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## Mahā,nidāna Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Connections | D 15/2:55-71

Theme: Dependent arising, language and non-self

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 Background

The theme of the **Mahā,nidāna Sutta** is *paṭicca,samuppāda*, which has been simply rendered as **dependent arising**. The reasons for this have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> There are many versions of the dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) model given in the Canon. As such, it is useful for us to know their various applications.<sup>2</sup> The Mahā Nidāna Sutta's presentation of the dependent arising is mainly concerned with the relationship between consciousness (*viññāna*) and name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*), and this relationship is the heart of dependent arising.

The Mahā Nidāna Sutta<sup>3</sup> is the longest and most detailed discourse of the Buddha, and the most important sutta, dealing with dependent arising, a central teaching in Buddhism.

Despite its length, however, the Mahānidāna Sutta does not give the most complete formal exposition of dependent arising. It lacks the abstract formula and a statement of the sequence of cessation. Moreover, its series of conditions omits three factors of the standard version: ignorance, volitional activities [*saṅkhāra*], and the six sense-bases. These omissions have led some scholars to suggest that the twelvefold formulation may be later augmentation of a shorter original; but such suggestions remain purely conjectural, misleading, and objectionable on doctrinal and textual grounds. All in all, omissions of the Mahānidāna Sutta are more more than compensated for by its detailed explanations, interesting digressions, and supplementary sections. Indeed, it might well be suspected, contrary to the thesis of historical development, that in the present sutta the Buddha has varied the usual exposition expressly to create an opportunity for such a special treatment. (Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:6)<sup>4</sup>

Bodhi has done a very learned and insightful translation of the Mahā Nidāna Sutta<sup>5</sup> together with all the doctrinally important passages from its Commentary and Subcommentary. His long and important introductory essay discusses the sutta's rich doctrinal and philosophical implications, and an appendix explains the treatment of dependent arising according to the Abhidhamma system of conditional relations (*paṭṭhāna*). Much of the materials here are drawn and paraphrased from Bodhi's work for the benefit of Sutta students.

### 2 Terminology

#### 2.1 THE SUTTA TITLE

**2.1.1 Nidāna.** Although *nidāna* in the title sounds better in English as “causation” or “causality” (Bodhi translates the title as “The Great Discourse on Causation”), I have rendered the title here to reflect the likely historical reality, that is, the Buddha's consciously turning the Vedic term *nidāna* on its head to expound what is perhaps the leading discourse on dependent arising.<sup>6</sup> Vedic scholar, **Joanna Jurewicz**, in

<sup>1</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.1.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed study, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.1. On the Buddha's usage of the 12-link *paṭicca,samuppāda* as a polemic against the Vedic cosmogony, see Jurewicz 2000 & **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1(5.4).

<sup>3</sup> The Saṃyutta has its own **Nidāna S** (S 12.60/2:93 f), but while the opening sections [1-4] of the Saṃyutta version is identical to the Majjhima version [1], the rest of it forms a separate sutta of its own, **Mahā Rukkhā S** (S 12.55/2:87 f). The identical passages share the same long commentary. See S:B 768 m152 & Bodhi (tr) 1984:58-73.

<sup>4</sup> See Table 1 for a tabular comparison of the two versions.

<sup>5</sup> See biblio.

<sup>6</sup> For an important study on this connection, see Joanna Jurewicz 2000.

her paper, “Playing with fire: The *pratītyasamutpāda* from the perspective of Vedic thought” (2000), explains that the word *nidāna* appears in the cosmogonic context in the Ṛgveda:

“What was the prototype, what was the counterpart and what was the connection between them?” (*kṣit pramā kim nidānam*) [Rv 10.130.3]. In ŚB [Śata, patha Brahmana] 11.1.63 *pratimā* is the cosmos identified with the fire altar, in ŚB 11.1.83 *pratimā* is sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> The *pramā* is Prajāpati, the Creator, the *nidāna*, the link between the Creator and the creation: their identity. Thus *pramā* and *pratimā* resolve themselves into *nidāna* which guarantees and expresses their identity.

*Nidāna*, denoting the ontological connection between different levels and forms of beings, also refers to the epistemology: it gives the explanation of this connection.<sup>8</sup> I presume that this is the first meaning of *nidāna* in the title of the Buddha’s sermon. It is really “a great explanation”: there is no *ātman*, the *nidāna* of the cosmogony. The negation of the ontological *nidāna* constitutes the Buddha’s *mahānidāna*. (Jurewicz 2000:100)

Jurewicz goes on to explain what other Indologists and Buddhologists would fully agree on, that is, that the Buddha teaches at least some of his discourses to educated people, well versed in brahmanic thought, who are familiar with the concepts and the general idea of Vedic cosmogony. Jurewicz explains in detail how the terms of the dependent arising have a definite meaning, evoking definite associations. Having explained dependent arising in this manner, the Buddha then brilliantly turns the table against the brahmins!

The act of cutting off the *ātman*—or rather given his fiery nature, the act of blowing him out—deprives all the hitherto well-defined concepts of their meaning and challenges the infallibility of all their associations, exposing the meaninglessness, absurdity even, of all the cosmogonic development they express....

And since fire is the intrinsic character of the *ātman*, *nirvāṇa* can mean not only the liberating recognition of the *ātman*’s absence, but also the refutation of the whole of the Vedic metaphysics, which postulates that fire underlies, conditions, and manifests itself in the cosmogony.

(Jurewicz 2000:100)

The word *nidāna* comes from the prefix *ni-* (“down”) + *dāna* (from √DĀ or DĪ, meaning “to bind”): hence, “to tie down,” meaning “(figuratively & literally) ground, foundation, occasion; source, origin, cause; reason, reference, subject” (PED). In early Buddhist usage, *nidāna* (as used in the Sutta title) is often found in a string of synonyms related to the idea of “cause,” such as those occurring 17 times here in the Mahā, nidāna Sutta itself:

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for decay and death, that is to say, birth”

*Tasmā ’ti-h’ānanda es’eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo jarā, maraṇassa, yad idaṃ jāti.* (§§4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)

**2.1.2 Mahā.** Clearly, based on such information, Bodhi has rendered *nidāna* as “source,” reserving “cause” for *hetu*.<sup>9</sup> Bodhi also thinks that the prefix *mahā* was used by the Sutta compilers “far more probably...to emphasize the sutta’s own intrinsic greatness” rather than that it is a “great discourse” (cf Jurewicz’s “great explanation” above) in contrast to a short one (of which there is none) (1984:v).

However, Bodhi titles it as “The Great Discourse on Causation.” If the greatness is placed upon its topic, then surely it would be more appropriate to title it as such as “The Discourse on the Great Connect-

<sup>7</sup> Smith 1989:73-75 [Jurewicz’s n].

<sup>8</sup> Smith 1989:79 [Jurewicz’s n].

<sup>9</sup> Bodhi 1984:v.

ions.” I have translated *nidāna* as “connections,” reflecting the Buddha’s awareness of its Vedic usage, and this same familiarity of his intended audience, as discussed by Jurewicz above.<sup>10</sup>

**2.2 SAṆKHĀRA.** Another important and difficult term connected with dependent arising is *saṅkhāra*, often translated as “formation/s.” This term is resolved as *saṃ* (= con-, “together”) + *karoti*, “he does, he makes.” The noun has both the active and passive senses: as such, *saṅkhārā* are both the things that deliberately put together, construct and compound other things, and also the things that are put together, constructed and compounded. In the Nikāyas, *saṅkhāra* occurs in a number of major doctrinal contexts.<sup>11</sup>

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> link of dependent arising, *saṅkhārā* are the karmically active volitions responsible, in conjunction with ignorance and craving, for producing rebirth and clinging on to the wheel of existence; here as such rendered as “**volitional formations**” to distinguish it from the passive “formations” discussed in the **Kāma, bhū Sutta 2** (S 41.6).<sup>12</sup>

### 3 Variations in the dependent arising formula

**3.1 CONSCIOUSNESS AND NAME-AND-FORM.** In the dependent arising formula, it is important to note the relationship between **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) and **name-and-form** (*nāma, rūpa*): *with consciousness as condition, there arises name-and-form*, which in turn is the condition for **the six sense-bases** (*saḷ’āyatana*). Peter Harvey presents this fascinating notion:

As I have argued elsewhere, ... the Pali Suttas (though not later Pali) includes [sic] indications that the early Buddhists regarded consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as able to “break free” of the network of interactions (Harvey 1989:61-68, 58). Indeed, the Suttas often see personality as a vortex of interaction not between *nāma* (including consciousness) and *rūpa*, but between consciousness and *nāma, rūpa* (D 2:32, 63 f; S 3:9-10) [4]. By turning away from all objects, seen as ephemeral and worthless, consciousness could become objectless. “It” would then not be a limited, conditioned process, but the unconditioned: Nibbāna. Unlike the situation of cessation,<sup>13</sup> this would not be the complete absence of consciousness, but the timeless experience of a “consciousness,” which had transcended itself by dropping all objects. (Harvey 1993:12 digital ed)

Elsewhere, we find variations in the relationship between consciousness and name-and-form. In the Dīgha Nikāya, for example, we find consciousness and name-and-form mutually conditioning one another [§§21-22] and also at the **Mahā’padāna Sutta** (D 14.2.18-19/2:32),<sup>14</sup> the **Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65/2:104)<sup>15</sup> and the **Nala, kalapiya Sutta** (S 12.67/2:112-115). Name-and-form is here the condition for contact (*phassa*).

When name-and-form is correlated with the **five aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*),<sup>16</sup> form is identified with the aggregates of physical form (*rūpa*), and name with the three aggregates of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) (Vism 17.187/644 f).<sup>17</sup> Consciousness (*viññāṇa*), al-

<sup>10</sup> On the prefixes *mahā* and *cūḷa* (or *culla*) in sutta names, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22, M 10) @ SD 13.1 (2).

<sup>11</sup> Further see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6 (5).

<sup>12</sup> S 41.6/4:293 = SD 48.7. On volitional formations, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6.

<sup>13</sup> “Cessation,” ie cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*), see **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43.25/-1:296) & SD 30.2 (4); **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.16-21/1:301 f) & SD 40a.9 (2.5); also SID: *saññā, vedayita, nirodha*.

<sup>14</sup> This sutta and the next—**Mahāpadāna S & Nagara S**—contains the passage “This consciousness turns back (*paccudāvattati*) at *nāma, rūpa* [name-and-form or mind-and-body]; it goes no further” (D 14.2.19/2:32 = S 12.65.9/2:104). See Bucknell 1999:317 & S:B 777 n177.

<sup>15</sup> See Bodhi’s useful notes: S:B 776 n176 & 777 n177.

<sup>16</sup> The 5 aggregates: for a general survey, see **(Upādāna) Parivattā S** (S 22.56), SD 3.7; for study of the individual aggregates, see SD 17. For the difference btw dependent arising model and the five-aggregates model, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6

<sup>17</sup> On some technical difficulties regarding this term, see Bodhi 1984:18 n1, Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed) & Hamilton 1996a ch VI, esp 124-127.

though inseparably linked with the three mental aggregates, is not included here as it is the condition for name-and-form. As such, **the Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2) gives this definition of name-and-form:

And what, bhikkhus, is **name-and-form**? Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention. This is called name. And the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements. This is called form. Thus this is name and this is form—this is called name-and-form. (S 12.2.12/2:3), SD 5.15

**3.2 ORIGINS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS.** The Mahā Nidāna Sutta gives another important variant sequence of dependent arising. In the usual sequence, after giving contact as the condition for feeling, feeling as the condition for craving would follow.<sup>18</sup> Here, however, the Buddha introduces a variation [§§9-18]. From feeling as conditioning craving, he elaborates on the effects of craving, that is, giving a new series—a **secondary sequence**—of nine factors, each of which arises in dependence on its predecessor.

This more down-to-earth sequence shows, as a result, how “there are born various evil unwholesome states” [§9]. The purpose of this sequence is clear: it shows that dependent arising can be used to explain the origins of social problems just as effectively as it can be used to understand the origins of individual suffering.<sup>19</sup> Thus, craving not only brings further rebirth with personal pains, but also causes various unwholesome conditions leading to social disorder.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4 Summary of dependent arising

The sutta’s instruction proper begins with a short catechism on dependent arising pointing out the condition for each dependent factor in the series [§2]. The catechism follows the series in *reverse order* from decay and death being dependent on birth back to consciousness being dependent on name-and-form. The Buddha then presents the entire sequence again in *forward order*, without the catechism, adding the regular refrain identifying the series as the arising of suffering [§3].

A longer exposition follows with the Buddha returning to each proposition of the original sequence and elaborates on its meaning. His explanation serves three purposes: (1) to explain the meaning of specific conditionality (*idapaccayatā*); (2) to give a precise understanding of dependent arising by analyzing the conditioning factors into their constituents; and (3) to show how each condition supports the arising of state dependent on it. Although no formal definition of specific conditionality is given,

the explanation of the connection between each pair of factors suffices to make the underlying principle clear. Specific conditionality is a relationship of indispensability and dependency: the indispensability of the condition (eg birth) to the arisen state (eg ageing and death), the dependency of the arisen state upon its condition.

(Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:10 f; see Vism 17.68/612)

The Buddha’s commentary begins with the statement that **decay and death** (*jarā, maraṇa*) occur with birth as condition [§4], affirming the fact that suffering cannot be avoided. By merely being born, one is subject to decay and death. But there is a solution to this, since suffering like everything else in the world is conditioned. Conception does not occur through biological causes alone, but involves a stream of consciousness passing over from a previous life.

<sup>18</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (4).

<sup>19</sup> Well known examples of the causal origins of social problems are found in **Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-98), **Cakkavatti Sīhanāda S** (D 26/3:57-79, esp 26.14-22/3:67-75) and **Vāseṭṭha S** (Sn 594-656): see discussion in Payutto 1994:73-75. Other suttas that investigate the causal conditions behind social disorder are **Sakka, pañha S** (D 21), **Mahā Dukkha-khandha S** (M 13) and **Kalaha, vivāda S** (Sn 4.11). Despite their differences in formulation, they all come to the same conclusion.

<sup>20</sup> Comy labels the two side of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra, taṇhā*) (DA 2:500).

The condition for birth, in other words, is **existence** (*bhava*) [§5], of which there are three: the sense existence (*kāma, bhava*), form existence (*rūpa, bhava*) and formless existence (*arūpa, bhava*). Because rebirth into each realm occurs through a particular kind of karma, the word “existence” also refers to the *karma* conducive to rebirth in that realm. The two applications of “existence” are distinguished as karma-existence (*kamma, bhava*) and rebirth-existence (*uppati, bhava*).<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Concordance of the standard and Mahā Nidāna versions**  
**of dependent arising**

Standard version	Mahā Nidāna version	Secondary sequence
Ignorance ↓	—	
Volitional formations ↓	—	Craving ↓
Consciousness ↓	Consciousness ↓ ↑	Seeking ↓
Name-and-form ↓	Name-and-form ↓	Gain ↓
Six sense-bases ↓	↓ —	Decision-making ↓
Contact ↓	Contact ↓	Desire and lust ↓
Feeling ↓	Feeling ↓	Attachment ↓
Craving ↓	Craving ↓	Possessiveness ↓
Clinging ↓	Clinging ↓	Avarice ↓
Existence ↓	Existence ↓	Safe-guarding ↓
Birth ↓	Birth ↓	Various evils, unwholesome phenomena
Decay and death	Decay and death	

Note: An arrow represents a relationship of conditionality from the condition to the dependently arisen phenomenon. [Source: Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:143]

<sup>21</sup> Bodhi: “The distinction is explicitly drawn, with full definitions, in **Vibhaṅga** [Vbh 137]. It does not seem to be stated as such in the suttas, but may have been based on such passages as the following: “If, Ānanda, there were no kamma ripening in the sense-sphere, would sense-sphere existence be discerned?”—“Certainly not, bhante.” [A 3.76/1:223]. **Paṭisambhidā, magga** too treats existence, in the context of dependent arising, as identifiable with volition, thus as kamma [Pm 1:52].” (1984:14 n2, slightly edited)



The specific condition for existence in both aspects (karma-existence and rebirth-existence) is **clinging** (*upādāna*): clinging to sense-pleasures (*kām'upādāna*), to views (*diṭṭh'upādāna*), to vows and rituals (*sīla-b, bat'upādāna*) and to a doctrine of the self (*atta, vād'upādāna*) [§6]. The specific condition for clinging is **craving** (*taṇhā*), which in this sutta, is subdivided in two ways: first, by way of its immediate object, into craving for each of the sense-objects [§7]; second, by way of its projected aim, into craving for sense-pleasures (*kāma, taṇhā*), craving for existence (*bhava, taṇhā*) and craving for non-existence (*vibhava, taṇhā*) [§18].<sup>22</sup>

## 5 Conceptual impression and sense-impression

**5.1 BHIKKHU BODHI.** Whether one is enjoying a present object (mostly physical experience) or planning to do so (a mental experience), craving has **feeling** (*vedanā*) as its condition [§19]. Feeling, in turn, has **contact** (*phassa*) as condition [§20]. Contact is the coming together of sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness.<sup>23</sup>

This section contains two terms—“labelling contact” or **conceptual impression** (*adhivacana, samphassa*) and “impact contact” or **sense-impression** (*paṭigha, samphassa*)<sup>24</sup>—that are peculiar to the Mahā Nidāna Sutta. The Commentary glosses “conceptual impression” with *mind-contact*, and “sense-impression” with *the five kinds of sense-contact*, without discussing their special meanings here. The Buddha states that conceptual impression is impossible in the physical body (*rūpa, kāya*) when the special qualities of the mental body (*nāma, kāya*) are absent [§20]. As such, contact here depends both on the mental body and the physical body. It is then obvious that these two bodies “are intended in a narrower sense, as two sides of the sentient organism, rather than in the broader sense as including the objective spheres.” (Bodhi 1984:19-22)<sup>25</sup>

Experience occurs both ways: from the mind outwards into the world, or from the world inwards into the mind. Outward experience occurs with mind-consciousness, resulting in conceptual and volitional activity. Inward experience occurs with sense-consciousness, when the mind passively receives the sense-objects. Outward experience begins with **designation** (*adhivacana*) or naming, and so organizes the raw data of experience into a coherent picture of the world.

However, this is an *internal picture*, comprising the mind’s own conceptual schemes, whereby it evaluates and subjects these data to fits its own understanding and purposes. Thus, a difference in feeling may make a person out to be called “friend” or “foe”; with a difference in perception, one considers a fruit as “ripe” or “unripe”; a difference in volition leads one to designate a piece of plank as “future door” or “future table-top”; a difference in attention decides whether a distant object is “moving” or “stationary.” When an object is designated thus, a union occurs between the designating consciousness and the designated object through the designation—this union is called **conceptual impression**. This act can only occur with a mental body, with or without a physical body.

Sense-perception begins with **impingement** (*paṭigha*), here used as a technical term referring to the impact of an object on a sense-faculty. The union of the consciousness with the impinging object is called **sense-impingement**. Technically, it belongs to the mental body, but it cannot occur in the mental body alone. It needs the physical body to provide the internal bases for its arising.

The two terms, impingement and designation, have a fundamental importance which ties them to dependent arising as a whole. They again indicate the basic oscillatory pattern of experience referred to earlier, its movement back and forth between the phases of reception and

<sup>22</sup> Craving for existence leads to a belief in the immortality of the soul (the eternalist doctrine); craving for existence to a theory of personal annihilation at death (the materialist doctrine); craving for sense-pleasures can give rise to either an annihilationist view justifying indulgence here and now, or to an eternalist view promising a heaven of delight to those obedient to the religious injunctions. See Bodhi, 1984:15 f.

<sup>23</sup> See eg **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.16/1:111) & SD 6.14 (4).

<sup>24</sup> Also rendered as “resistance contact” or “resistance impression.”

<sup>25</sup> For a fuller discussion, see *Saṇṇā*, SD 17.4(2.2).

response. The receptive phase sees the maturation of the kammic inflow from the past; it is represented here by impingement issuing in sense consciousness. The responsive phase involves the formation of new kamma; it is represented by designation issuing in action. Each impingent object elicits from the mind an appropriate designation, and this sparks off an action considered the fitting response. Thus the relationship between impingement and designation depicts in cognitive terms the same situation depicted in conative terms by feeling and craving: the regeneration of the round of existence through present activity building upon the kammic inheritance from the past. (Bodhi, *The Great Discourse on Causation*, 1984:21; emphases added)

**5.2 N ROSS REAT**, in his insightful study, “Some fundamental concepts of Buddhist psychology” (1987:15-28),<sup>26</sup> comments on this passage [§20], saying that it identifies *nāma* and *rūpa* as two classes of objects of consciousness *nāma* is conceptual (*adhivacana*); *rūpa* is sensory (*paṭigha*, “impact”). Reat observes that the *nāma, rūpa* of early Buddhism was a near-synonym to its counterpart in the pre-Buddhist Upanishads (Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.7; cf Reat 1987:18), where it figures in an account of the manifestation of the universe. He concludes that

*adhivacana* (verbal) and *paṭigha* (sensual), as categories of *phassa*, are an alternative to the more commonly enumerated six kinds of *phassa*, and thus that *nāma-rūpa* is a dual categorization of the six types of objects of consciousness. (1987:18, 22)

In short, Reat is saying that *nāma, rūpa* refers to the two sense-categories: the *rūpa* category comprising physical sense-objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch), and the *nāma* category, comprising non-physical sense-objects (dharmas, mind-objects).<sup>27</sup>

“The textual basis for his [Reat’s] argument,” notes Bucknell, “is strengthened by the fact that the same account of the causal connection between *nāma-rūpa* and *phassa* appears in three of the four extant Chinese counterparts of the Pali Mahānidāna-sutta.” (1999:323 f).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps, concludes Bucknell, “the Buddha appropriated and adapted this important term precisely so that his teaching of Conditioned Arising would be recognized as a response to the doctrines of his opponents.” (1999:340).

### 5.3 SUJATO BHIKKHU

**5.3.1 Name-and-form.** This whole section, very insightful and instructive in itself—with an element of characteristic Buddhist humour—has been extracted from Sujato’s thought-provoking essay, “**The mystique of the Abhidhamma**” (nd),<sup>29</sup> and included here without comment:

**Name-and-form.** Let us continue the story of name-and-form in the specifically Buddhist context of dependent origination. There, name-and-form is shown to be dependent on cognition. This suggests that “name” is a term for certain mental functions exclusive of cognition, while “form” designates physical phenomena. There is a very interesting passage in the Mahā Nidāna Sutta which highlights the root meaning of “name.” I would therefore consider this to be an early conception of “name.” The passage is obscure even in Pali and nearly incomprehensible in a literal English translation, so I paraphrase.

“Name” and “form” are each shown to correlate with a particular kind of “contact.” Name correlates to “labeling contact,” while form correlates to “impact contact.” So let us have a look at this “contact.” In the normal analysis of contact, it is said to be the cooperation of three factors:

<sup>26</sup> See also Bucknell 1999:323 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Like Reat, Tetsurō Watsuji (1971:228-231) & Shi Yinshun (1981:16 f, 20-22) too do not support the rendition of *nāma, rūpa* as “mind-and-body” or the like, but regard it as a collective term for the 6 types of sense-objects. Kōgen Mizuno (1969:142-144) & Ishii Yamada (1980:272) take the same understanding of *nāma, rūpa*. Reat’s reasoning (based only on the Pali texts), however, is criticized by Peter Harvey (1995:131 f) and Sue Hamilton (1995:126). See Bucknell 1999:324-326.

<sup>28</sup> See also Bucknell 1999:323 n 31.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.santiforestmonastery.com/writings>.

the external sense object (eg “image”), the internal sense organ (eg “eye”), and the corresponding class of cognition (eg “visual cognition”). In the case of the five physical senses, then, the “impact contact” would be the “impact” of the external sense object on the internal sense organ—light “hitting” the eye, or sound “hitting” the ear. In the case of mental cognition, we have the mental objects (*dhammas*), *mano* (usually rendered “mind”), and *mano*-cognition.

**5.3.2 *Mano*.** What then is this *mano*? It is not defined in this context in the suttas, so any explanation remains speculative. In simpler, non-specialized contexts, such as the three doors of action (body, speech, and mind), *mano* is more or less a synonym for “mind” (*citta*) or “cognition” (*vinnaṇa*). But here, since *mano* is clearly distinguished from *mano*-cognition, it seems to carry a more specialized nuance.

The Abhidhammikas invoke their beloved “mind-moment” here, opining that *mano* refers to certain kinds of mind-moments in the process of cognition, while *mano*-cognition refers to certain others. Specifically, the *mano, dhatu* is defined as the “five-door advertent consciousness” and the “receiving consciousness” that accepts the five-sense impingement; which is rather odd since the *mano, dhatu* is the support for *mano*-cognition, not five-sense cognition.

Elsewhere *mano* is inconsistently identified with *bhavaṅga*, the supposed subliminal “life continuum consciousness”, which is interrupted by “advertent consciousness” to give rise to a process of active cognition; this despite the fact that the relevant sutta passage clearly states that *mano* must be intact, not cut off, in order for *mano*-cognition to manifest.

**5.3.3 *Tinnam saṅgati phasso*.** Furthermore, the suttas make it plain that the “co-operation” (*saṅgati*, “coming together”) of *mano*, mental objects, and *mano*-cognition constitutes contact. How can separate mind-moments occur simultaneously? Since in the Abhidhamma the simultaneous occurrence of the three factors becomes stretched out into successive occurrence, it would seem only natural to further separate out contact, dignifying it with a real existence of its own, rather than being a mere function.

