects: visible, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects. Its field is so wide, embracing not only the components of actuality, but also conceptual constructs having only consensual reality. The definition of the object-condition is not based on whether it is real or unreal, but whether it could enter the avenue of sense experience as an object of the cognitive process. The objects of the first five consciousnesses belong to the present moment. In contrast, mind-consciousness has as its objects, mental or material, real or conceptual, past, present and future, and also that which is free from time.

Predominance condition (*adhipati-paccaya*) has two kinds, object predominance and co-nascence predominance. The first is an extension of object condition. It refers to an object that dominates over the mental states arising as its result. Only objects that have a strong appeal to the individual can become the conditioning state. The second, co-nascence predominance, is a relation where the conditioning state exercises a dominant influence on the conditioned states. The conditioning states are concentrated intention (*chanda*), energy (*viriya*), consciousness (*citta*), and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*).

Proximity condition (*anantara-paccaya*) and contiguity condition (*samanantara-paccaya*) are identical. They refer to a relation where the conditioning state causes the conditioned state to arise immediately after it has ceased, preventing the intervention of another state between them.

The two conditions describe a temporal relationship between mental states that arise one after the other. Here, the consciousness and its concomitants that have just ceased are the conditioning states. The consciousness and its concomitants that arise immediately afterward are the conditioned states. This conditional relation highlights two things. One is that between the preceding and the succeeding mental states there is no gap or interstice. This is shown by the name given to this conditional relation. For *anantara* means there is no intervening gap or interstice. The second is that the preceding consciousness gives rise to the succeeding one in such a way that the latter conforms to the former. This explains why a process of cognitive events does not occur in a haphazard manner, but in a proper sequence, following the laws of psychological order (*citta-niyāma*). If proximity and contiguity conditions ensure the occurrence of consciousness in a linear sequence, this means that two or more consciousnesses do not arise at one and the same time by way of juxtaposition.

Co-nascence condition *(sahajāta-paccaya*) refers to a conditional relation where the condition causes the conditioned state to arise concurrently with it. Both the condition and the conditioned arise together. The co-nascence condition operates in the following instances: (a) each mental state for the other mental states associated with it, (b) each mental state in relation to material phenomena that arise together with it and (c) at the moment of rebirth the physical base of mind for the resultant consciousness and its concomitants.

Mutuality condition (*aññamañña-paccaya*) is an extension of the co-nascent condition with this difference: the conditioning state activates reciprocally. If A is a condition by way of co-existence to B, at the same time B is a condition by way of co-nascence to A. Both are on par, supporting each other simultaneously. Mutuality condition operates in the following instances: (a) consciousness and mental factors and (b) the physical base of mind and the resultant (*vipāka*) consciousness and its concomitants at the moment of rebirth.

Support condition (*nissaya-paccaya*) is when the conditioning state causes the conditioned state to arise by serving as its support. There are two varieties. One is co-nascence support (*sahajāta-nissaya*) which is identical with the co-nascence condition discussed above. The other is pre-nascence support (*purejāta-nissaya*), with two subsidiary types. One is base pre-nascence support (*vatthu-purejāta-nissaya*), where 'base' means the physical sense-organs and the physical basis of mental activity. In the course of an individual's existence, the six physical bases serve as pre-nascence conditions for the consciousness and its concomitants that take them as material support for their arising. At the time of rebirth, the physical base of mental activity and the resultant mental states arise simultaneously and support each other as co-nascence and mutuality conditions. Immediately after rebecoming (rebirth) the physical base of mental activities and the resultant metal states arise simultaneously and support each other as co-nascence and mutuality

conditions. Immediately after the moment of rebirth the physical base of mind begins to activate as a pre-nascence condition for the mind, mind consciousness, and their concomitants. The second variety of pre-nascence support is called object pre-nascence support (*vatthārammaṇa-purejāta-nissaya*). It is a relational situation where consciousness arises with its physical base as its support and object as well.

Decisive-support condition (*upanissaya-paccaya*) is so-called as it supports the conditioned as a powerful inducement. There are three types. The first is object-decisive support (*ārammaṇūpanissaya*) condition. It is another type of object condition, with this difference. It refers to only exceptionally desirable objects that cause consciousness and its concomitants to apprehend them. The second is proximity-decisive-support (*anantarūpanissaya*). It is the same as proximity condition, but for this difference: the preceding mental states cause the immediately succeeding to arise, because they strongly depend on the cessation of the preceding. The third is natural decisive support condition (*pakatūpanissaya*). It is wide-ranging as to include as its conditioning factors all past mental and material *dhamma*s exercising a strong influence for the arising at a later time of consciousness and its concomitants.

Pre-nascence and post-nascence conditions (*purejāta and pacchājāta-paccaya*s): pre-nascence condition refers to a relation where what arises earlier becomes a support for something that arises later. Conversely post-nascence refers to a relation where something arising later becomes a support for something that has arisen earlier. Because of their temporal dissimilarity, they can apply only to relations between mind and matter. Since the life span of matter is longer than that of mind, a material *dhamma* arising earlier can become a pre-nascence condition to a mental *dhamma* that arises later. In the same way, a mental *dhamma* arising later can become a post-nascence condition to a material *dhamma* that has arisen earlier.

There are two types of the pre-nascence: base pre-nascence (*vatthu-purejāta*) and object pre-nascence (*ārammaṇa-puerejāta*). The former refers to the physical sense-organs in relation to the five consciousnesses named after them and the physical base of mental activity in relation to mind and mind consciousness. These two conditions are based on the idea that the lifespan of matter is longer than that of mind.

Repetition condition (*āsēvana-paccaya*) refers to a conditional relation between mind and mind only. Its function is to cause the conditioned states to gain more and more proficiency so that the succeeding states come to gain more and more efficiency. The conditioning states are the mental *dhamma*s occurring in the *javana* moments of a cognitive process. The proficiency each succeeding moment gains by way of repetition is evaluated in terms of ethical quality.

Kamma condition (*kamma-paccaya*) is of two kinds. The first is co-nascent *kamma* condition. It is called so because the condition and the conditioned arise simultaneously. The reference is to *cetanā* (volition) as a *kamma* condition. Volition coordinates and causes the accompanying mental states to perform the respective functions. The mental and material *dhamma*s, referred to, are determined, fashioned and impelled by the force of volition. The other *kamma* condition is asynchronous (*nānākhaṇikā*), because of the temporal difference between the condition and the conditioned.

Result condition (*vipāka-paccaya*) where the conditioning factors in this conditional relation are the mental states that arise as a result of *kamma*. The conditioned factors are the self-same mental states and the material *dhamma*s that have arisen together with them. The role of the result condition is to have a tranquilizing effect on the conditioned states and to make them passive and quiescent. For the results of *kamma* arise effortlessly, and not as something propelled by any external force. While the mental *dhamma*s that arise as results of *kamma* are result-conditions with respect to each other, the co-nascent material *dhamma*s conditioned by them, do not in turn activate as a conditioning factor. The reciprocity is only between the mental states.

Nutriment condition (*āhāra-paccaya*) is where the conditioning factors are the four nutriments, on which living beings subsist. They are material food (*kabaḷiṅkārāhāra*), sensory contact (*phassa*), mental volition (*mano-sañcetanā*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). The term nutriment is used in a wider sense to include both material and mental food that govern both biological and mental life. These factors are called food because they nourish, maintain, and keep going the empiric individuality, which thus becomes a nutrimental process, a process of alimentation (*āhāraṭṭhitikā*). In their role as conditions, while material nutriment is related to the physical body, mental nutriment consisting of sensory contact, mental volition, and consciousness is related to the mental and material *dhamma*s that arise together with it.

The faculty condition (*indriya-paccaya*) exercises a dominating influence over the things related to it. There are twenty-two faculties. The first five faculty conditions are the physical sense organs. In their capacity as five kinds of sensitive material *dhamma*s, receptive and reactive to sense data, they determine the efficiency of the consciousnesses that take them as their bases. The relative strength or weakness of the sense organs reflects on the consciousnesses. The next two are faculties of masculinity and femininity. They are not recognized as faculty conditions. One reason given for this situation is that at the initial stages of embryonic development, they do not perform their respective functions of bringing about the sex-distinctions.

Next is life-faculty (*jīvitindriya*). It is twofold as mental and material. The first stabilizes and sustains all consciousnesses and their concomitants. The second is material life faculty, the factor that stabilizes and sustains *kamma*-originated materiality, namely, first five sense organs, two faculties of sex and the physical base of mental activity.

