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## Unconscious Views

An examination of some Buddhist terms for body-mind processes  
by Piya Tan ©2009

My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirr'd;  
And I myself see not the bottom of it.

Achilles, in *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.3.3 2189 f<sup>1</sup>

### 1 We are what we have thought

#### 1.1 WHY THESE VIEWS ARE UNCONSCIOUS

We often hear the saying, “We are what we think.” However, following the early Buddhist teachings, it would be more correct to say, especially of unawakened persons, “we are what we *have thought*.” In fact, much of what we *are*, is what we *have thought*. When we worry, for example, the root conditions of the worrying always lie in the past, or more exactly, arises from past habitual tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

Our past often shadows us, relentlessly colouring, filtering and guiding our feelings and thoughts so that they are decidedly tinged with lust, ill will or delusion, and we seem unable to do anything about them. We are controlled by the views (*ditṭhi*) generated and perpetuated by these latent tendencies (*anusaya*).<sup>3</sup>

The views that lie hidden deep in our unconscious are those that fear death and desire to exist forever. From this fear arises the view that there is a part of it that is unchanging, permanent and eternal. This notion is *the soul*, the biggest phantom of the “I,” *biggest* in the sense that it functions only to promote itself (*aham, kāra*). It will do anything, say anything, believe anything, just to feed itself.

In fact, it is like a runaway horse-chariot, out of control, driven by greed, fed by hatred, and piloted by ignorance. Understandably, this runaway chariot keeps running and racing with other runaway chariots through the dangerous pathways of samsara. It is like a high-speed version of Sisyphus pushing his rock up the mountain, and on reaching the peak, to see it roll down again. Then he goes down and starts all over again. But he seems to enjoy it!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, 1602: [OpenSource Shakespeare](http://OpenSource_Shakespeare).

<sup>2</sup> On habitual tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

<sup>3</sup> **Latent tendencies** (*anusayā*) or “latent dispositions” highlight the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. See Abhs 7.9: “The latent dispositions are defilements which ‘lie along with’ (*anuseti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the 7 mentioned here are the most prominent” (Abhs:B 268). **Sallaṭṭhena S** (S 36.6) introduces the teaching of the latent tendencies, of which the 3 basic ones (S 36.6.8bcd)—the latent tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighānusaya*), and of ignorance (*āvijjānusaya*)—are esp related to feelings. Another traditional expanded list gives 7 latent tendencies, ie, (1) sensual desire (*kāma, rāga*), (2) aversion (*paṭigha*), (3) views (*ditṭhi*), (4) doubt (*vickicchā*), (5) conceit (*māna*), (6) the desire for becoming (*bhava, rāga*), and (7) ignorance (*avijjā*): see **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(12)/3:254), **Anusaya S** (S 45.175/5:61) & **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). Items (3)-(4) are eliminated upon streamwinning; (1)-(2) upon non-return; (5)-(7) upon arhathood. **Anusaya Sutta 1** and **2** (S 35.58-59) explain how the latent tendencies are to be abandoned and to be uprooted respectively (S 35.58-59/4:32). See also Abhs:SR 172; and **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14(5).

<sup>4</sup> On the theme of *repetition*, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.9. On Sisyphus, see **Yodh’ājīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).

## 1.2 THE PURPOSE OF BUDDHIST TRAINING

The purpose of the Buddhist training is to at least rid our minds of evil and unwholesome views so that we can attain streamwinning.<sup>5</sup> As streamwinners, we would never consciously break the 5 precepts,<sup>6</sup> as a result of which we are never reborn in a subhuman plane.<sup>7</sup> We will be reborn for at the most seven more times, each time in an environment conducive for our spiritual progress.