So the Abhidhammikas alter the sutta statement that the three *are* contact (*tinnam saṅgati phasso*) to the three *give rise* to contact (*tinnam saṅgatiya phasso*). To sum up. The suttas say: “Dependent on *mano* and mental objects arises *mano*-cognition. The co-operation of the three is contact.” The Abhidhamma explains: “Dependent on certain kinds of cognition and mental objects arises sense cognition or other kinds of mental cognition. Due to the co-operation of the three is contact.” In all modesty, I think we can do a little better than that.

*Mano* and mental objects here give rise to cognition, in the same way that name-and-form gives rise to cognition. And just as the physical sense organs are physical constructs that enable or facilitate the act of physical cognition, so too *mano* would seem to be a mental “construct” that enables or facilitates the act of mental cognition. I would therefore suggest that it seems to be similar if not identical with “name” itself. We might therefore render it in this context as “mentality.” The “mental objects” would most commonly consist of “thoughts,” etc, which are related to “name,” and also “mental images,” which are part of “form.”

**5.3.4 Impact contact & labeling contact.** But we digress. To return to the Maha Nidana Sutta, we now have form giving rise to “impact contact” consisting in the impact of external sense objects on the sense organs, and name, appropriately enough, giving rise to “labeling contact” consisting in conceptual processing of sense data. I am desperately flailing about here in a probably doomed attempt to avoid making this discussion too technical. There are important qualifications to be made to my discussion both above and below, but I hope that by simplifying somewhat I can clarify the outlines without distortion.

We can see that “impact contact” deals primarily with receiving data from outside, while “labeling contact” deals primarily with processing inner, conceptual information. Thus the earlier, mystical understanding of name-and-form receives a strictly rational, psychological treatment. Name-and-form are shown to be interdependent. If there were no name, there could be no labeling, ie no conceptual processing of sensory experience. If there were no form, there would be no awareness of the world outside. Finally the [Mahā, nidāna Sutta] passage proceeds by way of synthesis to show that both of these processes are essential aspects of “contact.”



So far I have treated this analysis as general psychology. But the context, and elsewhere too, suggests that it may be applied rather more specifically to the field of infant development. Thus we can see that without sensory stimulus the infant's mind would not develop past an undifferentiated, "oceanic" sub-conscious, like a fetus in the womb. And without developing conceptual abilities one could not learn to assimilate and process sensory input in a meaningful and useful form.

**5.3.5 Buddhist ontology.** But I have omitted the most important aspect of this passage for understanding early Buddhist ontology. Normally in dependent origination, existence is simply described in terms of the existence of the factor itself, as in the famous formula: "This being, that is... this not being, that is not." But our present passage speaks, not of the existence of, say, "name," but of the existence of "the features, properties, signs, and summaries by which there is a concept of name." If these "properties" are absent, no "labeling contact" regarding "form" can be "found." Conversely, if the "properties" by which there is a "concept" of "form" are absent, no "impact contact" regarding "name" can be "found".

This demonstrates in a most emphatic and explicit way that the "properties" by which phenomena are known are, for all Dhamma purposes, equivalent to the phenomena themselves, since they perform the identical function in dependent origination. We cannot distinguish between a thing's properties and the thing itself, since the label we give a "thing" is just a concept denoting the exercise of certain functions. To say a thing "exists" is to say it is "found." And the very workings of experience, the fundamental structure of information processing, is necessarily dependent on this conceptual apparatus.

Without "labeling," without the properties by which a thing is "conceptualized," stimulus, and hence the entire perceptual process cannot work. Thus this passage thoroughly demolishes any attempt to wedge a division between "ultimate reality" and "conventional reality." Wisdom does not consist in going past convention to the ultimate substratum, but in understanding how conceptualizing is inherent in the cognitive process itself. Hence the Buddha said that the extent of concepts, language, and labeling is precisely the domain of wisdom; that is, birth, ageing, and death, cognition together with name-and-form.

**5.3.6 The 3 ways of speech.** Bodhi, however, reads this passage in just the opposite way. For him, the mention of the "properties" implies that they are conceptually distinct from the thing in and of itself. But he is surely just reading a later agenda into an earlier teaching. He buttresses his position with reference to the three "ways" of speech, designation, and language, mentioned a little below in our sutta. Claiming support from the Commentaries (although they are not consistent here, always a suspicious sign), he says that "speech" refers to conceptual description, while the "way" of speech refers to the objective referent of speech, ie the five aggregates.

Unfortunately, when the identical phrase occurs in **the Khandha Saṃyutta**, it refers to, not five, but three "ways" of speech—that is, past tense, future tense, and present tense (remembering that in Pali these tenses often mean past lives, future lives, and the present life). Any statement must be phrased in terms of these modes, and must therefore buy into time, into the course of rebirths. This is especially so in a heavily inflected language like Pali, where the tenses are built into the verb forms; the statement would perhaps lose some of its punch when applied to, say, Chinese or other uninflected languages where tenses may be omitted.

**5.3.7 Theory of the two truths.** Understanding the difference between "ultimate" and "conventional" truth was upheld by later Buddhists as a sign of profound wisdom, a key to penetrating the inner mysteries of the Dhamma. But any specialized field of endeavor—from mechanics to mathematics, from fishing to physics—will develop a technical vocabulary of terms used in narrowly defined and sometimes eccentric ways—a jargon. Dhamma is no different. We just take our jargon a tad too seriously. Tracing the arbitrary and inconsistent usage of this ontological apartheid in its checkered career through Buddhist history, I can discern only one constant factor—to exalt one's own teachings as "ultimate" and denigrate others" as "conventional."

Thus the Abhidhamma is "ultimate" while the suttas are "conventional"; or the Mahāyāna suttas are "ultimate" while the Abhidhamma is "conventional." It is a standard piece of Abhidhamma rhetoric to claim that the entire Abhidhamma is phrased in terms of "ultimate truth." But this is transparent bluster. There are two whole books, and much material elsewhere in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, that straightforwardly talk of what even the Abhidhammikas would consider to be "conventional" truth.

Thus **the Kathā, vatthu** enlightens us with learned discussions on such crucial issues as, say, the smell of the Buddha's excrement. However I allege that every word in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, from "*kusala*" to "*paccayo*," is nothing but convention. Probably the composers of the Abhidhamma Pitaka would agree with me.

**The Puggala Pannatti** ("The Concept of the Person") lists six concepts, the concepts of aggregates, sense media, elements, truths, faculties, and persons. The Puggala Pannatti itself obviously deals with the sixth kind of concept, and the rest of the Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with the remaining concepts.

Thus, in harmony with the suttas and the rest of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, there is no attempt to sanctify the aggregates, etc., with a privileged ontological status above the "person". The later Abhidhammikas, drawing on the subtle epistemology of the Sautrantikas, proposed that conventional truth is known through inference (*anvaya*, *anumana*), while ultimate truth is known through direct perception (*paccakkha*). Ultimate truth is then said to constitute the objects of *vipassanā*, while the objects of *samatha* are mere conventional truth.

**Samatha & vipassanā.** I have argued elsewhere at length that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are not distinguished in the suttas by their objects, but by their characteristic emphasis on either peace or understanding. But I do not need to resort to the subtleties of dialectic to refute this theory. For we need only glance at the way "direct knowledge" (*dhamme ñāṇaṃ*) and "inferential knowledge" (*anvaye ñāṇaṃ*) are treated in the Nidāna Saṃyutta to see that they are *both* aspects of *vipassanā*. Direct knowledge understands the present; inferential knowledge understands the past and future.

**5.3.8 Name group & form group.** In the Mahā Nidāna Sutta passage, name and form are also called the "name group" and the "form group", implying that each consists of a number of factors. Elsewhere in the suttas they are indeed defined, not synthetically as above, but analytically. Name is feeling, perception, attention, contact, and volition. Form is the four great physical properties and derived form. The connection between name and its original meaning is growing weaker. It is now an umbrella term for a class of mental functions, only some of which are directly associated with conceptualizing.

One factor which is, however, associated with conceptualizing is "perception." This is the associative aspect of consciousness. "**Perception**" (*saññā*) relates to "**cognition**" (*viññāṇa*) as "**connotation**" relates to "**denotation**." The suttas treat it as a key aspect of concept formation. In everyday usage it can mean "contract," "agreement." In this sense, perception (*saññā*) approaches the meaning of convention (*sammuti*). The two are etymologically parallel. Noteworthy by its absence from name is "thought" (*vitakka*), which is not an essential factor for consciousness. Elsewhere the factors constituting name are said to precede thought. So it seems that despite the terms "name" and "labeling", name deals with very fundamental, pre-linguistic proto-conceptual processes.

**5.3.9 Evolution of "name."** By the time of the Abhidhamma, name has drifted even further from its basic meaning. Now name becomes an umbrella for all mental phenomena, including cognition, which as we saw above was specifically excluded in the suttas. This is justified by relying on a spurious connection with the verb "to bend," and asserting that cognition "bends" towards its objects—a highly athletic accomplishment for our agile mind-moment!

Thus "name-and-form" becomes translated as "mind and body," the "ultimate reality," and wisdom is the ability to mince these into very small bits. Which rather misses the point. A skilled surgeon is not one who can hack their patient into shreds, but one who can delicately remove just the diseased tissue.

(Sujato, "The mystique of the Abhidharma," 12-15, digital ed)

## 6 The hidden vortex

**6.1 NAME-AND-FORM AND CONSCIOUSNESS.** The next two sections [§§21-22] are intimately interconnected, dealing the interaction between **name-and-form** and **consciousness**.<sup>30</sup> In his *The Magic of the Mind*, **Ñāṇananda** calls this activity “the hidden vortex,” (1971:25), and claims that this discovery of the Buddha is “[t]he most outstanding contribution made by the Law of Dependent Arising to the ethical, psychological and philosophical enquiries of all times” (id).

The Buddha first shows how **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), as the specific condition for **name-and-form** (*nāma,rūpa*), is necessary to the latter in four ways: at conception, during gestation, when emerging from the womb, and in the course of life [§21]. That consciousness is a condition for conception is also mentioned in **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), that is, conception can only successfully occur when consciousness “has descended into the womb” (M 38.26/1:265 f). **Bodhi**, however, cautions us:

The description of consciousness as descending is metaphorical; it should not be taken literally as implying that consciousness is a self-identical entity which transmigrates from one life to another. The Buddha expressly repudiates the view that “it is the same consciousness that travels and traverses (the rounds of rebirths)” [M 38.5/1:258]. Consciousness occurs by way of process. It is not an ongoing subject but a series of transitory acts of cognition arising and passing away through conditions. Each act is particular and discrete—an occasion of eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, or mind-consciousness. Based on its sense faculty it performs its function of cognizing the object, then gives way to the next act of consciousness, which arises in immediate succession. (1984:22)

**6.2 THE SIX SENSES AND CONTACT.** In the next section of the sutta, instead of going on to **the six senses** and **contact**, as in the standard formula, the Buddha reverses his last statement and says: “With name-and-form, there is consciousness.” [§22a]. To prevent any misunderstanding, the Buddha then, introduces a remarkable passage unique to this sutta [§22b]:

It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born, decay and die, pass away and re-arise; thus far that there is a pathway for designation; thus far there is a pathway for language; thus far there is a pathway for description; thus far there is a sphere for wisdom; thus far that The rounds [of cyclic lives] turns for describing this [state of being], that is, when there is name-and-form together with consciousness.

In other words, just as conception cannot occur without “the descent of consciousness,” so too consciousness cannot arise unless it “finds a footing” in name-and-form. In fact, consciousness requires name-and-form throughout life.<sup>31</sup>

## 7 The problem of language

**7.1 CONCEPT, LANGUAGE AND REALITY.** According to the Dīgha Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*), the terms “**designation**” (*adhivacana*) [§20], “**language**” (*nirutti*), and “**description**” (*paññatti*) are near-synonyms generally referring to verbal statements expressing meaning. The “pathway” (*patha*) for designation, language and description, that is, the world of *reference* or the connecting of words and things,<sup>32</sup> is the same

<sup>30</sup> **Naḷa,kalapiya S** (S 12.67) compares this intimate interconnection between *nāma,rūpa* and *viññāṇa* to “two bundles of reeds that are standing and supporting each other...if one of the two were to fall, the other would fall, too.” (S 12.67/2:114).

<sup>31</sup> On this important topic, see Bodhi 1984:22-25.

<sup>32</sup> An example in English is the relationship between the word *tree* and the object “tree” (referent) in the real world.

for all three, namely, the five aggregates,<sup>33</sup> referred to here as “name-and-form together with consciousness”<sup>34</sup> (DA 2:504).