The remaining faculties are all mental. The first is mind-faculty. It means the whole of consciousness. The next five are five kinds of feeling: pleasure (*sukha)*, pain (*dukkha*), joy (*somanassa*), displeasure (*domanassa*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The next are the five spiritual faculties: faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

Among the last three faculties, the first is 'I will know the unknown' (*anaññātaññassāmītindriya*). It is the knowledge of the path of stream-entry. The second is the faculty of one who has 'final knowledge' (*aññātāvindriya*). It is the knowledge of the fruit of arahantship. The third is the faculty of final knowledge (*aññindriya*). All these immaterial faculties are each a co-nascent faculty condition for the mental states associated with them and the material *dhamma*s arising together with them.

In *jhāna* condition (*jhāna-paccaya*), *jhāna* is not used to mean higher reaches of mind attained in meditative absorption. As a conditioning factor *jhāna* here means close contemplation (*upanijjhāyana*) of an object. It refers to the following seven factors: initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), zest (*pīti*), one-pointed-ness (*ekaggatā*), joy (*somanassa*), displeasure (*domanassa*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These seven mental states as *jhāna*-conditions enable the mind to closely contemplate on its object. Among them while displeasure is unwholesome, the other six could be wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate. They all have as their conditioned states consciousness and the mental factors associated with them and the material *dhamma*s arising together with them.

The path condition (*magga-paccaya*) relates to the conditioned state by causing it to function as a means of reaching a particular destination. There are twelve factors functioning as path conditions: right view (*sammā diṭṭhi),* right intention (*sammā saṅkappa*)*,* right speech *(sammā vācā*), right action *(sammā kammanta), right* livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), right effort (*sammā vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), right concentration (*sammā samādhi*), wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*), wrong intention (*micchā saṅkappa*), wrong effort (*micchā vāyāma*) and wrong concentration (*miccha samādhi*). These twelve are called path factors, though they do not lead to the same destination. The first eight lead to realization of blissful states and the final goal of *nibbāna*. The last four lead to birth in woeful states. The states conditioned by the path factors are all types of rooted-consciousness, mental factors associated with them, and the material *dhamma*s arising together with them.

Association condition (*sampayutta-paccaya*) obtains only among mental states. It refers to a mental state that causes other mental states to arise together with it in such a way as to remain in inseparable association with them. The mental states so associated share the following four characteristics: a common physical basis, that is, a common physical sense-organ or the physical basis of mental activity, a common object, simultaneous origination, and simultaneous cessation.

In dissociation condition (*vippayutta-paccaya*), the relationship between mind and matter is not one of association (*sampayutta*). It is one of dissociation (*vippayutta*). Mind and matter exist together but remain separate, like a mixture of water and oil. However, what is dissociated (*vippayutta*) is not necessarily a dissociation condition. All material *dhamma*s are dissociated in relation to the mental. The dissociation condition functions in different ways, as co-nascence (*sahajāta*), post-nascence (*pacchājāta*), and as pre-nascence (*purejāta*). At the moment of re-becoming (rebirth) the mental states are a dissociation condition for the other kinds of *kamma*-born material *dhamma*s. In the course of life, consciousness and mental factors function as dissociation conditions for the material *dhamma*s of the body by way of post-nascence. The five physical sense organs and the physical seat of mental activity function as dissociation conditions for the seven consciousness elements by way of pre-nascence. Why the physical objects are not recognized, the answer is that when consciousness springs up, it springs up as if it were 'issuing forth' (*nikkhantā viya*) from within its physical base. There is some kind of close association between consciousness and its physical base, an association not observable between consciousness and its object. This shows that when something is related to something else by way of dissociation, there is in fact a close association between them.

Presence condition (*atthi-paccaya*) and non-disappearance condition (*avigata-paccaya*) refer to the same conditional relation. Here the term presence or non-disappearance refers to the presence or non-disappearance of the conditioning and the conditioned states at the time when the former activates as a condition in relation to the latter. It is not necessary for them to arise and cease together. What is necessary for them is to overlap at a time when the conditioning state can support the conditioned state in some way or other.

Absence condition (*natthi-paccaya*) and disappearance condition (*vigata-paccaya*) refer to the same relationship. Absence condition is so called because its absence gives an opportunity for the presence of the conditioned state. Likewise, disappearance condition is so called because its disappearance gives an opportunity for the appearance of the conditioned state. Both describe the linear sequence of consciousness, where the immediately preceding one disappears before the emergence of the immediately succeeding one. Both are identical with proximity and contiguity conditions.

This brings us to an end of our survey of the twenty-four conditions. It shows that a given thing can become, at one and the same time, a condition to something else in many ways. For example, the visual organ becomes a condition in relation to visual consciousness by way of support (*nissaya*), pre-nascence (*purejāta*), faculty (*indriya*), dissociation (*vippayutta*), presence (*atthi*) and non-disappearance (*avigata*).

In the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* of Ācariya Anuruddha, the twenty-four conditions are arranged into six groups as they structure the relations between the different *dhamma*s. The six groups are: (1) mind and mind, (2) mind and mind-and-matter, (3) mind and matter, (4) matter and mind, (5) mind-and-matter and concepts and mind, (6) mind-and-matter and mind-and-matter.[2]

Six conditions operate exclusively in relations between mind and mind: (1) proximity, (2) contiguity, (3) absence, (4) disappearance, (5) repetition and (6) association. The first four explain the conditionality of mental states that arise in linear sequence, the preceding yielding place to the succeeding, without any gaps between them. The fifth shows how they arise in the same way, while imparting more and more proficiency to the succeeding mental states. The sixth explains the conditionality of mental states arising simultaneously to constitute a cognitive act having a common basis, a common object, simultaneous origination, and simultaneous cessation. These conditional relations, as we have seen, cannot activate between mind and matter or between matter and matter.

There are five conditions that operate between mind, on the one hand, and mind-and-matter, on the other. They are roots, *jhāna*, path, *kamma*, and result.

There is only one condition where mind becomes the conditioning state exclusively in relation to matter, i.e., condition by way of post-nascence. This is because the life span of matter is longer than the life span of mind.

Similarly, there is only one condition where matter becomes the conditioning state exclusively to mind, i.e. the condition by way of pre-nascence, because of the disparity between mind and matter as to their life span.

There are only two ways in which mind-and-matter and concepts (*paññatti*) operate as conditions to mind. They are the two conditions by way of object and decisive support.

There are nine ways in which mind-and-mater become conditions in relation to mind-and-matter: by way of predominance, co-nascence, mutuality, support, nutriment, faculty, dissociation, presence, and non-disappearance.

2 CMA 185ff.

Another division of the twenty-four conditions is based on the time of their occurrence. On this basis there are four groups. The first group includes the conditions and the conditioned that function simultaneously. In other words, those that activate in the present. It includes fifteen conditions: roots, co-nascence, mutuality, support, pre-nascence, post-nascence, result, nutriment, faculty, *jhāna*, path, association, dissociation, presence and non-disappearance.

Our review of the twenty-four conditions shows that some conditions are repeated under different names. We refer to the three pairs: (1) proximity and contiguity, (2) presence and non-disappearance, and (3) absence and disappearance. Each pair, as we have noted, contains two identical conditions. If we eliminate what is repeated, we are left with twenty-one conditions. Why the number was increased to twenty-four could perhaps be explained in the context of the schematic order of exposition followed in presenting the doctrine of conditionality. The number twenty-four, unlike the number twenty one, is easily amenable to divisions, classifications, and combinations. It is very likely, therefore, that the number of conditions was increased from twenty-one to twenty-four to facilitate their schematic presentation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

What the Buddha Taught

What the Buddha taught is not a philosophy, nor can we call it a religion in its proper sense. Religion has been defined in many ways. However, if we go by what is common to most religions, it can be defined as "belief in or reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe."[1] It is also defined as man's relationship with the unseen, as "the human response to a transcendental reality, as voluntary subjection of oneself to God, as complete surrender to God, or as the recognition of all our duties as divine commandments."

If we go by the above definitions of religion, Buddhism avoids all such definitions. As a matter of fact, Buddhism gives its own definition of religion, if we can interpret it as a definition. In the *Dhammapada,* we read that people driven by fear go for refuge to many places — to hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines.[2] This, indeed, is no safe refuge; this is not the refuge supreme. Not by resorting to such a refuge is one released from all suffering.

The final goal of Buddhism is not union with a transcendental reality, as for example, god, or godhead, but complete elimination of suffering. So, what drives a person to a way of emancipation is not fear, but suffering.

*Issara i*s the term used in the Buddhist discourses to refer to what other religious teachers conceived as god. From the Buddhist perspective, the idea of an ever-lasting god or, an immortal soul comes under what Buddhism calls spiritual eternalism.

That everything is due to creation on the part of god (*sabbam issara-nimmana-hetu*) is one of the three sectarian views, rejected by Buddhism, because it fails to justify the efficacy of moral acts (*kiriyavāda*) and the role of human effort in practicing moral life (*viriyavāda*).

