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# NOTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN BUDDHA-DHARMA

The article is devoted to the phenomenon of consciousness in the sensory world, without which, according to the author, there is no “being”. In Eastern religious philosophy, consciousness is one of the most inevitable aspects of the discussion that leads to the full realization of awakening or enlightenment.

*Keyword:* Buddhist sources, consciousness, Abhidharmakośa, Pali Canonical Texts, *ālaya*-consciousness.

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# ПОНЯТИЕ СОЗНАНИЯ В БУДДА-ДХАРМЕ

Статья посвящена феномену сознания в чувственном мире, без которого, по мнению автора, не существует никакого «бытия». В восточной религиозной философии сознание – одна из самых неизбежных сторон обсуждения, которое ведет к полному осознанию пробуждения или просветления.

*Ключевые слова:* буддийские источники, сознание, Абхидхармакоша, Палийский канон, алая-виджняна.

**The etymological meaning and Terms for Consciousness**

In Buddhist sources consciousness does not have one single name, and does not include all conscious activities. Essentially, it is classed as one single entity or element (dharma) that functions in association with its mental concomitants, which influence its behaviour and ethical qualities. Thus, the totality of conscious experiences is split into consciousness and mental concomitants.

The word viññāṇa (Skt. vijñāṇa) is a combination of the prefix “vi”, the root √ñā (Skt. √jñā) and the suffix “ana”. “Vi” means “distinctively” (visesa), √ñā means “to recognize, to know”, and “ana” is the neuter noun-forming suffix. Beings are aware of different kinds of object such as visible object, sound, smell, taste, and touch through this ultimate reality.

Among several terms in Buddhist texts denoting consciousness, three occupy a primary position: citta, manas and vijñāna[2]. It is said in the canonical texts and reaffirmed in the Abhidharma sources that these three terms are synonyms (ekārtha) [Abhidharmakośa 1970–1972: 2.208; Saṃyutta Nikāya 1884–1898: 2.95; Visuddhimagga 1950: 14.82].

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[1] In western studies the term citta is often rendered as “consciousness” or “mind”, manas as “mind”, and vijñāna as “consciousness”. In this article I follow these renderings, but frequently retain the Sanskrit terms for the sake of clarity and precision.

However, although they refer to the same thing, namely consciousness, their interpretations as given in different contexts and taxonomies are not the same.The Abhidharmakośa and its commentaries state that the terms citta, manas and vijñāna refer to the same thing, but have different etymologies (nirvacana): citta accumulates (cinoti), manas thinks (manute), and vijñāna cognizes (vijānāti).

The AK explains that when citta serves as a support it is manas, and when it is supported it is vijñāna. Then it further clarifies that citta accumulates whole-some and unwholesome dharmas, and that it is accumulated (cita) by the pure and impure elements (dhātu). When it acts as a support (āśraya) it is manas, and when it is supported (āśrita); it is vijñānas [Abhidharmakośa 1970–1972: 2.208].

In the Pali Canonical Texts (Tipitaka) of Buddhism consciousness is referred as Viññāna; which is translated as "life-force". In the first four Nikayas of the Sutta-Pitaka Viññāna is one of the three overlapping Pali terms used to refer to mind. The others are being manas and citta. Each is used in the generic and non-technical sense of mind in general. But the three are sometimes used in sequence to refer to one's mental process as a whole.

Throughout Pali literature, Viññāna can be found as one of a handful of synonyms for the mental force that animates the otherwise inert material body. In a number of Pali texts though, the term has a more nuanced and context-specific (or "technical") meaning. In particular, in the Pali Canon's "Discourse Basket" *(Suttapitaka)*, *viññāṇa* (generally translated as "consciousness") is discussed in at least three related but different contexts:

(1) as a derivative of the sense bases *(āyatana)*, part of the experientially exhaustive "All" *(sabba)*;

(2) as one of the five aggregates *(khandha)* of clinging *(upadana)* at the root of suffering (*dukkha*); and,

(3) as one of the twelve causes *(nidana)* of "Dependent Origination" *(paticcasamuppāda)* which provides a template for Buddhist notions of kamma, rebirth and release[1].

In the Pali Canon's Abhidhamma and in post-canonical Pali commentaries, consciousness *(viññāṇa)* is further analyzed into 89 different states which are categorized in accordance with their karmic results.

The Dictionary of Pāḷi Language defines the word viññāṇa as "intelligence, knowledge, consciousness, thought, and mind". Rhys Davids and William Stede define "viññāṇa" as a mental quality as a constituent of individuality, the bearer of individual life, life force (as extending also over rebirths), principle of conscious life, general consciousness (as function of mind and matter), regenerative force, animation, mind as transmigrant, as transforming (according to individual kamma) one individual life (after death into the next).