There is, as such, an interesting relationship between concepts, language and reality. In showing how this is relevant to our understanding of existence, Bodhi adds an instructive note:

To bring that relevance to light it is necessary to investigate briefly the nature of **reference**, the act which establishes connections between words and things. Designation, language and description are the tools of reference, enabling us to interpret and evaluate our experience privately to ourselves and to communicate our thoughts to others... But reference involves more than simply the indicating of a referent. It is also **signification**, the ascribing of meaning to the referent. While the referent provides the locus for meaning, the meaning itself is contributed by the mind<sup>35</sup> making the reference. (1984:28; emphases added)

**7.2 LANGUAGE AND THE UNWHOLESOME ROOTS.** This process of language and cognition is further complicated by the infiltration of greed, hate and delusion, causing one’s attention to waver and veer about unsteadily. In such a case, the mental body can hardly be expected to mirror the world according to reality through precise ideas and words. Even when the meanings given to words conform to the popular conventions governing their use, this is no guarantee against aberrant references; “for often these conventions stem from and reinforce unrecognized common error, the ‘collective hallucinations’ of the world” (Bodhi, 1984:29).

Of all the tools of reference a person may use, those of greatest importance to himself are the ones that enable him to establish and confirm his sense of his own identity. These are the designations “mine,” “I am,” and “myself.” In the Buddha’s teaching such ideas and all related notions, in the way they are ordinarily entertained, are regarded as conceptual outcroppings of the ego-consciousness. They are fabrications of the mind (*mathita*), subjective conceivings (*maññita*), conceptual proliferations (*papañcita*),<sup>36</sup> grounded in ignorance, craving, and clinging... Through the designation “mine” he establishes a territory over which he claims control, through the designation “I am” and “myself”<sup>37</sup> he establishes an identity upon which he builds his conceits and views. (Bodhi, 1984:29)

**7.3 WORDS AND THE SELF.** W S Waldron makes a similarly insightful remark:

And what is our most important source of human categorization and classification, whose distinctions have no spatial location either inside or outside of our brains, and is, furthermore, one of the most salient features of our physical and mental structures? Language. It appears that we embody not only the results of what we have thought, felt and done, but, in addition, of what we have heard and said. We are, in short, the word become flesh. (Waldron 2002:147; fn omitted)

In the ultimate analysis, the referents are simply the five aggregates themselves, which when carefully examined would reveal nothing of an abiding self. However, even though there is no abiding “self,”

<sup>33</sup> The five aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*): form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

<sup>34</sup> This identification is confirmed by **Nirutti, patha S** (S 22.62) which speaks of three “pathways for language, designation and description”: the 5 aggregates which have ceased are the pathway for the designation “was” (*ahosi*), those aggregates which have not yet arisen are the pathway for the designation “will be” (*bhavissati*), and those that have presently arisen are the pathway for the designation “is” (*atthi*) (S 22.62/3:71-73). As the 5 aggregates encompass all phenomena they include both internal and external sense-bases.

<sup>35</sup> See **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44): “Having first applied thought and sustained thought, one then breaks out into speech.” (M 44.15/1:301).

<sup>36</sup> W S Waldron speaks of *papañca* as “language’s endless recursivity” (2002:152).

<sup>37</sup> See SD 19.1-3.

words like “I,” “me” and “mine” are useful as tools of communication. The Buddha and his saints use ideas and words freely like everyone else, but when used by the Buddha and the saints those ideas and words do not betray latent tendencies of craving, conceit and wrong views, but simply recognizing their referential function:

These, Citta, are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world. And a tathāgata [thus come] uses them, but indeed, he does not misapprehend them. (D 9.53/1:202)<sup>38</sup>

## 8 Direct experience

**8.1 CONSTRUCTION AND REALITY.** An important purpose of the Mahā Nidāna Sutta is to enable us to discriminate between two kinds of phenomena: the actual phenomena pertaining to the “pathways for designation, language and description” and the mental constructs derivative upon them.<sup>39</sup> Reality is signified by those “qualities, traits, signs and indicators through which there is a description of the mental body” [§20], which are experienced immediately as objects of direct cognition. This cognition validates their reality as things existing independently of conceptualization.

The mental constructs, on the other hands, do not reveal their own distinctive “qualities, traits, signs and indicators.” Our mental process, in short, comprises two streams: one responsible for the mental constructions and the other the “pathways” providing the raw materials and the objective basis to which the completed constructs are ascribed.

**8.2 TWO LEVELS OF TALK.** In the long insightful introduction to his Mahā Nidāna Sutta translation, **Bodhi** goes on to discuss the significance of these sutta passages [§§21-22] regarding description, especially in terms of religious philosophy and language. He speaks of two levels of religious talk: veridical description and deviant description. **Veridical description** is

description [that is] true from the special standpoint of insight-contemplation, [that] not only represents actuality correctly, but represents it solely in terms of what is discovered in contemplation—its constituent phenomena, their qualities, and their relations. Examples would be such statements as: “The earth element has the characteristic of hardness, consciousness that of cognizing an object,” etc; “All material form is impermanent,” etc... (Bodhi 1984:33)

**Deviant description** either posits mental constructs as actual existents (eg a Creator God, the universal soul, the personal soul, etc) or else ascribes to the actual phenomena attributes they only appear to possess due to cognitive distortion. From the Dharma level, the most important of these are the appearance of beauty (*subha*), permanence (*nicca*), pleasure (*sukha*) and self (*attā*). The relevance of this distinction becomes clear when we come to the section of description of the self [§23].

The “pathways” for designation, language and description not only makes possible the vortical interaction between consciousness and name-and-form, but also makes possible “**a sphere for wisdom**” (*paññāvacara*). The sphere for wisdom is the pathways themselves: the five aggregates in process of dependent arising. When the aggregates are examined with mindfulness and clear awareness—thus, “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self”—they are transformed into the basis for the growth of wisdom, as stated in **the Rāhula Sutta 1** (S 22.91):

When one knows and sees thus, Rāhula, then, in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, and the latent tendency to I-making, to mine-making and to conceit no longer occur [within oneself]. (S 22.91.9/3:136)

<sup>38</sup> Further see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11.

<sup>39</sup> In later scholastic terminology, as in Yogācāra philosophy, a contrast is made between *pariṣpanna, dharmā* (P *parinipphannā dhammā*), ie ultimate truth, and *parikalpita, dharmā* (P *parikappitā dhammā*), the “imagined” reality.



## 9 Seeking the self

**9.1 DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SELF.** In the next section [§23] of the Sutta, the Buddha appears to digress to a new and unrelated topic—that of the different descriptions of the self (*atta, paññatti*) proposed by speculative thinkers—but the Dīgha Commentary explains that this new section connects to the Buddha’s original statement that “this generation has become like a tangled skein” (DA 2:504). The purpose of the ensuing passages is to clarify this statement by identifying the tangles and showing how they have occurred. In other words, the Buddha takes a new angle of approach in discussing the causal process of existence.

The Dīgha Commentary explains that these self-views can arise either from meditative experiences or from bare reasoning. In terms of meditation, says the Commentary, these wrong views arise from the misinterpretation of the kasina sign (the inwardly visualized image of the meditation object). If the sign itself is apprehended as the self, it is conceived as material; if the area covered by the sign, or the mental factors covering it, is apprehended, the self will be conceived as immaterial; if the sign is unextended (ie confined to a small area), the self is conceived as limited; if the sign is extended as far as visualization will allow, the self will be conceived as infinite. (DA 2:504)

**9.2 IGNORANCE AND VIEWS.** “This generation has become like a tangled skein” because it fails to understand and realize dependent arising. That is to say, they are kept bound to the rounds of existence due to their own lack of insight into the conditions that keep them bound. The root of these conditions is **ignorance**, the absence of true knowledge, the knowledge of the four noble truths. Since nature abhors a vacuum, when this true knowledge is absent, its place is filled with false knowledge or views (*diṭṭhi*). These views are the mental tangles, knots and matting that prevent one from going beyond the cycle of existence.

According to **Bodhi**, “Of all the tools of reference a person may use, those of greatest importance to himself are the ones that enable him to establish and confirm his sense of his own identity” (1984:29) [§7]. Similarly, of all the views one may hold, the ones clung to with the greatest tenacity are one’s views of the self, which define for one that identity. One’s intellect (or lack of it) then creates for oneself a conceptualized view of the self. “Therefore, in order to dislodge ignorance and craving, a preliminary step often becomes necessary: to take away their protective shield of views.” (Bodhi 1984: 36).

**9.3 DESTINIES OF THE SELF.** The next section [§24] talks about **the present and future destinies of the self**. Temporal speculations, however, admit three possibilities (in terms of the past, the present and the future), which in principle can be combined with any of the four basic views. However, in actuality, notes Bodhi,

there is a tendency for certain of the basic views to combine with one of the temporal views more readily than the other. Thus a description of the self as limited and material will tend to the annihilationist mode, a description of the self as infinite and immaterial will tend to the eternalist mode. (Bodhi, 1984:38 n1)

A short passage on the “**non-description of the self**” [§§25-26] states that, unlike the speculative theorists, the Buddha’s disciples, on the basis of their spiritual attainments or practice, refrain from describing the self. The Commentary notes: “They know that the counterpart-sign of the kasina is only a counterpart sign and that the formless aggregates are only formless aggregates.” (DA 2:505). That is to say, they only describe the describable, namely, as dependently arisen phenomena that are all impermanent, suffering and non-self.

**9.4 SELF-CONSIDERATIONS.** Next [§27] the Buddha explains how **a consideration of the self** (*atta, samanupassanā*) can lead to twenty forms of the self-identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*). He selects one aggregate, that of feeling, and shows how in four alternative ways it can become a basis for conceiving self: one who recognizes a self either considers feeling as self, or the self as altogether without feeling, or the self as being distinct from feeling but is of the nature to feel (or, subject to feeling).

The view that feeling is self is then examined [§§28-29]. The three kinds of feeling—pleasant, painful and neutral—are found to be distinct and mutually exclusive, experienced only one at a time. Feeling, in other words (like any of the other aggregates) is a succession of distinct states lacking an enduring entity essential to selfhood.

The Buddha then rejects the view of a completely insentient self on the ground that such a self could not even conceive the idea “I am” [§30]. In the third view, the Buddha shows how an attempt is made by theoretical thinkers to avoid the faults of the first two positions by making the self as being of the nature to feel [§31]. Perhaps the closest historical parallel to this view is the Sāṅkhya philosophy with its dualism of *puruṣa*, the self as the changeless witness of nature, and *prakṛti*, nature itself, the ever-changing psychophysical field.

## 10 The eight liberations

**10.1 THE 2 KINDS OF ARHATS.** Having abandoned all these speculative views, one becomes an arhat, and the saint is described in a general way [§§32-36]. Then the Buddha introduces a division of the liberated one into two kinds: “the one liberated by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutta*) and “the one liberated both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*).<sup>40</sup> Both win arhathood through wisdom and their wisdom is the same.

The distinguishing mark between them, then, is the “bodily suffusion” of the immaterial liberations—the four immaterial [formless] attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling. The *ubhatobhāgavimutta* arahat has this experience, the *paññāvimutta* lacks it.

(Bodhi 1984:47 f; see 48 n1)

**The wisdom-liberated arhat** is described in terms of his understanding of the different realms of existence. This indirect reference to the realms gives the Buddha the occasion to present a psychocosmic map. Having explained the conditions for rebirth, the Buddha goes on to show how the realms are divided into the seven stations for consciousness (*viññāṇa-t, thitīyā*) and the two spheres (*āyatana*).<sup>41</sup> [Table 2]

**The arhat liberated both ways**, on the other hand, is described by way of his mastery over the eight liberations (*vimokkha*) [§35]. These liberations include the nine successive attainments reached by the power of concentration: the four dhyanas (*jhāna*), the four formless attainments (*ārūpa samāpatti*), and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha* = *nirodha, samāpatti*).

**10.2 THE 8 LIBERATIONS.** The first three of the eight liberations are *kaṣiṇa* meditations,<sup>42</sup> which are explained in some detail in the **Mahā Sakuludāyī Sutta** (M 77.23/2:13), but a more detail exposition is found in the **Paṭisambhidāmagga** (Pm 2:38-40). The eight liberations are as follows:

(1) **The 1<sup>st</sup> liberation** is that of one with physical form sees physical forms (*rūpī rūpāni passati*). The Majjhima Commentary explains that the meditator does the preliminary exercise (*parikamma*) on an internal form (in one’s own body), for example, the blue of the eyes for a blue *kaṣiṇa*, the skin for a yellow *kaṣiṇa*, the blood for a red *kaṣiṇa*, the teeth for a white *kaṣiṇa*, but the concentration sign (*nimitta*) arises

<sup>40</sup> On the 4 types of arhats, see **Te, vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8(2.1). **Richard Gombrich**, in ch 4 of his book *How Buddhism Began* (1996:96-134), discusses how he thinks *ceto, vimutti* and *paññā, vimutti* came to mean different things in the early development of Buddhist doctrine. This development was closely connected with the later scholastic view that one could gain awakening without meditation, which some scholars like Gombrich think the Buddha did not envisage (1996:96). See also Brekke 2002:67.