The cogency of this Buddhist argument we can see in an encounter the Buddha had with certain ascetics and Brahmins who believed in divine revelation. The Buddha says:

> There are some ascetics and Brahmins who maintain and believe that whatever a man experiences, be it pleasant, unpleasant or, neutral, all that is caused by god's act of creation. I went to them and questioned them (whether they held such a view), and when they affirmed it, I

1 *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (p. 6085).

2 Dhp 189.

> said: 'if that is so, venerable sirs, then people commit murder, theft and unchaste deeds due to god's act of creation; they indulge in lying, slanderous, harsh and idle talk due to god's act of creation; they are covetous, full of hate and hold wrong views due to god's act of creation. Those who fall back on god's act of creation as the decisive factor will lack the impulse and effort for doing this and not doing that. Since for them, in truth and fact, (the necessity for) action or inaction does not obtain.[3]

As the Buddha argues, a theory of divine creation is totally unacceptable because of two reasons. One is that it fails to establish a causal correlation between acts and their consequences. The other is that it equally fails to justify the necessity and desirability of human effort in pursuing the moral life. That everything is due to the fiat of a creator god amounts to theistic determinism, just as the view that everything is due to past *kamma* leads to kammic determinism.

Ācārya Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, makes the following assertive statement:

> We know the gods are false and have no concrete being.
> Therefore, the wise man believes them not.
> The fate of the world depends on causes and conditions.
> Therefore, the wise man may not rely on gods.
> Should Higher Knowledge come from an Omniscient God?[4]

One reason adduced in support of a theistic view of existence is that all higher knowledge should come from an omniscient divine being, not from a mere human being. Buddhism adopts the opposite position. To underpin this position, there is this story recorded in a Buddhist discourse.

The story begins with a Buddhist monk who lived during the time of the Buddha. One day, he came to be disturbed by a serious metaphysical problem. The problem was this: where do the four great elements of matter cease without remainder? In modern terms the problem translates as: where does matter cease without remainder? The monk thought that no human being could answer his question. So, he thought of putting the question to heavenly beings. Since that monk had developed such mental concentration, the way to the heavenly realms appeared before him. He first came to the lowest heavenly realm though the denizens there could not provide the answer to his question. So, he went from heaven to heaven, still failing to receive the answer to his query. Finally, he made the way to the Brahma world and put the question to the Great Brahma: "Friend, where do the four great elements of matter cease without remainder?" Then the Great Brahma said:

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3 *Titthāyatana-sutta.* A i 73.

4 Editors' note: the exact reference of this quote could not be located.

> Monk, I am Brahma, Great Brahma, the conqueror, the unconquered, the all-seeing, all-powerful, the lord, the maker and creator, the ruler, appointer and orderer, father of all that have been and shall be.

For the second and third time the monk repeated the question, yet he received the same evasive reply. When the monk insisted on receiving an unequivocal answer, the Great Brahma took him by the arm, led him to a corner and said:

> Monk, these heavenly beings believe there is nothing Brahma does not see, there is nothing he does not know, there is nothing he is unaware of. That is why I did not speak in front of them. But, monk, I myself don't know where the four great elements of matter cease without any remainder. You did make a mistake in bypassing the Buddha in your search for an answer to this question.

So, the monk came to the world of human beings and put the question to the Buddha. The Buddha said:

> You should not ask where the four great elements of matter cease without remainder. Instead, the question should be rephrased, as: where do earth, water, fire, and air find no footing and the answer is: where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous. That's where earth, water, fire, and air find no footing.[5]

Obviously, the purpose of this story is to show that the Great Brahma is ignorant, although he is considered to be all-knowing. The main message sought to be conveyed through this story is that higher knowledge comes not from God as believed by some, but from an enlightened human being (*manussa-bhūta*). This is just the opposite of what the Brahmins assert. The story also highlights that if there is anything called divinity it is but exalted humanity. An enlightened human being who is free from passion, aversion, and delusion is superior to all gods including the Great Brahma whom the Brahmins considered as the Creator of the world.

The parable of the staircase

As the Buddha says, the attempt to find union with the Great Brahma, whose existence cannot be verified, is like making a staircase without knowing where it is leading to. Addressing Vāseṭṭha, a Brahmin student, the Buddha says:

> Vāseṭṭha, it is just as if a man were to build a staircase for a palace at across roads. People might say: this staircase for a palace – do you know whether the palace will face, east or west, north, or south, whether it will be high, low or of medium height? And he would say 'no'. And they might say 'well then, you don't know or see what kind of a palace you are building the staircase for'. And he would say 'no'. Does not the talk of that man turn out to be stupid?

Vāseṭṭha: "Certainly, Reverend Gotama."[6]

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5 *Kevaṭṭa-sutta* (*Kevaḍḍha-sutta*). D i 223.

6 *Tevijja-sutta.* D i 244. (LDB 190ff)

God as the ineffable highest splendor

As can be seen from the following dialogue between the Buddha and Udayi, some Brahmin teachers conceived god as an ineffable splendor.

Buddha: Well then, Udayi, what is your teacher's doctrine?

Udayi: Our own teacher's doctrine, Venerable Sir, says thus: this is the highest splendor.

Buddha: But what is that highest splendor, Udayi, of which your teacher's doctrine speaks of?

Udayi: It is, Venerable Sir, a splendor, greater and loftier than which there is none. That is the highest splendor.

Buddha: But Udayi, what is that splendor, greater and loftier than which there is none?

Udayi: It is, Venerable Sir, that highest splendor, greater and loftier than which there is none.

Buddha: For a long time, Udayi, you can continue in this way, saying, a splendor greater and loftier than which there is none. That is the highest splendor.

Falling in love with the beauty queen of the kingdom

Buddha: Suppose a man were to say, I love and desire the most beautiful woman in this land and then he is asked, "good man, that most beautiful woman whom you love and desire, do you know whether she is a lady from the nobility or from a Brahmin family or from the trader class or worker class?" And he replies, "no." "Then, good man, do you know her name and that of her clan, or whether she is tall, short or of middle height, whether she is dark, brunette or golden skinned, or in what village or town or city she dwells." And he replies, "no." And then he is asked, "hence good man, you love and desire what you neither know nor see." And he answers, "yes." What do you think Udayi, that being so, would not that man's talk amount to nonsense?

Udayi: Certainly, Venerable Sir, that being so, that man's talk would amount to nonsense.

Buddha: But in the same way, you, Udayi, say a splendor greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the highest splendor, and yet you have not explained that splendor.

Udayi: Certainly, Venerable Sir, that being so, that man's talk would amount to nonsense.

Buddha: But in the same way, you, Udayi, say, "A splendor greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the highest splendor," and yet you have not explained that splendor.[7]

On the futility of prayers

Union with Brahma, the Creator (God), is the religious goal of the Brahmins. However, there was no unanimity among them as to the proper path to this

7 *Cūḷa-sakuludāyi-sutta.* M ii 62.

goal. One day two Brahmins, Vāseṭṭha and Bharadvāja referred this matter to the Buddha. Then the Buddha told Vāseṭṭha:

> Vāseṭṭha, it is just as if this river Aciravati were brimful of water so that a crow could drink out of it, and a man should come along wishing to cross over, to get to the other side, to get across, and standing on this bank, were to call out, "come here, other bank, come here." What do you think, Vāseṭṭha? Would the other bank of the river Aciravati come over to this side on account of that man's calling, begging, requesting or wheedling?
>
> No, Reverend Gotama.
>
> Well, now, Vāseṭṭha, those Brahmins learned in the three Vedas who persistently neglect what a Brahmin should do, and persistently do what a Brahmin should not do, declare, "we call on Indra, Soma, Varuna, Isana, Pajapati, Brahma, Mahiddhi, Yama." But that such Brahmins who persistently neglect, what a Brahmin should do, will, as a consequence of their calling, begging, requesting or wheedling, attain after death, at breaking-up of the body, to union with Brahma — that is just not possible.[8]

The notion of God-head as the ultimate ground of existence

Sometimes the notion of God is interpreted not as a personal god, but as a kind of ultimate reality considered as the ultimate ground of existence. The best example in this connection is the Upaniṣadic (Vedantic) teaching relating to Brahman, the cosmic soul as the ground of being.

It is worth noting here that Buddhism does not distinguish between two levels of reality, one metaphysical, the other empirical. The metaphysical reality is normally interpreted either as a personal god or as an impersonal god-head. What connects the two levels of reality is the soul. Since Buddhism rejects the notion of the soul, the notion of a metaphysical background to the world of experience similarly finds no place in Buddhism.