The latent tendencies—lust, aversion and ignorance—are so deep-rooted that they are only fully uprooted upon the attaining of arhathood. However, if we have attained streamwinning, even as a lay practitioner, we are already assured of awakening and arhathood within 7 lives. If we work on understanding our minds, and overcoming the mental fetters,<sup>8</sup> then we hasten the awakening process, so that we would awaken in the very next life, in 3 lives, or 7 at the most.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Proper use of words and terms

### 2.1 BUDDHISM AND PHILOSOPHY

There is a growing interest of Western philosophers and scholars in Buddhism. The reason for this be both because Buddhism is a rising global religion and also because western philosophy has run out of things to question. These philosophers and scholars attempt to examine and discuss Buddhism as a *philosophy*. Two important questions arise here: how useful is philosophy to Buddhism? And is Buddhism a philosophy?

**Erik Hoogcarspel**, an independent scholar, in his review (2006) of David Burton's *Buddhism, Knowledge, and Liberation* (2005) makes this caustic but realistic comment on philosophy, that

as a rule, philosophers tend to make life not easier but more complicated; not good at giving answers, they excel at raising questions, in particular questions most people never think of.  
(Hoogcarspel 2006:1)

In various discourses, we find the Buddha discouraging, even warning, of the dangers of speculative thinking, which is what philosophy mostly does. In **the Acinteyya Sutta** (A 4.77), for example, the Buddha

<sup>5</sup> See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7. When the first 3 of the 10 mental fetters (see below) are broken, one becomes a streamwinner. The 10 fetters (*samyojana*) are: Self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), repulsion (*paṭigha*), greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). On *sakkāya* as the 5 aggregates, see Cūḷa Vedalla S (M 44). Spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the uncertainty over what is wholesome and unwholesome, whether a deed should be done or not, etc. It is the lack of a desire to heal oneself, and taking various sides due to one's being indecisive and unwise attention (Vism 14.177/471), in short, not making an attempt to think things out for oneself. Clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*) is holding on to the view that merely keeping to rituals and vows can bring one purification.

<sup>6</sup> **The five precepts** (*pañca, sīla*) are those of refraining (1) from harming life, (2) from taking the not-given, (3) from sexual misconduct, (4) from false speech, and (4) from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness. See **Pañca Vera, bhaya S** (S 12.41, 4-9/2: 68 f), SD 2.2 (4.2) & **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2). On def of the first 4 precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290), SD 5.7 (2). On the dangers of breaching the 5<sup>th</sup> precept, see **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31, 8/3:182 f), SD 4.1.

<sup>7</sup> The subhuman planes where spiritual learning and liberation are impossible, are the realms of animals, pretas, asuras, and hell-beings. See SD 23.11 n45 "Afflictive."

<sup>8</sup> On the 10 fetters and the stages of sainthood, see **Kiṭṭhā, giri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 (5.1).

<sup>9</sup> On **the streamwinner**, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

declares that speculating over these 4 subjects<sup>10</sup> would lead to one's going mad or being vexed, that is, speculating over the mental range of the Buddha, the mental range of one in dhyana, karmic fruits, and cosmological questions.<sup>11</sup>

However, mental cultivation (*samādhī*), that is, a focussed mind, is a necessary and important part of Buddhist spiritual training. One who has a "cultivated mind" (*bhāvitam cittam*) is said to be free from suffering (U 4.4.10/41\*; Tha 191). The Buddha also warns that after his time, that is, such as in our own times, there would be "monks who are not cultivated in body, nor in moral conduct, nor in mind, nor in wisdom."<sup>12</sup>

Modern philosophers, like Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), tend to see philosophy as purely theoretical,<sup>13</sup> as already noted above by Hoogcarspel. On other hand, thinkers, like the analytic philosopher, **Richard Rorty** (1931-2007),<sup>14</sup> says,

Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own—unaided by the describing activities of humans—cannot. ("The Fire of Life," *Poetry* 2007)<sup>15</sup>

Rorty adds that *philosophy* as a European category should not be imposed on non-European systems, especially in the study of Oriental teachers and philosophers. He asserts that Europeans and Americans should make effort to study the teachings of the Buddha and other great Eastern teachers. We need to learn their language, as it were, "and enrich our vocabulary with Sanskrit and Pali words and learn what those words meant to the people who used them. We must seek to understand them without giving in to the temptation to translate their most important terminology into our own familiar idiom." (Hayes 2009:4 f).