<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere these are called “the 9 abodes of beings” (*nava, satt’āvāsa*) (D 33.3.2(3)/3:263, 33.2.2(3)/3:288; A 9.24/4:401). Here *āyatana* is rendered as “sphere,” referring to a realm or level of meditation; where it refers to the senses, it is tr as “base.” *Avacara* (*ava*, “down, out” + *cara*, “wandering”) is tr as “realm,” but “sphere” is often used here, too. See SD 17.8a (5.2) & (11.2).

<sup>42</sup> The *kaṣiṇa* is a physical meditation device (a colour, a primary element or light) that provides support for visualization exercise until one acquires the mental image (*nimitta*). For example, a disc made of clay is used in earth *kaṣiṇa* meditation, a bowl of water in water *kaṣiṇa* meditation. On the 10 kaṣiṇas, see **Mahā Sakuludāyī S** (M 77.-24/2:14 f). For details, see Vism chs 4-5 (where, however, the space *kaṣiṇa* is restricted to limited space, and the consciousness *kaṣiṇa* is replaced by the light *kaṣiṇa*).

## Table 2

### The 7 stations for consciousness and the 2 spheres<sup>43</sup>

#### **Formless realm** (*arūpâvacara*)<sup>44</sup>

Sphere only	Sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception
7 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Sphere of nothingness
6 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Sphere of the infinity of consciousness
5 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness	Sphere of the infinity of space

#### **Form realm** (*rūpâvacara*)

[ <i>Not stations:</i>	The Pure Abodes	( <i>Suddh'āvāsa</i> )] <sup>45</sup>
Sphere only	Sphere of non-percipient beings	( <i>Asañña, sattā</i> )
4 <sup>th</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings same in body, same in perception</i>	Gods of abundant fruit Gods of radiant glory Gods of boundless glory Gods of limited glory	( <i>Vehapphala</i> ) ( <i>Subha, kiṇha</i> ) ( <i>Appamāṇa, subha</i> ) ( <i>Paritta, subha</i> )
3 <sup>rd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings same in body, different in perception</i>	Gods of streaming radiance Gods of boundless radiance Gods of limited radiance	( <i>Ābhassara</i> ) ( <i>Appamāṇ'ābha</i> ) ( <i>Paritta, subha</i> )
2 <sup>nd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings different in body, same in perception</i>	Great Brahmā Gods of Brahmā's Ministers Gods of Brahmā's Host	( <i>Mahā Brahmā</i> ) ( <i>Brahmā, purohitā</i> ) ( <i>Brahmā, parisajjā</i> )

#### **Sense realm** (*kāmâvacara*)

1 <sup>st</sup> station for consciousness: <sup>46</sup> <i>beings different in body, different in perception</i>	Gods who lord over others' creations Gods who delight in creating The contented gods The Yāma gods The gods of the Thirty-three The gods of the Four Great Kings Human beings Some beings in the lower worlds	( <i>Para, nimmita, vasavattī</i> ) ( <i>Nimmāṇa, ratī</i> ) ( <i>Tusita</i> ) ( <i>Yāma</i> ) ( <i>Tāvātimsa</i> ) ( <i>Cātum, mahārājika</i> ) ( <i>Manussa, loka</i> ) ( <i>Āpaya, bhūmi</i> )
2 <sup>nd</sup> station for consciousness: <i>beings different in body, same in perception (lower realms)</i>	The host of titans The realm of the departed [ghosts] The animal kingdom The hells	( <i>Asura, kāya</i> ) ( <i>Pitti, visaya</i> ) ( <i>Tiracchāna, yoni</i> ) ( <i>Niraya</i> )

<sup>43</sup> See **Group karma?**, SD 39.1 (1.4), & *Viññāṇa-t,thitī*, SD 23.14.

<sup>44</sup> Also called *rūpāyatana*; in Pali, respectively: *n'eva, saññā, nāsaññ'āyatana, ākiñcaññāyatana, viññāṇaṇcāyatana*, and *ākāsānañcāyatana*.

<sup>45</sup> It is interesting that the Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*), are not listed as "stations for consciousness." The Pure Abodes are inhabited only by non-returners who will attain their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akaṇitṭhā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

<sup>46</sup> The first 6 are the sense-sphere deva realms, the lowest of the celestial realms.

externally (MA 3:258 f). The “transcending” (*abhibhāyatana*) of the forms is the attainment of dhyana together with the arising of the sign. On emerging from the dhyana, he considers, “I know, I see.”

(2) **The 2<sup>nd</sup> liberation** is that of one who does not see physical form internally, but sees physical forms externally (*ajjhataṃ arūpa, saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*). Here, the *kaṣiṇa* preliminary exercise is done on an external form (a *kaṣiṇa* object) and the arising of the concentration sign externally. The formulation of the second *vimokkha* “suggests that it is a shorthand for all the eight *abhibhāyatanas* which consist of variations on the theme *ajjhataṃ arūpa-saññī eko bahiddhā rūpāni passati*” (Gethin 2002:267 n7).

(3) **The 3<sup>rd</sup> liberation** is that of one liberated after contemplating the idea of the beautiful (*subhan t’eva adhimutto hoti*). This is said in reference to the attainment of form dhyana (*rūpa jhāna*) by means of concentrating the mind on perfectly pure and bright colours as the *kaṣiṇa*-object. **The Paṭisambhidā, magga** says that this mental state is also produced through the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), as a result of which all beings appear perfectly pure and glorious, and thus the mind turns to the beautiful (Pm 5.20/2:39).

These first three are said in connection with *kaṣiṇa* meditation by way of the “spheres of sovereignty” or “bases for transcendence” (*abhibhāyatana*), that is, one of the 8 stages of mastery over the senses through dhyana (*jhāna*).<sup>47</sup> The following four (4-7) are the formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*):

(4) **The 4<sup>th</sup> liberation**. Through the utter transcending of the perception of physical form, the passing away of the perception of impingement [*paṭigha*, sense-contact], and non-attention to the perception of diversity, contemplating, “Space is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the sphere of the infinity of space. This is the fourth liberation.

(5) **The 5<sup>th</sup> liberation**. Through the utter transcending of the infinity of space, contemplating, “Consciousness is infinite,” one enters and dwells in the sphere of the infinity of consciousness. This is the fifth liberation.

(6) **The 6<sup>th</sup> liberation**. Through the utter transcending of the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, contemplating, “There is nothing,” one enters and dwells in the sphere of nothingness. This is the sixth liberation.

(7) **The 7<sup>th</sup> liberation**. Through the utter transcending of the sphere of nothingness, one enters and dwells in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This is the seventh liberation.

(8) **The 8<sup>th</sup> liberation**. Through the utter transcending of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This last stage requires both concentration and insight, and can be attained only by non-returners and arhats who have mastered the formless attainments.

The Commentary on **the Mahā Sakuludāyī Sutta** (M 77.22/2:13) says that these liberations (*vimokkhā*) are the mind’s full (but temporary) release from the opposing states and its full (but temporary) release by delighting in the object (*ārammaṇa*) (MA 3:255, cf 255-259).

## 11 “Positive” dependent arising

In the Mahā Nidāna Sutta, the conditionality is depicted in a negative way, that is, showing the impossibility of the dependent state from arising without its condition. Conditionality is presented in a positive manner, showing how the condition flow into the dependent state, in such suttas as

<b>Āhāra Sutta</b>	S 12.11/2:11 f,
<b>Upanisā Sutta</b>	S 12.23/2:29-32,
<b>Paccaya Sutta</b>	S 12.27/2:42 f,
<b>Sammāsa Sutta</b>	S 12.66/2:107-112, and

<sup>47</sup> **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.24/2:110); **Mahā Sakuludāyī S** (M 77.22/2:13); **Abhibhāyatana S** (A 8.65/4:305), **Kosala S** (A 10.29/5:61). **The Dhamma, saṅgaṇī** apparently regard the *abhibhāyatana* as being “concerned with the mastery and facility in certain aspects of *jhāna* practice” (Gethin, 2001:267). See Dhs 45-52 where the 8 *abhibhāyatanā* (with slight variations from the Nikāya formulation) are treated as an aspect of *jhāna* that is of the form realm (*rūpāvacara*); cf DhsA 187-190. See BDict: *abhibhāyatana*.

**Upayanti Sutta** S 12.69/2:118 f.

It is said that the nun Khemā had listened to the Mahā Nidāna Sutta in the time of Kassapa Buddha (Ap 34/2:546), and on hearing it again, expounded by our Buddha, she recalled the event and became an arhat (Ap 72/2:549).

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## The Discourse on the Great Connections

D 15/2:55-71

[55]

**1a** Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying among the Kurus.<sup>48</sup> There was a market-town of the Kurus called Kammāsa,damma.<sup>49</sup>

### Ānanda's declaration

**1b** Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

“It is wonderful, bhante; it is marvellous, bhante, how deep this dependent arising is, how deep it appears to be.<sup>50</sup> Yet it is as clear as can be to me!”

<sup>48</sup> Comy to **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15) says: “It is said that the Blessed One was unable to find any dwelling-place at (ie near) the market-town. So leaving the market-town, the Blessed One went into the great forest, where he found a certain suitable and pleasant spot with water, and there he dwelt, making the market-town his alms-resort” (*Bhagavato kira tasmiṃ nigame vasan'okāso koci vihāro nāma nāhosi. Nigamato pana apakkamma aññatarasmiṃ udaka,sampanne ramanīye bhūmi,bhāge mahā,vana,soṇḍo ahosi tattha bhagavā vihāsi, taṃ nigamaṃ gocara,gāmaṃ katvā*) (DA 2:483). See Intro (1.2) & (12).

<sup>49</sup> This opening is identical to **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22) and **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), as such, it is very likely that this sutta was taught at the same venue around the same time. DA explains that there was no place in town for the Buddha to stay, so he stayed outside, in the jungle. The same setting opens **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.1 = 2:55). Kammāsa,damma, Kammāsa,dhamma, or Kammasa~: Comy here says: “It is said that the Blessed One was unable to find any dwelling-place at (ie near) the market-town. So leaving the market-town, the Blessed One went into the great forest, where he found a certain suitable and pleasant spot with water, and there he dwelt, making the market-town his alms-resort” (*Bhagavato kira tasmiṃ nigame vasan'okāso koci vihāro nāma nāhosi. Nigamato pana apakkamma aññatarasmiṃ udaka,sampanne ramanīye bhūmi,bhāge mahā,vana,soṇḍo ahosi tattha bhagavā vihāsi, taṃ nigamaṃ gocara,gāmaṃ katvā*) (DA 2:483).

**The Kuru kingdom** was located in the plain of Kurukṣetra between the Yamunā and the Ganges, where its capitals of Hastina,pura (Pali *Hatthina,pura*) (NE of Meerut) and Indra,prastha (Pali *Inda,patta*) (near Delhi) played important roles during the Epic period. According to Buddhaghosa the people of Kammāsa,damma had a good diet and great wisdom; hence, out of compliment, the Buddha taught them profound suttas: (Mahā) Satipaṭṭhāna S (D 22; M 10), Mahā Nidāna S (D 15) and **Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106/2:261 ff) (SA 2:87). The **(Cūḷa) Nidāna S** (S 12.60/-2:92), **Sammasa S** (S 12.66/2:107 f) and **Ariya,vasā S** (A 18.20/5:29 f) were also delivered at Kammāsadamma.

<sup>50</sup> Bodhi: “We might perhaps understand the first phrase [“The dependent arising is deep”] to refer to dependent arising as an objective principle, the second [“appears deep”] to the verbal exposition of that principle. Together they indicate that dependent origination is deep both in essence and in manifestation.” (1984:7). Comy explains that dependent arising is “deep” in 4 respects: (1) depth of meaning (ie from the effect looking back to its condition); (2) depth of phenomena (ie from the condition looking to its effect); (3) depth of teaching (diversity of methods use by the Buddha to teach it); (4) depth of penetration (it makes one realize the true nature of existence). (DA 2:485 f; see also 1984:7-9).



“Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda! The dependent arising is deep, it appears deep. Ānanda, because of not understanding, because of not penetrating this truth, this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted muñja-grass<sup>51</sup> and reeds—it does not cross beyond the cyclic life<sup>52</sup> with its plane of misery, its evil destination, its lower realms.

## I. Description of dependent arising

### Reverse cycle

2 Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Are **decay and death** due to a specific condition?’<sup>53</sup> One should say, ‘They are.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there decay and death?’ one should say, ‘With **birth** as condition there is decay and death.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is birth due to a specific condition?’ [56] one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there birth?’ one should say, ‘With **existence** as condition there is birth.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is existence due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there existence?’ one should say, ‘With **clinging** as condition there is existence.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is clinging due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there clinging?’ one should say, ‘With **craving** as condition there is clinging.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is craving due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there craving?’ one should say, ‘With **feeling** as condition there is craving.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is feeling due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there feeling?’ one should say, ‘With **contact** as condition there is feeling.’