*Deva*s as heavenly beings

Although Buddhism does not believe in a creator god, it recognizes a large number of heavenly beings, beings that inhabit the myriad planes of existence recognized in Buddhist cosmology. Their recognition does not in any way contradict Buddhist teachings, because of the following reasons:

(a) None of these heavenly beings are portrayed as omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. If the Great Brahma believes that he is the creator of the world, it is a delusion on his part.
(b) Any kind of heavenly existence is within *saṃsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths. Therefore, no heavenly being is free from the three signs of sentient existence, namely, impermanence, suffering, and non-substantiality. Prolong heavenly life does not mean eternal life. From the Buddhist perspective, even

8 *Tevijja-sutta.* D i 244.

divine pleasures are suffering. For, according to the Buddhist definition of suffering, suffering means any kind of conditioned existence, whether it is extremely pleasant or otherwise.

(c) The final goal of Buddhism, which is *nibbāna*, is the complete elimination of passion, aversion, and delusion, all while living as a human being, not birth in heaven. The Buddha says that if a Buddhist monk practices higher life expecting to be born in heaven, he is aspiring for a lower goal.

(d) The Buddha himself says, the heavenly beings themselves fancy that to be born as human beings is to go to heaven.[9] For Buddhism, the true heaven is not up above but here below in this terrestrial world of human beings.

(e) Prayers to gods have no role to play in the Buddhist path to emancipation.

The role of miracles

There are three kinds of miracle:

1. *Iddhi-pāṭihāriya*: the ability to project mind-made images of oneself; to become invisible; to pass through solid things, such as walls; to penetrate solid grounds as if it were water; to fly through the air; to touch sun and moon.
2. *Ādesanā-pāṭihāriya*: it is some kind of hypnotic power, mind-reading or, guessing other people's character.
3. *Anusāsanī-pāṭihāriya*: the miracle of instruction.

Referring to the first two kinds of miracles, the Buddha says: it is because I see danger in the practice of these mystic wonders that I loathe and abhor and am ashamed thereof.[10]

The mystic wonder that the Buddha himself believed in and advocated was the miracle of instruction, that is, giving instructions or teaching.

Let us remember the Buddha is called *sattha*, which means teacher. Very relevant here is the Buddha's saying: you yourselves do the needful, the Buddhas only show the way.[11]

Is *nibbāna* Buddhism's counterpart to the ultimate ground of being? Nibbānic experience, in one important sense, means de-construction (*visaṃkhāra*) of consciousness, resulting from the destruction of passion, aversion, and delusion.[12] Nibbānic experience is not projected against a metaphysical background. *Nibbāna* is not the primordial cause, nor the ultimate ground of existence. Non-self means the absence of a self-entity both in its microcosmic and macrocosmic sense.

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9 *manussattaṃ kho bhikkhu devānaṃ sugatigamanasaṅkhātaṃ*. It 77.

10 *Kevaṭṭa-sutta* (*Kevaḍḍha-sutta*). D i 212.

11 *Tumhehi kiccamātappaṃ, akkhātāro tathāgatā*. Dhp 276.

12 Dhp 154.

What we have in Buddhism is not theology, but anthropology. The main thrust of the Buddha's teaching is not on a search for metaphysical first principles or final consummations of the universe. It is a search for the meaning of human life. Buddhism begins with what is immediately given, our immediate experience or the conscious reality, which nobody can deny. The Four Noble Truths, constituting the essence of Buddhism, does in fact begin with the fact of suffering as our immediate indubitable experience. In conquering suffering we have to fall back on our own resources, without depending on grace or divine intervention. Most importantly, unlike in theistic religions, the final emancipation in Buddhism is to be sought and found within this world, as a human being, not in an escape from it to a divine realm.

> Seek not rebirth afar in future states.
> Pray, what could heaven itself advantage you!
> Now, in this present world, and in the state,
> In which you find yourselves, be conquerors.[13]

13 A verse attributed to the Buddha in the *Milindapañha.* Editors' note: the exact reference of this quote could not be located.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Psychology of the Nibbānic Experience

Mind in the Nibbānic experience

The best way to understand what *nibbāna* is and what it is not, is to understand *nibbāna* in its proper context, in the context of the Four Noble Truths. They are presented in such a way as to show that *nibbāna* which is the Third Noble Truth follows as a logical sequence from the first two. If there is suffering and if there is a cause of suffering, then it logically follows that the elimination of the cause of suffering leads to the cessation of suffering, which *is nibbāna*.

What is important to remember is that *nibbāna* is defined as cessation of suffering. It is not the cessation of life, nor is it the annihilation of an independently existing self-entity, either to be annihilated in a physical sense, or to be perpetuated in a metaphysical sense. When *nibbāna* is realized, what comes to an end is not a self-entity, but the false belief in such an entity.

It is in this context that we should understand the significance of the following statement of the Buddha:

> Some ascetics and Brahmins accuse me wrongly, baselessly, falsely, and groundlessly, saying that the recluse Gotama is a nihilist and preaches the annihilation, destruction, and non-existence of an existent being. That is what I am not and do not affirm. Both previously and now, I preach suffering and the cessation of suffering.[1]

As this quotation shows, the charge of nihilism was not something new; it prevailed during the time of the Buddha himself.

Nibbāna means the imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion have been finally extinguished.[2] *Nibbāna* is defined more in terms of its experiential characteristics rather than in terms of metaphysics. The basic idea conveyed by the term *nibbāna* is that of extinguishing a fire. Everything, insists the Buddha, is burning. Burning with what? Everything is burning with the three fires of passion, aversion, and delusion. These three fires are the three basic factors of moral evil, passion, aversion, and delusion to which all unwholesome mental dispositions such as anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, depression, afflictions, disturbing and destructive negative emotions can be traced. When they are eliminated, all other defilements come to an end with no possibility of further growth. Therefore, the final deliverance which is *nibbāna* came to be defined as the extinction of the three fires of

1 *Alagaddūpama-sutta*. M i 130.

2 Gombrich 1996: 132–133.

passion, aversion, and delusion. One who has extinguished the three fires came to be aptly defined by the metaphor of being cool (*sītibhūta)* or pacified (*nibbuta*). The absence of the three defiling factors should be understood in a positive sense as well. Absence of passion is presence of such qualities as charity, liberality, and renunciation. Absence of aversion is the presence of amity, goodwill, benevolence, and loving kindness. Absence of delusion is the presence of higher knowledge and wisdom.

Passion and aversion are defiling emotive factors, whereas delusion is the defiling cognitive factor. Elimination of the two emotive factors gives rise to compassion. Elimination of the cognitive factor gives rise to wisdom: compassion and wisdom are the two main components of the nibbānic experience.

Cessation of passion, aversion and delusion is the standard definition of *nibbāna*. All other dimensions of *nibbāna, nibbāna* as the highest emancipation, as the highest happiness and so on, are but different perspectives of understanding *nibbāna.*

Passion, aversion, and delusion are described as limiting factors (*pamanakarana*). When one is infatuated with passion (*ratta*), overcome by aversion (*duṭṭha*), and blinded by delusion (*mulha*), one does not see things as they actually are. Since *nibbāna* is free from these limiting factors, it is described as limitless or immeasurable (*appamāna*). The limiting factors are also described as boundaries (*sīmā*) as they set bounds to and thus circumscribe our freedom. One who has realized *nibbāna* is described as one who has gone beyond the boundaries (*sīmātiga*), the boundaries of passion, aversion, and delusion. The three limiting factors are also called barriers (*mariyādā*). One who has realized *nibbāna* is described as one who "lives with a mind in which all barriers have been broken asunder."[3]

Nibbāna as the highest level of knowledge

Absence of delusion means the presence of higher knowledge or wisdom. Realization of *nibbāna* is itself defined as attainment of knowledge. The knowledge in nibbānic experience is described as wisdom (*paññā*), accurate or exact knowledge (*pariññā*), gnosis (*aññā)*, higher knowledge (*abhiññā*), and insight (*vipassanā*).[4]

Higher knowledge is defined as knowledge of phenomena as they actually are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇa*). 'Phenomena as they actually are' refer to the five aggregates of grasping. To the question raised by the Buddha himself, "what, monks, are the things that should be thoroughly comprehended through knowledge," the

3 Sn 795.

4 *Sangīti-sutta*. D iii 230.

Buddha himself provides the answer, "it is the five aggregates of grasping — so should it be answered."[5] Thus, for Buddhism higher knowledge is not the knowledge of a metaphysical reality, as a personal god or an impersonal godhead. Rather, it is the final awakening to the true nature of the world of sensory experience by fully comprehending the five aggregates of grasping.

What takes place when *nibbāna* is realized is not a change in the nature of reality, but a change in our perspective of the nature of reality. Impermanence is not a problem in itself. It becomes a problem when it is wrongly considered as permanence. This is called perception of permanence in impermanence. In the same way, absence of a self-entity is not a problem in itself. It becomes a problem when it is wrongly considered as a self-entity. This is called perception of self in what is not self. What prevents the realization of *nibbāna* is not the nature of reality, but our unwarranted assumptions that do not conform to the nature of reality. What comes to an end when *nibbāna* is realized is not the world, rather it is a wrong interpretation of the world.