## 2.2 UNDERSTANDING BUDDHIST TERMINOLOGY

**David Burton**, in his interesting paper, "Unconscious beliefs in Buddhist philosophy: a comparative perspective" (2005), refers to a typology of unconscious beliefs developed by Western epistemologists, **Nicholas Everitt and Alec Fisher** (1995: 54 f). By way of comparative philosophy, Burton makes a useful attempt to "explicate and reflect on Buddhist ideas that were not originally formulated using such a typology" (2005: 119).

Actually, Burton need not be so apologetic because the Buddhist conception is much broader and deeper than any modern paradigm of the mind and the unconscious. *The unconscious* is at the crux of the problem that early Buddhist mind-training deals with in its strategy to cultivate mental health and awaken to spiritual liberation. What is valuable about Burton's response to Everitt and Fisher, and the duo's contribution, too, is that they provide a useful vocabulary to express the Buddha's wisdom in contemporary

<sup>10</sup> The 4 unthinkable (*acinteyya* or *acintiya*) are: (1) the range of the Buddha's knowledge, (2) the range of a meditator's dhyana, (3) the result of karma, and (4) thinking about the world (*loka*), ie, the universe.

<sup>11</sup> A 4.77/2:80 @ SD 27.5a (5.5.2). On a dubiously light side, this might explain why some of the leading philosophers of recent times end up becoming insane, and some of our philosophy specialists have very flaky behaviour.

<sup>12</sup> A 5.79/3:105-108 @ SD 1.10 (3.3); cf S 2:266 f.

<sup>13</sup> He says, eg, "It is my conviction that intentional phenomenology has for the first time made spirit as spirit the field of systematic scientific experience, thus effecting a total transformation of the task of knowledge," in "The crisis of European humanity, pt 2," Vienna, 1935. See also R P Hayes 2009:2-8.

<sup>14</sup> He says, eg, "Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own—unaided by the describing activities of humans—cannot." (*The Fire of Life*, 2007): <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/journal/article.html?id=180185>.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/1107/comment\\_180185.html](http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/1107/comment_180185.html).

term. However, it is important that in using such a vocabulary, the Buddha's teachings are presented just as they are without any baggage of those ideas as used to express western categories.<sup>16</sup>

Before we can meaningfully use such new terminology, we need to know what the early Buddhist terminology is. This is where some knowledge of Pali and maybe some Sanskrit would be necessary so that we do not superimpose alien categories onto the rich and potent Buddhist teachings of the mind. Yet, we still need to present such teachings in a manner that is comprehensible and effective to a non-Indian or contemporary audience.

### 2.3 SOME KEY BUDDHIST TERMS

Let me here state that my interest is not so much in philosophical discussion as it is in explicating Buddhist teachings to facilitate their practice for the sake of awakening in this life itself. My interest in academic studies of Buddhism is partly due to the fact there is so much of it now, some of which is very good and very challenging, and partly due to our need of a contemporary vocabulary to make Buddhist teachings more plainly clear. However, before doing all this, we need to know the Indian vocabulary of Buddhist teachings, so that we benefit from an understanding of early Buddhism as it is.

In this connection, we need to clearly understand some key early Buddhist terms, that is, *anusaya*, *āsava*, *diṭṭhi*, *viññāṇa*, and *saṅkhāra*. These terms occur all over the Nikāyas and later sections of the early canon. In simple terms, *anusaya* can be said to be the very “roots” of life's problems, and *āsava* refers to their manifestation in our everyday life and actions. Both of these churn out *diṭṭhi* (views) that define and limit us in many ways. Working together, they keep us in the rut of cyclic or samsaric life. Let us look at *āsava* first. And *viññāṇa* is the term for both our interaction with the world at its simplest level, and also the mechanism that keeps us in this rut, life after life.