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is contact due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there contact?’ one should say, ‘With **name-and-form**<sup>54</sup> as condition there is contact.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there name-and-form?’ one should say, ‘With **consciousness** as condition there is name-and-form.’<sup>55</sup>

Ānanda, if one were asked, ‘Is consciousness due to a specific condition?’ one should say, ‘It is.’

If one were asked, ‘With what as condition is there consciousness?’ one should say, ‘With **name-and-form** as condition there is consciousness.’

<sup>51</sup> *Muñjā*, a kind of grass reed, *Saccharum munja* Roxb (Sn 440). Cf *muñja,kesa*, “having dark flowing mane (like *muñjā* grass),” D 2:174). It is sometimes made into slippers (*muñja,pādukā*) (DhA 3:451). The *muñjā* reed itself (as opposed to the sheath) is called *isikā*, but this is found only in similes (D 1:77 = M 2:17; cf J 6:67; DA 1:222). SED (Monier Williams), under *ikṣukāṇḍa*, says that *muñja* is a kind of sugar cane. According to the University of Melbourne (Australia)’s “Multilingual Multiscript Plant Name Database,” *muñjā* is the Bengal cane, see <http://rimmo.mur.csu.edu.au/Plantnames/Sorting/Saccharum.html>.

<sup>52</sup> “Cyclic life,” *samsāra*, lit “perpetual wandering,” ie, round/s of rebirth. This is the unbroken chain of the aggregates (*khandha*) that are inherently painful due to their impermanence.

<sup>53</sup> *Atthi idap,paccaya jarā,marāṇaṇ ti*, lit “Is there specific condition in decay and death?” “Specific condition,” (*idap,paccayā*), that is, the proximate cause and effect. See Bodhi 1984:10-13.

<sup>54</sup> While this sutta defines the terms for the other links, it does not define *nāma,rūpa*, but goes on to discuss the causal connection between *nāma,rūpa* and *phassa* (omitting *saḷ’āyatana*) [19-22]. Reat (1987) gives an insightful study of *nāma,rūpa*. See also Bucknell 1999:322 ff.

<sup>55</sup> This link and the next form a *loop*. They are both defined at §§21+22a.

## Forward cycle

3 Thus, Ānanda,  
 with name-and-form as condition, there is consciousness;  
 with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;<sup>56</sup>  
 with name-and-form as condition, there is contact;  
 with contact as condition, there is feeling;  
 with feeling as condition, there is craving;  
 with craving as condition, there is clinging;  
 with clinging as condition, there is existence;  
 with existence as condition, there is birth;  
 with birth as condition, there arise decay and death, sorrow, [57] lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

## Birth conditioning decay-and-death

4 It is said thus: ‘**With birth as condition, there is decay and death.**’

Ānanda, how birth conditions decay and death should be known in this manner:

If there were no *birth* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—that is to say, of gods into the god state, of gandharvas<sup>57</sup> into the gandharva state, of yakshas into the yaksha state, of non-humans into the non-human state,<sup>58</sup> of humans into the human state, of quadrupeds into the quadruped state, or the winged<sup>59</sup> into the winged state, or reptiles<sup>60</sup> into the reptile state, each into their own state—

if there were no birth of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—

then, in the complete absence of birth, with the cessation of birth, would decay and death occur?”<sup>61</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition<sup>62</sup> for decay and death, that is to say, birth.”

## Existence conditioning birth

5 “It is said thus: ‘**With existence as condition, there is birth.**’

Ānanda, how existence conditions birth should be known in this manner:

If there were no *existence* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—that is to say, the sense existence, the form existence, or the formless existence—

if there were no existence of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—

then, in the complete absence of existence, with the cessation of existence, would birth occur?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for birth, that is to say, existence.”

<sup>56</sup> On the relationship of this line and the preceding, see Intro (3).

<sup>57</sup> “Gandharvas,” *gandhabba*, sometimes means “heavenly minstrel,” but here probably refers to the intermediate state between rebirths. For discussion, see Harvey 1995:105-108. See “**Is rebirth immediate?**” in SD 2003:2.16.

<sup>58</sup> “Non-humans,” *bhūtā*, usu tr as “spirits, demons,” but here I follow Comy and give a broader sense of the term.

<sup>59</sup> “The winged,” *pakkhīna*, here encompasses not only birds, but any animals with wings, such as bats.

<sup>60</sup> “Reptiles,” *sirīmsapa* (Skt *sarīṣṛpa*), lit “crawling, creeping,” ie snake, reptile (V 1:3, 2:110; D 2:57; M 1:19; S 1:154; A 2:73, 117, 143, 5:15; Sn 52, 964; J 1:93; Pv 3.5,2; Nm 484; VbhA 6).\*

<sup>61</sup> “Would there be decay and death?” *jarā, maraṇaṃ paññāyethā*, lit “would decay and death be manifested?”

<sup>62</sup> *Tasmā ’ti-h ’ānanda es ’eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo jarā, maraṇassa, yad idaṃ jāti*. The phrase “this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition” (*es ’eva hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo*) occurs 17 times (§§4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22); see Intro (2.1).

### Clinging conditioning existence

**6** “It is said thus: ‘**With clinging as condition, there is existence.**’

Ānanda, how clinging conditions existence should be known in this manner:

If there were no *clinging* of any kind whatsoever of anyone [58] anywhere—that is to say, no clinging to sense-pleasure, clinging to views, clinging to vows and rituals, or clinging to the self-doctrine<sup>63</sup>—if there were no clinging of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—

then, in the complete absence of clinging, with the cessation of clinging, would there be existence?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for existence, that is to say, clinging.”

### Craving conditioning clinging

**7** “It is said thus: ‘**With craving as condition, there is clinging.**’

Ānanda, how craving conditions clinging should be known in this manner:

If there were no *craving* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—that is to say, no craving for visible forms, no craving for sounds, no craving for smells, no craving for tastes, no craving for touches, no craving for or craving for mind-objects—

if there were no craving of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—

then in the complete absence of craving, with the cessation of craving, would there be clinging?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for clinging, that is to say, craving.”

### Feeling conditioning craving

**8** “It is said thus: ‘**With feeling as condition, there is craving.**’

Ānanda, how feeling conditions craving should be known in this manner:

If there were no *feeling* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, that is to say, no feeling born of eye-contact, no feeling born of ear-contact, no feeling born of nose-contact, no feeling born of tongue-contact, no feeling born of body-contact, no feeling born of mind-contact—

if there were no feeling of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—

then, in the complete absence of feeling, with the cessation of feeling, would there be craving?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for craving, that is to say, feeling.”

### Dependent arising of social problems

**9** <sup>64</sup>Thus, Ānanda,

<sup>63</sup> The 4 clingings (*upādāna*): to sense-pleasure (*kāmūpādāna*), to views (*diṭṭhūpādāna*), to vows and rituals (*sīla-b, batūpādāna*), and to the self-doctrine (*atta, vādūpādāna*): see **Sammā Ditṭhi S** (M 9.34/1:50 f), SD 11.14. On clinging to sense-pleasures, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (2). On clinging to views, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5). On clinging to vows and rituals, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.3). On clinging to self-doctrine, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5.2): self-view. *Attānuvāda*. Cf D 2:58, 3:230; M 1:66; S 2:3; Dhs 212. Regarding *atta, vād’upādāna* (clinging to a self-view), Comy says that those who hold such a view, talk about or cling to the “self” (MA 1:219). On *atta, āda*, see **Sallekha S** (M 8/1:40).

<sup>64</sup> This section—listing **the 9 states rooted in craving**, omitting the first link, feeling—forms a short sutta of its own, called **Taṇhā (Mūlaka) S** (A 9.23/4:400 f), and recurs at D 34.2.2(4)/3:289 (“**the 9 things to be abandoned**”) & Vbh 390. In the well known dependent arising formula, we have “contact→feeling→craving.” Here, however, the formula starts with feeling as the condition for craving, *successively followed by 9 other factors*, the last being a list

dependent upon <u>feeling</u>	( <i>vedanā</i> ),	there is craving;
dependent upon <u>craving</u>	( <i>taṇhā</i> ),	there is seeking;
dependent upon <u>seeking</u>	( <i>pariyesanā</i> ),	there is gain;
dependent upon <u>gain</u>	( <i>lābha</i> ),	there is decision-making; <sup>65</sup>
dependent upon <u>decision-making</u>	( <i>vinicchaya</i> ),	there is desire and lust; <sup>66</sup>
dependent upon <u>desire and lust</u>	( <i>chanda, rāga</i> ),	there is attachment;
dependent upon <u>attachment</u>	( <i>ajjhosaṇa</i> ),	there is possessiveness;
dependent upon <u>possessiveness</u>	( <i>pariggaha</i> ),	there is avarice; [59]
dependent upon <u>avarice</u>	( <i>macchhariya</i> ),	there is safe-guarding;
dependent upon <u>safe-guarding</u>	( <i>ārakkha</i> ),	there arise various evil unwholesome states—taking up of the rod, taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], back-biting, harsh speech, false speech. <sup>67</sup>

**10** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon safe-guarding, there are born various evil unwholesome states**—the taking up of the rod, the taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes, harsh speech, false speech.’

Ānanda, how safe-guarding conditions *the various evil unwholesome states* should be known in this manner:

If there were no *safe-guarding* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of safe-guarding, with the cessation of safe-guarding, would there be *the various evil unwholesome states*?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for *the various evil unwholesome states*, that is to say, safe-guarding.

**11** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon avarice, there is safe-guarding.**’

Ānanda, how avarice conditions safe-guarding should be known in this manner:

If there were no *avarice* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of avarice, with the cessation of avarice, would there be safe-guarding?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for safe-guarding, that is to say, avarice.

**12** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon possessiveness, there is avarice.**’

Ānanda, how possessiveness conditions avarice should be known in this manner: [60]

If there were no *possessiveness* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of possessiveness, with the cessation of possessiveness, would there be avarice?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for avarice, that is to say, possessiveness.

**13** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon attachment, there is possessiveness.**’

Ānanda, how attachment conditions possessiveness should be known in this manner:

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of social problems. Comy labels the 2 sides of craving as “craving which is the root of the rounds” (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and “obsessional craving” (*samudācāra, taṇhā*) (DA 2:500). See Intro (3.2). On dependent arising being applied to the rise of social disorders, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (19.5).

<sup>65</sup> “Decision-making,” *vinicchaya*, lit “decision, deliberation, examination, investigation.”

<sup>66</sup> “Desire and lust,” *chanda, rāga*, here treated as dvandva (so Ñānamoli/Bodhi), “desire and passion” (Rhys Davids); sometimes treated as karmadharaya: “lustful desire” (Walshe).

<sup>67</sup> *Ārakkhā ’dhikaraṇaṃ daṇḍ’ādāna, saṭṭh’ādāna, kalaha, viggaha, vivāda, tuvaṃtuva, pesuñña, musāvādā aneke pāpakā akusalā dhammā sambhavanti.*

If there were no *attachment* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of attachment, with the cessation of attachment, would there be possessiveness?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for possessiveness, that is to say, attachment.

**14** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon desire and lust, there is attachment.**’

Ānanda, how desire and lust condition attachment should be known in this manner:

If there were neither *desire* nor *lust* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of desire and lust, with the cessation of desire and lust, would there be attachment?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for attachment, that is to say, desire and lust.

**15** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon decision-making, there are desire and lust.**’

Ānanda, how decision-making conditions desire and lust should be known in this manner:

If there were no *decision-making* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of decision-making, with the cessation of decision-making, would there be desire and lust?” [61]

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for desire and lust, that is to say, decision-making.

**16** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon gain, there is decision-making.**’

Ānanda, how gain conditions decision-making should be known in this manner:

If there were no *gain* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of gain, with the cessation of gain, would there be decision-making?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for decision-making, that is to say, gain.

**17** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon seeking, there is gain.**’

Ānanda, how seeking conditions gain should be known in this manner:

If there were no *seeking* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere, then, in the complete absence of seeking, with the cessation of seeking, would there be gain?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for gain, that is to say, seeking.

**18** It is said: ‘**Dependent upon craving, there is seeking.**’

Ānanda, how craving conditions seeking should be known in this manner:

If there were no *craving* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—that is, no craving for sense-pleasure, craving for existence or craving for non-existence—then, in the complete absence of craving, with the cessation of craving, would there be seeking?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for seeking, that is to say, craving.

Thus, Ānanda, these two dharmas,<sup>68</sup> being a duality, converge into a unity in feeling. [62]

<sup>68</sup> Comy: These two dharmas (or phenomena) (*ime dve dhammā*) are the two aspects of craving, that is, craving as the root of The rounds of rebirths (*vaṭṭa, mūla, taṇhā*) and craving as obsession (*samudācāra, taṇhā*), ie obsessive craving (DA 2:500). In the Chinese texts, only one **Dīrgh’āgama** reading (T60c.13) mentions the three forms of *taṇhā*, but both **Dīrgh’āgama** and **Madhyam’āgama** list “these two dharmas” as *kāma, taṇhā* and *bhava, taṇhā* (T243a19-20 = T579b22 = T845a8-9). Bucknell concludes, “It is likely, therefore, that [the Dīgha version] formerly listed just the two kinds, despite Buddhaghosa’s suggestion that the phrase refers to a different two kinds of *taṇhā* [DA 500].” (1999:317 n21).