Thus, for Buddhism, what actually matters is not the nature of world per se, but the world as interpreted and constructed through the lens of our ego-centric perspectives: our views and beliefs, our speculative theories and dogmatic assertions. This is why the Buddha sometimes explains theoretical views (*diṭṭhi*), in same framework reserved for explaining suffering: views (*diṭṭhi*), origin of views (*diṭṭhi-samudaya*), cessation of views (*diṭṭhi-nirodha*), and the path that leads to the cessation of views (*diṭṭhi-nirodha-gāmini-paṭipadā*).[6] Cessation of views is cessation of suffering.

When Vacchagotta, the itinerant philosopher asked the Buddha: Venerable Gotama, do you have a view of your own, the Buddha replied:

> The Tathāgata, O Vaccha, has given up all views (*diṭṭhi*). However, the Tathāgata has viewed (*diṭṭha*) thus: this is materiality, this is its arising, this is its cessation, this is feeling, this is perception, these are mental formations; this is consciousness, and so on.[7]

In the commentarial exegesis we find "freedom from views" (*diṭṭhi-nissaraṇa*) as another expression for *nibbāna*.[8]

Nibbāna as world-transcendence

The Buddhist idea of world-transcendence is expressed as cessation of the world (*loka-nirodha*): "in this fathom-long body, endowed with consciousness and perception," says the Buddha, "I declare the world, the origination of

5 Ibid.

6 *Abyākatavatthu-sutta*. A iv 68.

7 *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*. M i 487.

8 M-a iii 144.

the world, the cessation of the world, and the path that leads to the cessation of the world." "Cessation of the world" is sometimes called "the end of the world" (*lokanta*).[9]

For Buddhism, the world means the world of experience, in other words, the five aggregates of grasping. As the Buddha says:

> I do not say that the world's end could be known, seen, or reached by travelling. Nor do I say that without reaching the end of the world, an end of suffering can be made.[10]

All suffering, from the Buddhist perspective, is due to self-appropriation, a process manifesting in three ways: this is mine (*etaṃ mama*), this I am (*eso'ham'asmi*), this is my self (*eso me attā*). It is in relation to the five aggregates that the unenlightened person imposes this process of self-appropriation. Therefore, to transcend the five aggregates of grasping (= the world), this three-fold self-appropriation should come to an end. The cessation of the threefold appropriation has to be accomplished by the opposite process of self-negation: this is not mine (*netaṃ mama*), this I am not (*n'eso'ham asmi*), this is not my self (*n'eso me attā*).[11]

Realization of *nibbāna* means the ending of the process of self-appropriation. This means that the Tathāgata does not identify himself with any of the five aggregates, selectively or collectively:

> The five aggregates on the basis of which one would designate (identify) the Tathāgata, in the case of the Tathāgata, they are given up, their root broken, uprooted like a palm-tree, and are beyond all possibility of their ever again arising in the future. The Tathāgata is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable, just as the deep ocean.[12]

If the Tathāgata is not comprehensible, it is because he does not identify himself with any of the five aggregates. If I do not identify myself with anything in the world, then from my point of view, I become unidentifiable by others.

The idea of the five aggregates been given up should not be understood in a literal sense. The arising (*samudaya*) and the ceasing (*atthaṅgama*) of the five aggregates means not their actual arising and ceasing. Rather, it is the arising and ceasing of the attachment or clinging to them. 'In this way arises material form' means 'in this way arises attachment to material form'. 'In this way ceases material form' means 'in this way ceases attachment to material form'. This is true of the other aggregates as well. When the Buddha says, "the five aggregates should be abandoned (*pahātabbā*), this means

9 *Rohitassa-sutta* and *Piya-sutta*. S i 62 & 72.

10 *Rohitassa-sutta*. A ii 49.

11 *Yadanicca-sutta*. S iv 2.

12 *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*. M i 487.

that one should abandon attachment to them."[13] When understood thus, the abandonment of the five aggregates by the Tathāgata means the abandonment by him of the attachment and clinging to them. It is extremely important to remember this psychological meaning of arising and ceasing of the five aggregates. To overlook this connotation is a gross misinterpretation of the Buddhist teaching on the nibbānic experience. If the Tathāgata does not identify himself with any of the five aggregates this means that the Tathāgata has transcended the world.

The Tathāgata is neither distinct nor separate from the five aggregates. Given this observation, the relation between the Tathāgata and the five aggregates can be subsumed under two headings: (a) the Tathāgata is neither identical with nor distinct from the five aggregates; (b) the Tathāgata is not the five aggregates, nor is he without the five aggregates.

This situation, which appears rather paradoxical, could be understood as follows: that the Tathāgata is not identical with any of the five aggregates, or comprehensible with reference to them, entails that he has transcended the world. That the Tathāgata is not distinct or apart from the five aggregates means that he does not identify with anything that transcends the five aggregates (= the world), either; i.e., a metaphysical reality that goes beyond the aggregates themselves (= the world). This idea is very well expressed in the following statement:

> Monks, when a monk's mind is freed, *deva*s headed by Indra, Brahma and Pajapati do not succeed in their search for something to which the mind of the Arahant is attached. What is the reason for this? I say that the Arahant is not knowable (*ananuvejja*) in this very life itself.[14]

We find articulated here the Buddhist idea of world transcendence, an idea beautifully illustrated by the simile of the lotus flower:

> Just as, o monks, the lotus born in water, grown in water, rises above the water and stands unsullied by the water, even so the Tathāgata grows up in the world, rises above the world, and stays unsullied by the world.[15]

Nibbāna as the one and only unconditioned experience:

> Monks, there is 'not-born', 'not-become', 'not-made', and 'not-constructed'. Monks, if 'not-born', 'not-become', 'not-made', 'not-constructed' were not, no deliverance from the 'born', 'become', 'made', and 'constructed' would be known. But, monks, since there is 'not-born', 'not-become', 'not-made', and 'not-constructed', therefore deliverance from the 'born', 'become', 'made', and 'constructed' is known.[16]

13 *Pariññā-sutta*. S iii 26.

14 *Alagaddūpama-sutta*. M i 140.

15 *Puppha-sutta*. S iii 137.

16 Ud 80.

This quotation refers to the difference between *saṃsāra*, which is 'born, become, made and constructed', on the one hand, and *nibbāna*, which is 'not-born, not-become, not-made, and not-constructed' on the other. It seems to give the impression that *nibbāna* is some kind of metaphysical reality into which the Tathāgata enters. In point of fact, some modern scholars interpret the four words, 'not-born', 'not-become, 'not-made', and 'not-constructed' as conveying four different meanings in support of such a metaphysical interpretation of *nibbāna*. Quite in contrast to this modern interpretation is the Theravāda commentarial exegesis. It says that these four words connate the same thing, because they are used in a synonymous sense to show that *nibbāna* is not brought about by causes and conditions. In the Buddhist discourses we find become (*bhūta*), constructed (*saṅkhata),* and dependently arisen (*paṭicca-samuppānna*) used in a synonymous sense. What they all entail is that whatever is dependently arisen is born, become, constructed and made. As such *nibbāna* should be understood in the opposite sense, as not subject to the principle of dependent arising.

In the above quotation, *nibbāna* as psychological experience is presented in an objective sense, as if *nibbāna* were some kind of external reality. The kind of language used here is meant to emphasize that *nibbāna* represents the one and only unconditioned experience, an experience free from the three basic factors of moral evil. Hence the Buddha says, "the cessation of passion, aversion, and delusion is the unconditioned."[17] The cessation of passion, aversion, and delusion, in positive terms, means the presence of generosity, compassion, and wisdom. In contrast to passion, aversion, and delusion that function as limiting factors, compassion and wisdom are unconditioning factors, the factors that free the mind from all that is evil and unwholesome. This is precisely why nibbānic experience is presented as the one and only unconditioned experience.

Nibbāna as de-construction (*visaṅkhāra*)

Another way to understand the nature of nibbānic experience is to understand it in the light of the term deconstruction (*visaṅkhāra*). From the Buddhist perspective, individual existence in its saṃsāric dimension is a process of construction. This can be clearly seen in the definition given to volitional constructions (*saṅkhārā*):

> And why, monks, do you call them volitional constructions. They construct the constructed, monks, therefore, they are called volitional constructions. And what is the constructed that they construct? They construct constructed material form as material form; they construct constructed feeling as feeling; they construct constructed perception as perception; they construct constructed volitional constructions as

17 *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*. S iv 359.

> volitional constructions; they construct constructed consciousness as consciousness. They construct the constructed, monks, therefore they are called volitions (*saṅkhārā*).[18]

This definition shows that though volitional constructions (*saṅkhārā*) are one of the five aggregates, they construct not only other aggregates, but themselves as well. From the Buddhist perspective, individual life is a process of construction through the imposition of the threefold grasping: this is mine, this I am, this is myself.