In the Pāḷi English Dictionary, "viññāṇa" has been translated into English as "thought", "mind", or "consciousness". Among all these renderings, "consciousnesses" is seen as the most appropriate term for "viññāṇa", and is widely used by Buddhist scholars.

[1]Vijñāna – Wikipedia.

**Ālaya-consciousness** *(ālaya-vijnāna)* storehouse consciousness, never-perishing consciousness, or maintaining-consciousness (*ādāna*-consciousness). According to the Consciousness-Only school, the eighth and deepest of the eight consciousnesses; *ālaya* means abode, dwelling, or receptacle, and *vijnāna* means discernment. Located below the realms of conscious awareness, it is called the storehouse consciousness, because all karma created in the present and previous lifetimes is stored there. It is also called the never-perishing consciousness, because the karmic seeds preserved there continue even after death, and the maintaining-consciousness, because it maintains the life and body of a sentient being. The *ālaya*-consciousness is regarded as that which undergoes the cycle of birth and death, and determines the nature of individual existence. All the actions and experiences of life that occur through the first seven consciousnesses, such as sight, hearing, touch, and mind, are accumulated as karma in this *ālaya*-consciousness, which in turn exerts an influence on the workings of these seven. The Consciousness-Only school, which postulates the existence of the eight consciousnesses, holds that all phenomena arise from the *ālaya*-consciousness and that the *ālaya*-consciousness is the only reality.

The dialogue between King Milinda and Bhante Nāgasena clearly illustrates what is viññāṇa: King Milinda asked: “Bhante Nāgasena, what is consciousness?” “Your Majesty, consciousness is the act of being conscious”. “Give an illustration”. “It is as if, Your Majesty, the city watchman were to take his seat at the crossroads in the middle of the city and were to behold every man who approached from the eastern quarter ... southern quarter ... western quarter ... who approached from the northern quarter; in exactly the same way, Your Majesty, whatever form a man beholds with the eye, of that he is conscious with the consciousness; whatever sound ... whatever odor ... taste ... tangible thing ... whatever idea he is conscious of with the mind, of that he is conscious with the consciousness. Thus, Your Majesty, is consciousness the act of being conscious”.

**Levels of Consciousness**

The Buddha taught that consciousness is always continuing, like a stream of water. Consciousness has four layers. The four layers of consciousness are mind consciousness, sense consciousness, store consciousness, and manas. Mind consciousness is the first kind of consciousness.

Mind consciousness is the first kind of consciousness. It uses up most of our energy. Mind consciousness is our “working” consciousness that makes judgments and plans; it is the part of our consciousness that worries and analyzes. When we speak of mind consciousness, we’re also speaking of body consciousness, because mind consciousness isn’t possible without the brain. Body and mind are simply two aspects of the same thing. Body without consciousness is not a real, live body. And consciousness can’t manifest itself without a body.

Buddhism teaches that there are 9 levels of Consciousness. The teaching offers a means of understanding of human awareness and how we are connected to the world and the wider universe. The theory has come about from 2500 years of study and investigation into the nature of our inner selves and the endless cycle of birth, life and death.

**The first 5 levels – using our senses**

The first 5 levels of consciousnesses are your bodily senses. In order these are sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Depending on the strength of the input of these senses, you will have differing awareness of these consciousnesses at different times.

**The 6th Level – the mind**

The 6th level of consciousness is the layer that integrates and processes the information from the various senses into a coherent whole – this level corresponds closely with the western concept of "the mind". For most people, these first 6 levels of consciousness are where we spend most of our time in performing daily activities.

**The 7th level – your inner life**

This is the first level of consciousness that is inner looking rather than focused outwards. This 7th level or "manas" (Sanskrit) is concerned with the sense of self, and of your ability to distinguish between good and evil.

**The 8th level – where karma resides**

Below these 7 levels, Buddhists believe that there is an 8th level – the "alaya" consciousness. This correlates with what modern psychology would call the unconscious mind. In this level is stored all the good and the evil deeds, as well as all the experiences of past and present lifetimes – the karma. Unlike the first 7 levels of consciousness, which are destroyed upon death of the physical body, the alaya persists past death. It is also called the "storehouse" or never-perishing consciousness. It is at this level that spiritual phenomena occur.

**The 9th level – pure consciousness**

Deeper even than the alaya consciousness there exists a layer of consciousness termed the "amala" consciousness. This level is free from the impurities of karma and is therefore called the fundamental pure consciousness. This is the fundamental basis of all life. In this amala consciousness the true eternal self can exist in harmony with the life of the cosmos itself. This level is greatly powerful and attained by reaching enlightenment.