## Feeling

**19** It is said: ‘**With contact as condition, there is feeling.**’

Ānanda, how contact conditions feeling should be known in this manner:

If there were no *contact* of any kind whatsoever of anyone anywhere—that is to say, there were no eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, or mind-contact—then, in the complete absence of contact, with the cessation of contact, would there be feeling?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for feeling, that is to say, contact.

## Contact

**20** It is said: ‘**With name-and-form as condition, there is contact.**’

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

(1) If, Ānanda, there were no *qualities, traits, signs and indicators*<sup>69</sup> through which there is a description [definition] (*paññatti*) of the mental body [mind-group]<sup>70</sup>—then would **conceptual impression**<sup>71</sup> manifest in the physical body?”<sup>72</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(2) If, Ānanda, there were no qualities, traits, signs and indicators through which there is a description of the mental body [mind-group]—then would **sense-impression**<sup>73</sup> manifest in the mental body?”<sup>74</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

<sup>69</sup> *Yehi ākārehi yehi lingeḥi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi*. Comy: The mutually dissimilar nature of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, are called “qualities” (*ākāra*). They are also called “traits” (*līṅga*) because, when carefully looked at, they betray the hidden meanings (of their base) (*līṇam-attha*). They are also called “signs” (*nimitta*) because they are the causes of perceiving (*sañjānana, hetuto*); and they are also called “indicators” (*uddesa*) because they are to be indicated (“pointed out”) (*uddisitabbo*) [through these the meaning is signalled or inferred]. (DA 2:500 f; DAṬ within square brackets). For further explanation, see SD 18.3(1.1).

<sup>70</sup> *Nāma, kāya*, the “mind-group” comprises the 4 formless groups of existence (*arūpino khandhā*): feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhārā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). It is distinguished from *rūpa, kāya*, the body-group, comprising form (*rūpa*), ie the 4 elements (*dhātu, mahā, bhūta*) [see SD 17.1 & 2]. We have here the first canonical occurrence of this term and also at **Pm 1:183** (where it is def as “feeling, perception, intention, contact, attention and naming are the mental body, and also what are called mind-formations, *vedanā saññā cetanā phasso manasikāro nāmaṇ ca, nāma, kāyo ca, ye ca vuccanti citta, saṅkhārā*) but *nāma, kāya* is mentioned by itself at **Sn 1074**. The twofold grouping (*nāma, kāya* and *rūpa, kāya*) is common in Comys. In **Dhamma, saṅgāṇī**, all phenomena are classified as 3 groups: consciousness (*citta*) (*khandha* 5), mental factors (*cetasika*) (*khandhā* 2-4) and form (*rūpa* = *khandha* 1).

<sup>71</sup> “Conceptual impression,” *adhivacana, samphassa*, lit “designation-contact” or “labelling-contacts” [5.3] referring to verbal (ie mental or conceptual) impression. Comy: “Conceptual impression is synonymous with mind-contact, which arises in the mind-door taking the four (mental) aggregates as its basis [because it is apprehended by means of designation and description]” (DA 2:501 with Subcomy). U Thittila, in his **Vbh 6** tr, renders it as “analogical contact” (Vbh: T §17/7) with the n, “Mind and mental objects do not impinge but are explained by the analogy (*adhivacana*) of physical states.” On *adhivacana* and *pañiḥa*, see Intro (5.2) above.

<sup>72</sup> *Yehi Ānanda ākārehi yehi lingeḥi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi nāma, kāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu līṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho rūpa, kāye adhvavacana, samphasso vā paṇiḥa, samphasso vā paññāyethā ti*. On *rūpa, kāya*, see §20(1) n here.

<sup>73</sup> “Sense-impression,” *pañiḥa, samphassa*, lit “impingement-contact” or “impact-contact” [5.3], referring to impression through sensory stimulus. Comy: Sense-impression is the contact that arises taking the contact-aggregate of form as basis (*sappaṇiḥam rūpa-k, khandham vatthum*) (DA 2:501), that is, contact arising through eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, and body-contact (ie the 5 physical sense-experiences). On *adhivacana* and *pañiḥa*, see Intro (5.2) above.

<sup>74</sup> *Yehi Ānanda ākārehi yehi lingeḥi yehi nimittehi yehi uddesehi rūpa, kāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu līṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho paṇiḥa, samphasso vā paṇiḥa, samphasso vā paññāyethā ti*.

(3) If, Ānanda, there were no qualities, traits, signs and indicators through which there is a description of the mental body and the physical body [the mind-group and the body-group]—then would conceptual impression or sense-impression manifest itself?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(4) If, Ānanda, there were no qualities, traits, signs and indicators through which there is a description of the name-and-form—then would there be **contact**?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for contact, that is to say, name-and-form.

## The looped formula<sup>75</sup>

### Existential consciousness<sup>76</sup>

**21** It is said: ‘**With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.**’ [63]

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

If there were no *consciousness* to descend into a mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?”<sup>77</sup>

“Certainly not, bhante.”

If, after descending into the mother’s womb, the consciousness were to depart, would name-and-form be generated in this state of being here?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“If the consciousness of a young boy or a young girl were to be cut off, would name-and-form grow, develop and mature?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for name-and-form, that is to say, consciousness.

### Cognitive consciousness

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

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

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

<sup>75</sup> On the 2 forms of consciousness described here, see **Nagara S** (S 12.65), SD 14.2 Intro (2) & **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a(6).

<sup>76</sup> This term (“existential consciousness”) and the next subheading (“cognitive consciousness”) are modern neologisms. See **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (6) & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

<sup>77</sup> Cf **Tiṭṭh’āyatana S** (A 3.61) where the Buddha declares: “Based on the six elements, there is descent into the womb; | (On account of) such a descent, there is name-and-form; | With name-and-form as condition, there is contact; | With contact as condition, there is feeling. | Now, it is for one who feels that I make known [the 4 noble truths]” (A 3.61.9/1:176). This clearly shows that feeling arises with the descent of the gandharva (rebirth consciousness) into the womb. However, this is not a common interpretation of *viññāṇa-nāma,rūpa* dyad, where “*viññāṇa* in this context became the consciousness that descends into the mother’s womb at conception, while *nāma-rūpa* became the body complex that takes shape and, after developing sense-organs (*saḷāyatana*), experiences contact (*phassa*) and so on.” (Bucknell 1999:339). More commonly, *viññāṇa* is “the consummation of the six types of consciousness associated with the sense organs, which makes the version read like an account of the psychological process of sensory perception.” (Bucknell 1999: 327): see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16-18/1:111-113). See discussion on *nāma,rūpa* in the essay **Dependent arising**, SD 5.11 Intro.

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this itself is the reason, this is the connection [link], this is the arising, this is the condition for consciousness, that is to say, name-and-form.

### Name-and-form and consciousness

**22b** It is thus far, Ānanda, that one can be born, or decay, or die, or fall away, or re-arise;  
 thus far that there is a pathway for designation;  
 thus far there is a pathway for language;  
 thus far there is a pathway for description;  
 thus far there is sphere for knowing [wisdom];  
 thus far that the samsaric round (of lives)  
 turns [64] for describing this (state of being),  
 that is, when there exist name-and-form together with consciousness.<sup>78</sup>

## **II. Talk on the rounds (*vaṭṭa, kathā*): self-views**

### Descriptions of the self

**23** In what ways, Ānanda, does one *describing* the self describe it?

Ānanda, one describing the self as having form and being limited, describes it thus, ‘My self has form and is limited.’

Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as having form and being unlimited, describes it thus, ‘My self has form and is unlimited.’

Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as being formless and limited, describes it thus, ‘My self is and limited.’

Or, Ānanda, one describing the self as being formless and unlimited, describes it thus, ‘My self is formless and unlimited.’

**24a** Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as having form and being limited either describes such a self (as existing only) *now*,<sup>79</sup> or one describes such a self as one that *will be* [will arise in the future],<sup>80</sup> or one thinks: ‘What is *not* so, I will fashion it so that it is *so*.’<sup>81</sup>

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as having form and being limited lies latent in one.

**24b** Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as having form and being unlimited either describes such a self (as existing only) *now*, or one describes such a self as one that *will be* [will arise in the future], or one thinks: ‘What is *not* so, I will fashion it so that it is *so*.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as having form and being unlimited lies latent in one.

<sup>78</sup> The PTS ed is followed here. Be adds *añña-m-añña, paccayatā pavattati*, “(which) occur as conditions for one another.” “But this phrase seems to have been mistakenly read from the commentarial gloss into the text itself.” (Bodhi 1984:60 n1). On the interrelationship between name-and-form and consciousness [21, 22], see **Nāḷa, kalapiya S** (S 12.67) which compares this intimate interconnection (*nāma, rūpa* and *viññāṇa*) to “two bundles of reeds that are standing and supporting each other...if one of the two were to fall, the other would fall, too.” (S 12.67/ 2:114).

<sup>79</sup> As in the case of a materialist holding an annihilationist view.

<sup>80</sup> *Tattha bhāviṃ vā so rūpiṃ anantaṃ attānaṃ paññapento paññapeti*. For example, in the case of an eternalist or a Creator-God believer.

<sup>81</sup> *Ataṭhaṃ vā pana santaṃ tathattāya upakappessāmi*. Walshe: “Though it is not so now, I shall acquire it there.” Nāṇamoli/Bodhi: “That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.” One possible interpretation is that, for example, an eternalist thinking that his “soul” is not permanent, hopes for “eternal life” by subscribing to some eternalist belief. For the interpretations of this enigmatic sentence, see Bodhi 1984:38 (Intro).

**24c** Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as being formless and limited either describes such a self (as existing only) now, or one describes such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], or one thinks: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as being formless and limited lies latent in one.

**24d** Here, Ānanda, the one who describes the self as being formless and unlimited either describes such a self (as existing only) now, or one describes such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], or one thinks: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it **[65]** so that it is so.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as formless and unlimited lies latent in one.

—Ānanda, it is in these ways that one describing the self describes it.

### Non-description of the self

**25** In what ways, Ānanda, does one, *not* describing the self, *not* describe it?

Here, Ānanda, one not describing the self as having material form and being limited, does not describe it thus, ‘My self has form and is limited.’

Or, Ānanda, one not describing the self as having form and being unlimited, does not describe it thus, ‘My self has form and is unlimited.’

Or, Ānanda, one not describing the self as being formless and limited, does not describe it thus, ‘My self is formless and limited.’

Or, Ānanda, one not describing the self as being formless and unlimited, does not describe it thus, ‘My self is formless and unlimited.’

**26a** Here, Ānanda, one who does not describe the self as being formless and limited neither describes such a self (as existing only) now, nor does one describe such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], nor does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as having form and being limited does not lie latent in one.

**26b** Here, Ānanda, one who does not describe the self as having form and being unlimited neither describes such a self (as existing only) now, nor does one describe such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], nor does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as having material form and being unlimited does not lie latent in one.

**26c** Here, Ānanda, one who does not describes the self as being formless and limited neither describes such a self (as existing only) now, nor does one describe such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], nor does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as being formless and limited does not lie latent in one

**26d** Here, Ānanda, one who does not describe the self as being formless and unlimited neither describes such a self (as existing only) now, nor does one describe such a self as one that will be [will arise in the future], nor does one think: ‘What is not so, I will fashion it so that it is so.’ **[66]**

This being so, it is right to say that the notion (of a self) as being formless and unlimited does not lie latent within one.

—Ānanda, it is in these ways that one *not* describing the self does *not* describe it.

### The self is meaningless apart from experiences<sup>82</sup>

**27** In what ways, Ānanda, does one, *contemplating* the self, *contemplate* it?

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion on this section see, Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*, 1982: 98-103; also **Self & selves**, SD 26.9 (2.4(3)).

(1) Here, Ānanda, one contemplating the (notion of) the self, contemplates it thus, ‘Feeling *is* my self.’<sup>83</sup>

(2) Or, Ānanda, one contemplating the (notion of) the self, contemplates it thus, ‘Feeling is *not* my self; my self is without the experience of feeling.’<sup>84</sup>

(3) Or, Ānanda, one contemplating the (notion of) the self, contemplates it thus, ‘Feeling is not my self, but my self is *not without feeling*. My self feels; for my self is of the nature to feel.’<sup>85</sup>

### One feeling at a time

**28** (1) In the case, Ānanda, of the one who says, ‘**Feeling is my self,**’ he should be asked: ‘Friend, there are these three kinds of feeling: *pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling*. Of these three kinds of feeling, which do you consider as the self?’

Ānanda, when one experiences *a pleasant feeling*, one does not, at the same moment, experience a painful feeling or a neutral feeling. At that moment, one experiences only a pleasant feeling.