In contrast *nibbāna* represents complete de-construction (*visaṅkhāra*). Hence immediately after realizing *nibbāna*, the Buddha says:

> My mind has come to de-construction. I have attained the destruction of cravings.[19]

Thus, with the destruction of all cravings that give rise to all volitional constructions, the mind comes, not to destruction, but to de-construction.

When the mind has reached de-construction, the five aggregates do remain. Yet they are no more constructed, in the sense that the Tathāgata does not impose on them the three kinds of clinging.

> That which is selfless, hard it is to see;
> Not easy is it to perceive the truth.
> But who has ended craving utterly
> Has naught to cling to, he alone can see.
> For one who is clinging, there is agitation; for one who has no clinging, there is no agitation; there is calm; when there is calm there is no attachment; when there is no attachment, there is no coming-and-going; when there is no coming-and-going, there is no disappearance and reappearance; when there is no disappearance and reappearance, there is neither here nor there nor in-between. This, indeed, is the end of suffering.[20]

Nibbāna as conceptual non-proliferation

The difference between *saṃsāra* and *nibbāna* can also be understood in the light of the difference between conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) and conceptual non-proliferation (*nippapañca*). It is worth noting here that the cognitive process of an unenlightened person gives rise to conceptual proliferation, a proliferation based not only on the present objects, but on objects on past as well as in the future. At this stage, the individual is overwhelmed and overpowered by his own unrollable thoughts. Rather than having a mind under his own control, he comes under the irrepressible dominance of his own to mind. This is another way of referring to saṃsāric experience.

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18 CDB 915.

19 *visaṅkhāra-gatam citttam. tanhanam khayam ajjhaga.* Dhp 154.

20 S iv 130 (BJE).

If a person, says the Buddha , does not delight, welcome, and hold fast to such conceptual proliferation,

> then this is the end of the underlying tendency to lust, of the underlying tendency to aversion, of the underlying tendency to views, of the underlying tendency to doubt, of the underlying tendency to conceit, of the underlying tendency to desire for being, of the underlying tendency to ignorance; this is the end of resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, of brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words and false speech; here all these evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.[21]

Commentarial exegesis identifies the roots of this conceptual proliferation as craving conceit, and views, on account of which the mind 'embellishes' experience by interpreting it in conceptual terms of mine, I, and myself.[22] It is this threefold appropriation of the five aggregates by way of craving, conceit, and view that constitutes saṃsāric experience. When the three roots of conceptual proliferation are uprooted, there is nibbānic experience. Therefore, another expression for the nibbānic experience is conceptual non-proliferation (*appapanca, nippapanca*). How the cognitive process of an unenlightened person gives rise to conceptual proliferation, a proliferation based not only on the present objects, but on the objects in the past as well as in the future, needs explanation. At the stage referred to, the individual is overwhelmed and overpowered by his own thoughts. Rather than having a mind of his own, he comes under the irrepressible dominance of his own mind. This is another way of referring to saṃsāric experience.

If a person, says the Buddha, does not delight, welcome, and hold fast to such conceptual proliferation, then:

> this is the end of the underlying tendency to lust, of the underlying tendency to aversion, of the underlying tendency to views, of the underlying tendency to doubt, of the underlying tendency to conceit, of the underlying tendency to desire for being, of the underlying tendency to ignorance; this is the end of resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words, and false speech; here these evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.[23]

Since there are six sense-faculties, called the six internal contact-spheres (*phassāyatanāni*), there can be only six cognitive processes culminating in conceptual proliferation. To whatever extent is the course of the six internal contact-spheres, to that extent is the course of the conceptual proliferation. Therefore, either 'the complete cessation of the six internal contact-spheres' or 'the complete absence of all conceptual proliferation' entails the same thing. Both refer to nibbānic experience from two different angles.

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21 MLDB 202.

22 See M-a ii 73ff.

23 See *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*. M i 111.

When the six internal contact-spheres comes to complete cessation, it is not proper to say that something remains, or that something does not remain, or that something both remains and does not remain, or that something neither remains nor non-remains. Why? It is because such a predication amounts to conceptually proliferating what is not conceptually profitable(*appapañcaṃ papanceti*).

The words 'complete cessation of the six internal contact-spheres', as used above, should not be understood in a literal sense to mean the complete cessation of the internal contact-spheres themselves. It means that when one realizes *nibbāna* one does not cling to the internal contact spheres themselves, by way of craving, conceit, and view.

Nibbānic experience as freedom from the I-conceit (*asmimāna*)

I-conceit can manifest in three ways: I am superior, I am inferior, or I am equal to someone else. Since the arahant is free from the I-conceit, he does not make such I-based comparison. Nor does he project the eye-conceit in relation to *nibbāna*, either:

> having directly known *nibbāna* as *nibbāna*, he does not conceive (himself) as *nibbāna*, he does not conceive (himself) apart from *nibbāna*, he does not conceive *nibbāna* to be mine'; he does not delight in *nibbāna*.[24]

It is not that the arahant is not aware of *nibbāna*. Awareness is fundamental to the nibbānic experience. If not for awareness, the nibbānic experience would be some kind of mystical experience. What is stressed in the above quotation is that the arahant does not consider *nibbāna* as an object, as an object to be grasped. He is aware of *nibbāna* but is not conscious of *nibbāna*. To be conscious of something is not the same as to be aware of something.

Nibbāna as the attainment of cessation

Attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*) is the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*). In one who has reached this state of *saññā-vedayita-nirodha*, the bodily, verbal, and mental functions have been suspended and come to a standstill. Yet life is not exhausted, the vital heat is not extinguished, and the faculties are not destroyed. It is the suspension of all consciousness and mental activity, and not their cessation that is called the cessation of perception and feeling.

Nibbāna and the attainment of cessation are not identical. *Nibbāna* means the cessation of passion, aversion, and delusion, whereas attainment of cessation is the cessation of perception and feeling. There is, however, a close connection between them. It concerns the Buddhist definition of the

24 *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*. M i 32.

highest level of happiness. In a sequence of ascending levels of happiness, it is claimed that happiness culminates in the attainment of cessation. To the question, if there is no feeling in this attainment, how could there be happiness in it, the Buddhist answer is that it is the very absence of feeling that qualifies it to be called happiness. In this connection, the Buddha declares: "wherever happiness is found and in whatever way, the Tathāgata describes that as included in happiness."[25]

When Sāriputta claimed that *nibbāna* is happiness, a monk called Udayi exclaimed: how could there be happiness, if there is no feeling in *nibbāna*.[26] Nibbānic experience is not without feelings as we shall see in the sequel. As such, it is obvious that here the reference is to an arahant's experience when he is in the attainment of cessation. Sāriputta's reply is reminiscent of the Buddha's declaration, referred to above. Sāriputta, too, declares that it is the very absence of feeling that is called happiness.

The conclusion that we can draw from the juxtaposition of attainment of cessation and *nibbāna* is this: when an arahant, the one who has realized *nibbāna*, abides in the attainment of cessation, he experiences the highest happiness.

An arahant can experience many levels of happiness, while being completely free from passion, aversion, and delusion. When he is in different levels of *jhāna*, he experiences different levels of happiness, and when he is in the attainment of cessation, he experiences the highest level of happiness.

Nibbāna as the immortal

The term immortal (*amata*) occurs often in the discourses of the Buddha. When Brahma Sahampati invited the Buddha to preach the newly discovered Dhamma, the words he used were: "let the Enlightened One open the door to the immortal."[27] Again, when the Buddha was on his way to set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma, he told Upaka, the itinerant ascetic that he was going to Benares to beat the drum of immortality (*amata-dundubhi*).[28] These and many other references show that in common with many other religions, Buddhism, too, has as its final goal, the realization of immortality.

Since Buddhism does not recognize an immortal soul, or an eternal heaven as its final goal, in what sense are we to understand the nibbānic experience as the experience of immorality? What we need to remember here is that although the arahant has the five aggregates and that they are subject to impermanence and death, he does not identify with any of the five aggregates,

25 *Pañcakanga-sutta*. S iv 223.

26 Ibid.

27 *Ayācana-sutta*. S i 136.

28 *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*. M i 160.

taken selectively or collectively. The arahant does not experience death as such. Of course, death as a physical event cannot be overcome. Yet since he does not identify with the five aggregates, which are subject to death, in that sense the arahant has won a psychological victory over the inevitable phenomenon of death. The experience of death is present only when one identifies oneself with what is subject to death. Therefore, the liberated saint does not die per se. If he did, he would be born again. For according to Buddhism, death is always followed by re-becoming (rebirth). The truth of the matter is that saints never die. This is precisely why in the Buddhist discourses, the nominal and verbal derivatives from √*mṛ* (to die) are not applied in respect of the liberated saint. The modern practice of using such expressions as the death of the Buddha, the dead arahant and so on, does really amount to a gross misinterpretation of the Buddhist idea of emancipation.