The Buddhist concept of the 9 levels of consciousness gives a great template for living your life and for transformative change. The Buddhist teaching of the close interconnectedness of all living things shows also how changes you make for the better in your life lead to positive changes in others – as we are all connected like myriad cogwheels.

**How can you progress through the 9 levels of consciousness?**

Buddhism comes from a long history of introspection and personal growth. This tradition has many spiritual techniques that have been developed over the millennia, but the most accessible to most people is meditation. To learn meditation you do not have to be a practicing Buddhist – meditation is practiced these days by people from all walks of life and all cultural backgrounds and has many benefits which have been backed up by modern scientific study as well.

Meditation allows you to deepen your level of consciousness. In the beginning you will start at level 7, but with meditation you will soon find yourself being able to move into the 8th level. The 8th level of consciousness transcends the limits of the individual as you begin to access the energy of karma. Changing your karmic energy for the better will have a positive impact on those around you too and you will find yourself growing in compassion and self-awareness.

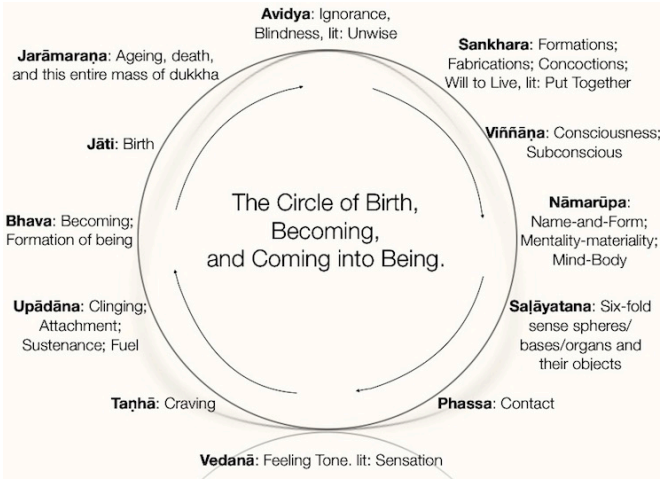
**Activities of Viññāṇa**

Viññāṇa has subtle and complicated activities. The activities of viññāṇa flow on continuously during the lifetime and do not stop even during sleep and on the verge of death. The first consciousness in a life is rebirth consciousness. It links one life to another. After

this consciousness passes away, other consciousnesses arise. All of them perform their specific function and pass away. The Law of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda) explains how volitional formations cause the arising of consciousness.

**Viññāṇa in the Law of Dependent Origination**

The Law of Dependent Origination is a doctrine expounded by the Buddha. It explains how all conditioned phenomena (mentality and materiality) arise and cease dependent upon causes and conditions. This doctrine consists of twelve factors that include both material qualities and mental forces. Each factor of the twelve is an effect of its preceding factor, and in turn, a cause of the following. Of the twelve factors, viññāṇa stands at the third junction of causal relations. It is produced by volitional (Sankhara) and it is a condition for mentality and materiality (nama-rupa).




**Viññāṇa at the rebirth moment (Paṭisandhi)**

At the stage of conception of beings with five-aggregates, rebirth linking consciousness appears first in the mother's womb and brings forth the combination of mentality and materiality into existence. The Mahānidāna-sutta questions, "If consciousness were not to appear in the mother's womb, would the mental and physical phenomena (nāma-rūpa) arise?" The Buddha also asked Venerable Ānanda a similar question, "Were consciousness, Ānanda, not to fall into the mother's womb, would mind-and-body (nāma-rūpa) be constituted there?" Venerable Ānanda replied, "It would not, Lord". "Were consciousness, having fallen into the mother's womb, to turn aside from it, would mind-and-body come to birth in this present state?" "It would not, Lord" [Mahānidāna sutta: II.254].

According to the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta, conception take place only through the concurrence of the three factors. If mother and father come together, but it is not the mother's proper season, and the being to be born is not present, a germ of life is not planted. The parents come together, and it is the mother's proper season, but if the being to be born is not present, conception will will not take place. If mother and father come together, it is the mother's proper season, and paṭisandhicitta of the being to be born is also present, then a germ of life is planted there [Mahānidāna sutta: I.256]. At the moment of rebirth linking, kamma produces consciousness, mental factors and materiality. Materiality (rūpa) means

the physical form (kāya), sex (bhāva) and the seat of consciousness (hadayavatthu). This psycho-physical personality arises and grows in the fetus or the embryo of the mother.