Ānanda, when one experiences *a painful feeling*, one does not, at the same moment, experience a pleasant feeling or a neutral feeling. At that moment, one experiences only a painful feeling.

Ānanda, when one experiences *a neutral feeling*, one does not, at the same moment, experience a pleasant feeling or a painful feeling. At that moment, one experiences only a neutral feeling.

### Feelings are impermanent, non-self

**29a** Ānanda, a pleasant feeling is *impermanent*, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

Ānanda, a painful feeling, too, is *impermanent*, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, [67] subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

Ānanda, a neutral feeling, too, is *impermanent*, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to ending.

**29b** If, when one experiences *a pleasant feeling*, one thinks, ‘This is my self,’ then with the ending of that pleasant feeling, one thinks, ‘My self is gone!’

If, when one experiences *a painful feeling*, one thinks, ‘This is my self,’ then with the ending of that painful feeling, one thinks, ‘My self is gone!’

If, when one experiences *a neutral feeling*, one thinks, ‘This is my self,’ then with the ending of that neutral feeling, one thinks, ‘My self is gone!’

**29c** Thus one who thinks, ‘Feeling is my self’ regards the self as something that, even here and now, is impermanent, a mixture of pleasure and pain, subject to arising and passing away.

Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to contemplate thus, ‘Feeling is my self.’

### We are what we feel

<sup>83</sup> *Vedanā me attā ti*. That is, identifying the “self” with the feeling aggregate (*vedanā-k, khandha*) (DA 2:507 f).

<sup>84</sup> *Na h’eva kho me vedanā attā, appaṭisaṃvedano me attā ti*. That is, identifying the “self” with the body aggregate (*rūpa-k, khandha*). (DA 2:507 f).

<sup>85</sup> “My self... is of the nature to feel,” *Na h’eva kho me vedanā attā, no pi appaṭisaṃvedano me attā, attā me vedi-yati, vedanā, dhammo hi me attā*. That is, identifying the self with the aggregates of perception (*saññā-k, khandha*), formations (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa-k, khandha*) (DA 2:507 f).

The sentence, *vedanā, dhammo hi me attā*, lit “feeling-nature indeed is my self,” alt tr “my self is subject to feeling.”



30 <sup>86</sup>(2) Here, Ānanda, of the one who says, ‘**Feeling is *not* my self; my self is without the experience of feeling,**’ he should be asked: ‘Friend, where there is nothing at all that is felt, could the idea “I am”<sup>87</sup> occur here?’”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to contemplate thus, ‘Feeling is not my self; my self is without the experience of feeling.’

### Feelings change

31 (3) Here, Ānanda, of the one who says, ‘**Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without feeling,**’ he should be asked: ‘Friend, if feeling were to utterly end without remainder, then, when feeling does not exist at all, with the ending of feeling, could (the idea), “I am this,” occur there?’”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, it is unacceptable to contemplate thus, [68] ‘Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without the experience of feeling.’

### One who clings not to the world

32.1 Ānanda, when a monk

(1) does *not* regard feeling as the self, and

(2) does *not* regard the self as without experience of feeling, and

(3) does *not* contemplate thus, ‘My self feels; for my self is of the nature to feel’<sup>88</sup>

—then, being without such considerations, he does *not* cling to anything in the world.

Not clinging, he is *not agitated*. Unagitated, he *attains nirvana* for himself. He understands, ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is (for me) no more of arising in any state of being.’

32.2 Ānanda, if anyone should say of a monk whose mind has been thus liberated that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata exists after death’—that would not be proper.

Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata does not exist after death’—that would not be proper.

Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death’—that would not be proper.

Or that he holds the view, ‘A tathāgata neither exists nor not exist after death’—that would not be proper.

32.3 What is the reason for this? Because that monk is liberated by directly knowing that

thus far there is a way for	designation;
thus far there is a way for	language;
thus far there is a way for	defining;
thus far there is a sphere for	knowing [wisdom];
thus far that the samsaric round (of lives) turn for	defining this (state of being).

<sup>86</sup> On refutations (2) and (3) here, Harvey says: “These two refutations show that, for the authors of the early Suttas, a real Self must have self-awareness, having a sense of ‘I am’ or ‘this I am.’ The argument is, though, that the sense of ‘I am’ or ‘this I am’ only arise when feeling exists. As they thus depend on feeling, which is itself not-Self (refutation i), they are themselves not-self [1995: §1.9/p20 f]. The ‘I’ that is Self would thus turn out to be not-Self, which is a contradictory situation. That is, if there can only be a Self under conditions which would make it *not*-Self, then it is clearly impossible for there to be such a thing as a Self. While the above passage may not be intended to ‘refute’ Self, but only deny certain views on Self, it clearly has the effect of showing that *the concept itself is self-contradictory*.” (1995:31 f). In 2012, Harvey uses “non-self” instead of “not-self”: see **Is there a soul**, SD 2.16 (1.2).

<sup>87</sup> Be *ayam aham asmi*, “I am this.” The PTS ed *asmi*, “I am,” which is confirmed by Comy. Both eds have *ayam aham asmi* as the reading for the following section.

<sup>88</sup> *Attā me vediyati, vedanā, dhammo hi me attā’ti*.

**32.4** To say of a monk who is liberated by directly knowing this that he holds the view, ‘One does not know, one does not see’—that would *not* be proper.

### III. Talk on the ending of the rounds (*vivatta, kathā*)

#### The 7 stations for consciousness

**33** Ānanda, there are these **seven stations for the consciousness**,<sup>89</sup> and there are **the two spheres**.<sup>90</sup> What are the seven?

(1) There are, Ānanda, beings who are different [69] in body and different in perception, that is to say, human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms.

This is the first support for the consciousness.

(2) There are, Ānanda, beings who are different in body but same in perception, that is to say, the beings of the Brahma world who have arisen through the first dhyana.

This is the second support for the consciousness.

(3) There are, Ānanda, beings who are same in body but different in perception, that is to say, the devas of streaming radiance (*Abha-s, sara*).

This is the third support for the consciousness.

(4) There are, Ānanda, beings who are same in body and same in perception, that is to say, the devas of radiant glory (*Subha, kiṇṇa*).

This is the fourth support for the consciousness.

(5) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the perception of physical form, the passing away of perceptions of impingement, and non-attention to the perception of diversity, (contemplating,) ‘Space is infinite,’ arrive at the sphere of the infinity of space.

This is the fifth support for the consciousness.

(6) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the sphere of the infinity of space, (contemplating,) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ arrive at the sphere of the infinity of consciousness.

This is the sixth support for the consciousness.

(7) There are, Ānanda, beings who, through having utterly transcended the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, (contemplating,) ‘There is nothing,’ arrive at the sphere of nothingness.

This is the seventh support for the consciousness.

**32.4** And there is the sphere of non-percipient beings with the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the second.

#### The true nature of the 7 stations for consciousness

**34** (1) Ānanda, as regards **the first support for consciousness**, whose beings are different in body and different in perception, that is to say, *human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?” [70]

“Certainly not, bhante.”

<sup>89</sup> “Seven stations for the consciousness,” *satta viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo*. For diag, see Intro, Table 2. It is interesting to note that the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*), are not listed as “stations for consciousness.” The Pure Abodes are inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaniṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46); cf D 3:253; A 4:39. See *Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti*, SD 23.14.

<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere these are called “the nine abodes of beings” (*nava, satt’āvāsa*) (D 33.3.2(3)/3:263, 33.2.2(3)/3:288; A 9.24/4:401). Here *āyatana* is rendered as “sphere,” referring to a realm or level of meditation; where it refers to the senses, it is tr as “base.” *Avacara* (lit “down-wandering”) is tr as “realm,” but “sphere” is often used here, too. See Table 2 for a full list of the various stations and spheres.

(2) “Ānanda, as regards **the second support for consciousness**, whose beings are different in body but same in perception, that is to say, *human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(3) “Ānanda, as regards **the third support for consciousness**, whose beings are same in body but different in perception, that is to say, *the devas of streaming radiance (Abha-s,sara)*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(4) “Ānanda, as regards **the fourth support for consciousness**, whose beings are same in body and same in perception, that is to say, *the devas of radiant glory (Subha,kiṇṇa)*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(5) “Ānanda, as regards **the fifth support for consciousness**, through having utterly transcended the perception of physical form, the passing away of perceptions of impingement, and non-attention to the perception of diversity, (contemplating,) ‘Space is infinite,’ arrive at *the sphere of the infinity of space*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(6) “Ānanda, as regards **the sixth support for consciousness**, through having utterly transcended the sphere of the infinity of space, (contemplating,) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ arrive at *the sphere of the infinity of consciousness*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

(7) Ānanda, as regards **the seventh support for consciousness**, whose beings, through having utterly transcended the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, (contemplating,) ‘There is nothing,’ arrive at *the sphere of nothingness*—whoever understands it, and its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape from it—is it proper for him to delight in it?”

“Certainly not, bhante.”

“Ānanda, when a monk—having understood as they really are, its arising, its passing away, its satisfaction, its dangers, and the escape in regards to these seven stations for the consciousness and in regards to the two spheres—is liberated through non-clinging, then he is called a monk **liberated through wisdom**.

## The 8 liberations

**35** Ānanda, there are these eight liberations.<sup>91</sup> What are the eight?

(1) One with physical form sees physical forms.<sup>92</sup> This is the first liberation.

(2) One does not see physical form internally, but sees physical forms externally.<sup>93</sup> This is the second liberation. [71]

(3) One is liberated after contemplating the idea of the beautiful.<sup>94</sup> This is the third liberation.

<sup>91</sup> “Eight liberations,” *aṭṭha vimokkhā*; also at **Salāyatana S** (M 137.26/3:222). For further details, see Intro (10).

<sup>92</sup> *Rūpī rūpāni passati*. Perceiving form on one’s own body, one sees forms externally. This is said in connection with *kasīna* meditation. This is one of the “spheres of sovereignty” (*abhibhāyatana*), ie, one of the 8 stages of mastery over the senses through dhyana (*jhāna*); see D 2:110; M 77/2:13; A 8.675/4:305, 10.29/6:61. See Intro (10).

<sup>93</sup> *Ajjhattaṃ arūpa,saññī bahiddhā rūpāni passati*. Not perceiving forms on one’s own body, one sees forms externally. See Intro (10).

(4) Through the utter transcending of the perception of physical form, the passing away of the perception of impingement, and non-attention to the perception of diversity, (contemplating,) ‘Space is infinite,’ one enters and dwells in the sphere of the infinity of space. This is the fourth liberation.

(5) Through the utter transcending of the infinity of space, (contemplating,) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ one enters and dwells in the sphere of the infinity of consciousness. This is the fifth liberation.

(6) Through the utter transcending of the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, (contemplating,) ‘There is nothing,’ one enters and dwells in the sphere of nothingness. This is the sixth liberation.

(7) Through the utter transcending of the sphere of nothingness, one enters and dwells in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This is the seventh liberation.

(8) Through the utter transcending of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is the eighth liberation.<sup>95</sup>

**36** Ānanda, when a monk attains these eight liberations in a forward order, or in a reverse order, or in both forward and reverse order, when he attains to them and emerges from them, wherever he wishes, in whatever way he wishes, for as long as he wishes,

and when, right here and now having realized for himself through direct knowledge, upon attaining the liberation of mind and the liberation by wisdom<sup>96</sup> that are influx-free with the destruction of the mental influxes,<sup>97</sup> dwells therein—then he is called a monk who is **liberated both ways**.<sup>98</sup>

Ānanda, there is no other “liberation both ways” that is higher or more excellent than this liberation both ways.”

The Blessed One said this. The venerable Ānanda joyfully approved<sup>99</sup> of the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

<sup>94</sup> ‘Subhan’ *t’eva adhimutto hoti*. This consists of concentrating the mind on perfectly pure and bright colours as *kasīna*-object. See Intro (10).

<sup>95</sup> This last stage requires both concentration and insight, and can be attained only by non-returners and arhats who have mastered the formless attainments. See Bodhi, 1984:47-51.

<sup>96</sup> “**Liberation of mind and liberation through wisdom**,” respectively, *ceto, vimutti* (or, liberation by concentration, ie through destruction of the mental hindrances) and *paññā, vimutti* (liberation through insight) (A 1:60). One who is *liberated by wisdom* “may not have reached the 8 deliverances (*vimokkha* = *jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70.16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 deliverances** (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the four formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called *liberated both ways*, that is, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Saḷha, like the arhats Sāriputta and Moggallāna, is “liberated both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of liberation are given in **Mahānidāna S** (D 2:70 f) and **Kūṭāgiri S** (M 1:477 f). For full list of the 8 deliverances, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/2:70 f). For full list of the 8 deliverances, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/2:70 f), SD 5.17.35. See also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120.37/3:103 = SD 3.4.37.

<sup>97</sup> “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints”, RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj’āsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

<sup>98</sup> On types of saints, see Intro (10).

<sup>99</sup> “Joyfully approved,” *attamanā...abhinandunī*.

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