In the context of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self, the concept of immortality too assumes a new dimension. Immortality cannot be the perpetuation of a self-entity into eternity. Paradoxically it turns out to be the very opposite of any perpetuation. Immortality is what results from the elimination of the ego-illusion. What is unique about the Buddhist concept of immortality is that it can be achieved, here and now, while the mortal frame remains. What is more optimistic than to be told that death, the greatest hazard one has to face in this world, can be conquered in this very life itself.

Liberation through wisdom and liberation of mind

What is common to all arahants is complete emancipation from all suffering. Despite this commonality, there can be differences among them as to attainments. In this respect, there are two kinds of arahants. The first is one who is liberated through wisdom (*paññā-vimutta*). Through wisdom he has fully destroyed all defilements (*āsavakkhaya*). The other kind of arahant is called the one who is liberated in two ways (*ubhato-bhāga-vimutta*). Such an arahant is called so because besides being liberated through wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*), he has also liberation of mind (*ceto-vimutti*). Liberation of mind means an expression for the ability to unify and concentrate mind through the four *jhāna*s and the four attainments. Liberation of mind does not ensure complete emancipation from suffering unless it is supplemented by liberation through wisdom. Wisdom is the deciding factor: the extinction of defilements is to be realized by means of wisdom. This is why liberation through wisdom is common to both kinds of arahants. Liberation through wisdom is rightly defined as the imperturbable mental freedom (*akuppā-ceto-vimutti*).

In this distinction between two kinds of arahants, what comes into focus is the distinction between concentration (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*). When it comes to emancipation the deciding factor is not higher levels of concentration, but an insight into the nature of actuality. In pre-Buddhist meditational practices, what was sought after was mind's concentration

(*samatha*) as an end in itself, not wisdom (*vipassanā*). This is precisely why the Buddha-to-be was not satisfied with meditational practices taught to him by Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. In the Buddha's teaching on emancipation, it is to wisdom that pre-eminence is given.

Jhāna or higher levels of mind's unification is only a means to an end, the end being the realization of wisdom. Exclusive emphasis only on higher levels of mind's unification as an end in itself can have many pitfalls. As Bhiksu Sangharakshita says:

> to get stuck in a super-conscious state, the fate that befalls so many mystics, without understanding the necessity of developing insight is not a blessing but an unmitigated disaster.[29]

The two *nibbāna* elements

Designated as, *saupādisesa* and *anupadisesa*, there are two *nibbāna* elements. The first is *nibbāna* element with base, and the other *nibbāna* element without base. What is common to an arahant when he is in either of these two *nibbāna* elements is described as: his influxes are extinct, he has lived the higher life to the full, he has done what has to be done, he has laid down the burden, reached the goal, fully destroyed the bonds of existence, and is released with full understanding.[30]Despite this commonality, there is this difference in the two *nibbāna* elements.

When an arahant is in *nibbāna* element with base, his five physical faculties still remain and function. Therefore, he experiences likes and dislikes, pleasures, and pains. Yet when he experiences such feelings, he knows that these are impermanent and therefore they do not bind him. They are not experienced with passion and aversion, with emotional reaction to them. However, since the arahant has extirpated passion, aversion, and delusion, this nibbānic experience is called *nibbāna* with base. On the other hand, when an arahant experiences *nibbāna* with no base: here itself, all that is felt, being not delighted in, will become cool.

In the context of the two *nibbāna* elements, what exactly is meant by base (*upādi*)? Does it refer to the five physical sense faculties, because of which the arahant experiences likes and dislikes, pleasures, and pains? Or does it refer to the five aggregates? For the presence of the five aggregates implies the presence of the physical sense-organs.

Accordingly, *nibbāna* element with no base should mean when the five aggregates are discarded for good: all that is felt, being not delighted in, will become cool. *Nibbāna* element with no base comes at the last moment of the

29 Sangharakshita 2001: 110.

30 *Nibbānadhātu-sutta.* It 44.

arahant's life, when the five aggregates break up. To state more specifically, it is the final passing away of the Arahant. The most convincing evidence for this conclusion comes from the canonical statement: the Tathāgata fully passes away through the *nibbāna* element with no base.[31]

We could even refer to *nibbāna* with no base as the final *nibbāna*, if it is understood as taking place, not after death, but in this very life. *Nibbāna* with no base is not some kind of metaphysical reality into which the arahant enters after the final passing away; it is not a place of eternal rest for the arahant.

The Buddhist doctrine of non-self precludes any such metaphysical conclusion. Nowhere in the Buddhist discourses is there any reference to *nibbāna* after the final passing away of the arahant. The whole of the nibbānic experience is to be realized in this very life. There is only one unconditioned experience. It is none other than the nibbānic experience, which is to be realized in this very life. Since Buddhism dissociates itself from spiritual eternalism (*Sassatavāda*), there is absolutely no possibility within early Buddhism to speak of a post-mortem *nibbāna*, in whichever way it is sought to be interpreted.

It is true that *nibbāna* element with base is said to occur in this very life (*diṭṭhadhammika*) and the *nibbāna* element without base occurs subsequently (*samparāyika*). Subsequent does not necessarily mean after death. Rather, in this particular context, it means subsequently in this very life. That is precisely why the words here itself (*idh'eva*) are used in referring to the occurrence of *nibbāna* element with no base. According to the very definitions given to the two *nibbāna* elements, *nibbāna* element with base comes first and *nibbāna* element without base comes subsequently. Let it be repeated, both *nibbāna* experiences occur in this very life, not in a here-after.

In all other religions, their final goal can be realized only after death. According to Buddhism, however, its final goal, which is *nibbāna*, not only can be realized, but has to be realized in this very life.

The post-mortem condition of one who has realized *nibbāna*

What then is the after-death position of the Tathāgata? Is it complete annihilation in a physical sense (materialist annihilationism)? Or is it eternal continuation in a metaphysical sense (= spiritual eternalism)? The after-death position of an enlightened person was the subject of a dialogue between the Buddha and Vacchagotta, an itinerant philosopher who was very much prone to metaphysical speculations.

In this dialogue, Vacchagotta asks the Buddha whether a liberated monk, after dissolution of the body, reappears or does not reappear, or both reappears and does not reappear, or neither reappears nor reappears. When

31 *tathāgato anupadisesaya nibbanadhatuya parinibbayati. Loka-sutta.* It 112.

the Buddha told Vacchagotta that none of these four alternatives fit the case (*na upeti*), Vacchagotta got so bewildered as to tell the Buddha that he had lost whatever faith he had derived from the earlier part of his dialogue with the Buddha. The Buddha then goes to illustrate with a simile why none of the alternatives fit the case:

> "What do you think, Vaccha, suppose, a fire was burning before you, would you know: this fire is burning before me?"
>
> "I would, Master Gotama."
>
> "If someone were to ask you, Vaccha, "what does this fire burning before me burn in dependence on?" –being asked thus, what would you answer?"
>
> "Being asked thus, Master Gotama, I would answer: this fire burns in dependence on fuel of grass and sticks."
>
> "If that fire before you were to be extinguished, would you know "this fire before me has been extinguished?""
>
> "I would, Master Gotama."
>
> "If someone were to ask you, Vaccha, when that fire before you was extinguished, to which direction did it go; to the east, the west, the north or the south—being asked thus, what would you answer?"
>
> "That does not apply, Master Gotama. The fire burned in dependence on its fuel of grass and sticks. When that is used up, if it does not get any more fuel, being without fuel, it is reckoned as extinguished."
>
> "So too, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him, he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathāgata is liberated from reckoning in terms of material form, Vaccha, he is profound, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the ocean. 'He reappears' does not apply; 'he does not reappear' does not apply; 'he both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply (the same is true of the other four aggregates: feelings, perceptions, volitional constructions, and consciousness)."[32]

That none of the four alternatives 'fits the case' has given rise to a widespread belief that the postmortem status of the Tathāgata is some kind of mystical absorption with an absolute that transcends the four alternative possibilities proposed by Vaccha. In other words, that the liberated saint enters after death, into a transcendental realm that goes beyond all descriptions in terms of existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence. It has also been suggested by some that if the four questions were considered meaningless it is partly due to the inadequacy of the concepts contained in them to refer to this state of transcendence.

If the four questions are set aside, it is not because the concepts contained in them are inadequate in referring to the state of transcendence. Rather, it is entirely due to their illegitimacy. They are as meaningless as the four

32 *Aggivacchagotta-sutta.* M i 483.

questions as to where the fire went. What is focused on is not the inadequacy of the four questions but their illegitimacy in explaining a fire that gets extinguished with the exhaustion of its fuel. A fire can burn only so long as there is fuel. Once the fuel is gone, the fire gets extinguished. Being extinguished does not mean that the fire gets released from its fuel and goes out to one of the four quarters. In the same way, it is not the case that at death an entity called Tathāgata is released from the five aggregates and finds its way to some kind of transcendent existence. To try to locate a Tathāgata in a post-mortem position is like trying to locate an extinguished fire. In both cases, the questions are equally meaningless and equally unwarranted.

