

THE EARLY BUDDHIST ANALYSIS OF MIND

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The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to free the mind. To free the mind, it is necessary to develop the mind. To develop the mind, it is necessary to know the mind. This is the reason why Buddhism gives a prominent place to the analysis of mind.

2. Buddhism brings into focus the primacy and centrality of mind as the fundamental reality of human existence, the ever-changing sequence of thoughts, feelings and perceptions that go to make our conscious experience. What is stressed is not only a grasping aright of the nature of mind in bondage, but more importantly, the immense potentialities the mind possesses to realize higher cognitive capacities as well as to elevate itself to the highest level of freedom. If bondage means to come under the control of one's own mind, freedom means to have a mind under one's own control. Both bondage and freedom have mind as their common locus

The first basic principle of the analysis of mind is the dependent arising of consciousness: "Apart from conditions, there is no arising of consciousness". Consciousness is not some kind of potentiality that becomes actualized on different occasions. Nor is it a static entity that continues to persist without undergoing change. Consciousness springs up on a duality.

3. What is that duality? It is in the case of eye-consciousness for example, eye, the visual organ, which is impermanent, changing and becoming other. Such is the transient, fugitive duality (of eye-cum-visible objects), which is impermanent, changing and becoming-other. Eye consciousness too is impermanent. For how could eye-consciousness arisen by depending on impermanent conditions be permanent. The coincidence (sangatī), concurrence (sannipata) and confluence (samavaya) of the three factors, viz. the eye, eye-object, and eye-consciousness which is called sensory contact, and those other mental phenomena arising in consequence, are also impermanent.

It always arises due to the contact between a sense-organ and a sense-object. There are six kinds of sense-organs and six kinds of sense-objects, namely, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; colour, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind-objects. Accordingly, there are six kinds of consciousness, namely, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness.

3. The second basic principle is that consciousness does not exist as an isolated, solitary phenomenon. It always exists in conjunction with the other four aggregates into which a living being is analyzed, namely, materiality (rūpa), feelings (vedana), perceptions (saṇṇa), and mental formations (saṃkhara).

4. Although consciousness cannot be separated from the other four aggregates, nevertheless it can be identified or distinguished from them. This is the reason why it is possible to describe the nature of consciousness as well as the other four aggregates.

5. The third basic principle is the reciprocal or mutual dependence of consciousness on the one hand, and mentality-materiality (nama-rupa) on the other. Here “mentality” means five mental factors, namely, feeling (vedana), perception (sanna), volition (cetana), sensory contact (phassa), and attention (manasikara). These are the five basic mental factors that arise together with every type of consciousness. The idea behind this is that as the knowing or awareness of an object, consciousness cannot arise as a solitary phenomenon: It has to be assisted by the five mental factors for it to cognize or be aware of an object. Materiality in “mentality-materiality” means the four great material elements (mahabhuta) and the matter that is dependent on them (upada-rupa). It refers to the organic matter, as for example, the five physical sense-organs, that enter into the composition of a living being.

6. The three basic principles, discussed so far, clearly show that there is no unchanging mental substance or a thing-in-itself in our psychological or mental experience.