**Concluding Remarks**

Viññāṇa (consciousness) is one of the most important concepts in Buddhism. According to Buddhist philosophy, a being is "aware" of the "world" through Viññāṇa. In the absence of Viññāṇa there would be no "awareness". Nevertheless, this Viññāṇa is impermanent and impersonal in nature. It changes moment to moment. It is neither a "soul" nor a "self". As one of the five aggregates that constitute an individual or a so-called being and as a leading aggregate of the five aggregates from the aspect of psycho-physical make-up, viññāṇa plays the most crucial role in experiencing mental-and-physical phenomena and concepts in the world of condition (saṅkhata), and higher spiritual realization of the unconditioned (asaṅkhata or Nibbāna). Without viññāṇa, the other aggregates have no companion and accordingly have no base for existence and performance of their functions. Without viññāṇa, the other three mental aggregates – feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā) and mental formations (saṅkhārā) – cannot be found, and beings are inanimate just like non-sentient beings (asaññasattas) without perception, knowing and intuition. Viññāṇa is only one according to its function of awareness of the object. However, they are enumerated 89 or 121 on account of associated mental factors and different functions they perform together. Viññāṇa can also be classified into various categories – with root and without root; unwholesome, wholesome, resultant and functional, etc. From the aspect of etymology, viññāṇa is synonymous with citta, mana, ceta, hadaya and mānasa. These technical terms are different in words, but the same in meaning. From the aspect of reality, viññāṇa that stands for citta is one of the four ultimate realities, namely: citta (consciousness), rūpa (matter), cetasika (mental concomitants) and Nibbāna. Of these four ultimate realities, the first three are worldly and conditioned. The last one is supramundane and unconditioned. Viññāṇa produces mind-born matters, serves as a background or soil for association and existence of mental concomitants, and for the arising of different types of matter originated from kamma, temperature, and food. It also serves as a background or soil for understanding or wisdom (paññā) to analyze the conditioned realities, and for the realization of the fourth ultimate reality. From the aspect of psycho-physical make-up, viññāṇa plays the most crucial role in experiencing mental-and-physical phenomena and concepts in the world of condition (saṅkhata), and higher spiritual realization of the unconditioned (asaṅkhata or Nibbāna). Without viññāṇa, other aggregates have no companion and accordingly have no ground for existence and performance of their functions as well. Without viññāṇa, other three mental aggregates – feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā) and mental formations (saṅkhārā) – cannot be found, and beings become just like non-sentient beings (asaññasattas), without perception, knowing, and intuition. Despite the indispensable contribution to forming a so-called being as the whole, and to supporting other mental-and-physical phenomena for their existence and continuity, viññāṇa is conditionally arisen. It arises on account of conditions, so does it disappear. It comes into being due to concurrence of internal sense-faculties and external stimulus, and it ceases to exist when this concurrence changes or ends. Viññāṇa is one of the factors that constitute an ever-changing flux or process of mentality-materiality. No ever-lasting or eternal "agent", "soul", or "self" – as normally misconstrued by ignorant worldlings – evolves in and influences

viññāṇa. As conditioned phenomenon, viññāṇa serves as object of contemplation. From the aspect of the Four Noble Truths, viññāṇa belongs to the Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkhasacca).

With much effort and devotion, the researcher has tried best to analyze the concept of viññāṇa, based primarily on Vibhaṅga and Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha. Hopefully, this thesis has succeeded to contribute in defining, describing, analyzing, classifying, and giving a clear idea of the viññāṇa as explained in the Abhidhamma texts. However, due to limited time and data available, some interesting topics have been left untouched or not dealt with in detail. A related topic that may be further investigated can investigated can be the power of consciousness – in some cases, it is misled and misused in a detrimental and unprofitable way, such as casting spells, bewitching, harming people, and so on; while in other cases, it is developed to the higher states and used for the good purposes, e.g., the attainment of abhiññā or supernormal powers may be used to heal and cure diseases, and so on. Still another related topic is the effect of consciousness on the environment and vice versa. Another interesting point that could make a good research is that there is not only one stream of consciousness arising within us but many – there can be different types of creatures and worms inside our body; all these have consciousness. The researcher hopes that in the future there will be more studies on this topic. The thought process described in Abhiddhamma is unique. The proper knowledge of viññāṇa is essential to those who are pursuing the Buddhist way of life. When one knows that unwholesome mind brings unhappiness, one can restrain and develop the mind for its non-arising. It also benefits those who are interested in the fields of psychology. Most of our unhealthy intentions and actions have their origin in wrong view about “life” and “existence”. Once we get a proper view, our mind is less apt to develop unhealthy neurotic and psychotic behaviours, consequently our actions bring peace and happiness. For those seeking truth and freedom, it is indispensable to acquire insight into the true nature of consciousness, for consciousness is a decisive nucleus of human happiness and woe. Not knowing its nature can lead to false views. Knowing and rightly comprehending the same can help one gain freedom in life.

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