There is in fact textual evidence that goes against the metaphysical interpretation of the posthumous status of the Tathāgata. Anuradha, a disciple of the Buddha, once held the view that the after-death condition of the Tathāgata is such that it cannot be explained with reference to any of the four possibilities mentioned above. His conclusion was such that the after-death condition of the Tathāgata could be explained with reference to a position that is outside the four predications, in other words, a position that transcends the four possibilities.

When this matter was reported to the Buddha, the Buddha told Anuradha:

> Since, even in this very life, a Tathāgata is not comprehensible in truth and reality (*saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāne*), it is not proper to say that the after-death condition of the Tathāgata could be proclaimed in one other than these four possibilities.

Anuradha confesses that his conclusion is wrong. Finally, the Buddha sums up the correct position in the following words, "Anuradha, both formerly and now, it is just suffering and the cessation of suffering that I proclaim."[33] This clearly shows that the after-death condition of the Tathāgata cannot be explained either in terms of the four-fold predication or in terms of a position that transcends it.

When it is said that the four questions on the post-mortem status of the Tathāgata do not arise (*na upeti*), this explains the present position of the Tathāgata, not his post-mortem status. The present position of the Tathāgata is such that it does not admit any of the four questions relating to his after-death condition. For, although the Tathāgata is not without the five aggregates, he does not identify himself with any of them. It is this situation that makes the Tathāgata, the emancipated saint, in-comprehensible in this life itself.

One reason for interpreting *nibbāna* in a metaphysical sense could be that religion in general believes in a reality, which is either transcendental or both transcendental and immanent. Therefore, some scholars have been

33 *Anuradha-sutta*. S iii 116. (S iv 383).

inclined to believe that this metaphysical conception, which is common to many religions, should have its counterpart in early Buddhism as well. From the Buddhist point of view, all such attempts at interpreting *nibbāna* in this manner amount to spiritual eternalism (*Sassatavāda*), which upholds the theory of the metaphysical self. Buddhism begins by rejecting spiritual eternalism. There is, therefore, no reason why its final goal should involve a theory which it rejected at its very beginning.

Is the after-death condition of the Tathāgata, then, one of complete annihilation? This is the other conclusion to which some modern scholars arrived, particularly during the early stages of the academic study of Buddhism. It is claimed that if Buddhism denies a self-entity, this denial naturally and logically leads to the conclusion that *nibbāna* is annihilation.

The annihilationist view of *nibbāna,* too, is not confined to modern scholarship. An identical view was held by a disciple during the time of the Buddha, known as Yamaka: "On the dissolution of the body, the monk who is delivered from all defilements, is annihilated, perishes, and does not exist after death."[34] This conclusion is equally wrong as the metaphysical interpretation, as shown by Sariputta's response to it. The latter tells Yamaka that since the Tathāgata cannot be identified either with or without reference to the five aggregates, it is not proper to conclude that at death the Tathāgata comes to annihilation. To interpret the after-death condition of the Tathāgata as annihilation, is to interpret it, in the light of materialist annihilationism (*Ucchedavāda*). Buddhism began by rejecting materialist annihilationism. Therefore, there is no reason why the final goal of Buddhism should involve a theory which it rejected at its very beginning.

If the post-mortem status of the Tathāgata cannot be explained in the light of either spiritual eternalism or materialist annihilationism, the reason for both situations is identically the same: in this very life itself, there is no identifiable entity called Tathāgata either to be perpetuated in a metaphysical sense or to be annihilated in a physical sense. Strictly speaking, it is not correct to say that the Buddha was silent on the question as to the after-death condition of the Tathāgata. For the Buddha's answer to the question is that the question does not arise (*na upeti*). Realization of *nibbāna* means the elimination of the very possibility of raising the question.

34 *Yamaka-sutta*. S iii 109.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Buddhist Psychology of Philosophy

What the Buddha taught (= Buddhism) is not a philosophy. It is a meta-philosophy, a philosophy that explains the very nature of philosophy. The final goal of Buddhism is not to have a view, or philosophy, but to view.

When it comes to philosophical speculations, Buddhism seeks to transcend them by identifying the deep-seated psychological factors responsible for their emergence and prevalence in the world. This could be described as the Buddhist psychology of philosophy. The premise for this is that our deep-seated desires and expectations have a direct impact on what we choose to believe in.

The best textual evidence for what we maintain here comes from the very first Buddhist discourse in the very first collection of discourses of the Pāli canon, called the All-embracing Net of Views (*Brahmajāla-sutta*). It mentions some sixty-two religious and philosophical views on the nature of the self (*atta*) and the world (*loka*). They all have as their epistemological ground, logic and pure reasoning (*takka-vimamsā*), or experience gained through mental concentration (*ceto-samādhi*), or combination of both.[1]

The sixty-two views can be categorized as follows:

(a) Theism, the belief in a Creator God.

(b) Eternalism, the spiritual view that the physical body is perishable while the metaphysical self is eternal/immortal.

(c) Annihilationism, the materialist view that the self is the same as the physical body and, therefore, it is perishable at the time of death, with no possibility for its post-mortem existence.

(d) Cosmogony, whether the world is eternal or non-eternal in terms of time, or whether the world is finite or infinite in terms of space.

(e) Fortuitism, the view that the world has arisen haphazardly, without any rhyme or reason.

(f) Skepticism, the view that with our limited faculties we cannot fathom the unlimited reality, and therefore the need to suspend all assertive statements and categorical judgments.[2]

What is most significant about the Buddhist approach to the sixty-two views is that it is neither argumentative nor confrontational. In point of fact, not a single view is accepted as true, nor rejected as false. What we find here is

1 *Brahmajāla-sutta*. D i 1ff.

2 Ibid. loc. cit.

a psychological diagnosis of how these views arise and why they persist in the world at large, and more importantly, how they can be transcended by identifying and eliminating their psychological roots.

Buddhism makes a distinction between two kinds of views. The first refers to the belief in a self or soul (*attavāda*), considered as the essence of a human being. The second refers to all forms of speculative metaphysics intended to explain the nature of the self (*attavāda-paṭisaṃyutta*) and the nature of the world (*lokavāda-paṭisaṃyutta*). Of these two kinds of views, the first is primary and the second derivative, because in the final analysis, it is the first that serves as a base for the emergence of the second. In other words, all varieties of speculative philosophy, whatever form they assume, are finally traceable to the belief in a permanent selfhood, the notion of a self-existent subject which is impervious to change.[3]

The mutual opposition between spiritual eternalism and materialist annihilationism shows not only the perennial conflict between two mutually exclusive philosophical views, but also the human mind's oscillation between two deep-seated desires.

There is another important aspect of the Buddhist critique of views and ideologies: Buddhism does not endorse dogmatic adherence to views, even if they are right. To be infatuated with the rightness of one's own views and ideologies is called *sandiṭṭhi-rāga*. The dogmatic attachment to them is called *diṭṭhi-parāmāsa*. The root cause of both is the belief that this alone is true and all else is false (*idam eva saccaṁ, mogham aññan*)[4]. It is this kind of warped mind-set that provides a fertile ground for bigotry and dogmatism, what Buddhism calls *idaṃ saccābhinivesa*. Its external manifestations, as we all know, are acts of fanaticism and militant piety, indoctrination and unethical conversion, religious fundamentalism and persecution, not to speak of interpersonal conflicts and acts of terrorism often leading to internecine warfare.

From the Buddhist point of view, therefore, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies is very much more detrimental and fraught with more danger than our greedy attachment to material objects. Inter-religious and intra-religious wars are a case in point. The cold war between capitalism and communism, which had nearly brought the world into the brink of nuclear disaster, is another case in point.

If Buddhism does not encourage dogmatic attachment to views, it is because from the Buddhist way of looking at it, a view is only a guide to action. In his well-known discourse on the parable of the raft, the Buddha tells us that

3 Cf. *Brahmajāla-sutta.* D i 1ff.

4 Ud 69–70.

his teaching should be understood not as a goal unto itself but as a means for the realization of the goal[5]. The teaching of the Buddha, as the Buddha himself says, has only relative value, relative to the realization of the goal. It is a thing to be used and not a thing to be ritually adulated. What this clearly implies is that even the right view, like all other views, is a conceptual model serving as a guide to action. If it is called right view, it is because it leads us directly to the right goal. The right goal according to Buddhism is a right vision (*sammā dassana*) into the nature of the world both within and outside us (*yathābhūta*).[6]

5 *Alagaddūpama-sutta.* M i 130.

6 See e.g., *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*. D i 83.

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