#### 2.3.1 *Āsava*

The term *āsava* (literally, “in-and-out-flow”) comes from *ā-savati*, “flows towards or inwards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer); hence it is commonly translated as “influx.” It flows *out* like pus and impurities oozing out of a festering wound; hence, it is sometimes rendered as “canker”; or it flows *in* like a flood (*ogha*), which is another name for it. It has also been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” Rhys Davids), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated.

In other words, *āsavas* defile us and keep us defiled, so that we are burdened with wants, false views and fond hopes, and we forever feel burdened because they are never really satisfied. Understandably, in the later Buddhist texts, we find the term “defilement” (*kilesa*), a synonym, more commonly used than *āsava*.

The list of **3 influxes**—of sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), of existence (*bhav'āsava*), and of ignorance (*avijjāsava*)—is older (that the list of four, below) and is found more frequently in the suttas.<sup>17</sup> These three influxes are essentially the same as **the 3 graspings** (*ti, gaha*) of craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and views (*diṭṭhi*), on account of which arise, respectively, the notions “this is mine,” “this I am,” and “this is my self”.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I have used the term *philosophy* (as Burton has done), in a free sense of theoretical ideas that help us to think about a subject. A helpful reading here would be Richard P Hayes, “Why is there philosophy in Buddhism?” Leiden Univ lecture 1, 2009: <http://www.unm.edu/~rhayes/Lecture01.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63.

<sup>18</sup> See **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.18/1:38), SD 28.12. On each of these **3 graspings**, see **I: The nature of identity** (SD 19.1), **Me: The nature of conceit** (SD 19.2a) & **Mine: The nature of craving** (SD 19.3).

The later texts, especially the Abhidhamma, also listed **four kinds of influxes**, that is, treating views and ignorance separately,<sup>19</sup> thus,

- |                                |                         |  |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| (1) the influx of sense-desire | ( <i>kām'āsava</i> ),   | a sense of internal lack, seeking gratification; |
| (2) the influx of existence    | ( <i>bhav'āsava</i> ),  | a desire for divine or eternal life;             |
| (3) the influx of views        | ( <i>ditṭh'āsava</i> ), | a mindset that hinders spiritual growth;         |
| (4) the influx of ignorance    | ( <i>avijjāsava</i> ),  | not knowing the true nature of life.             |

(D 16,1.12/2:82, 16,2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937)

These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). *The influx of existence* is the attachment and desire for the realm of form and of formlessness, and as such, is the craving for the dhyanas, on account of *the false views* of eternalism and annihilationism. As such, *the influx of view* is subsumed under the influx of existence (MA 1:67). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood.<sup>20</sup>

The main reason I have translated *āsava* as “influx” because it clearly reflects the way in which an *āsava* operates. It flows into our minds as sense-data through the six senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind). They are primarily the five objects of physical sense-pleasures (*pañca kāma,guṇa*), which are then processed or edited by the mind (the sixth sense) in its own image. The repetitiveness and strength of such a process turn these sense-experiences into what dictates our bodily, verbal and mental habits, that is, the latent tendencies (*anusaya*).<sup>21</sup>

### 2.3.2 Anusaya

**Latent tendencies** (*anusaya*) or “latent dispositions” highlight the fact that the influxes (*āsava*) [2.3.1] are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. **The Abhidhamm'attha,saṅgaha**, an Abhidhamma compendium, says,

The latent dispositions are defilements which “lie along with” (*anuseti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the 7 mentioned here are the most prominent.

(Abhs 7.9; Abhs:B 268)

What are these seven prominent latent tendencies? The oldest set is that of the 3 latent tendencies, which are listed in **the Sallaṭṭhena Sutta** (S 36.6), and they are the 3 basic ones, namely:<sup>22</sup>

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| (1) the latent tendency of lust,         | <i>rāgānusaya</i>    |
| (2) the latent tendency of aversion, and | <i>paṭighānusaya</i> |
| (3) the latent tendency of ignorance.    | <i>āvijjānusaya</i>  |

Another traditional expanded list gives 7 latent tendencies, that is,<sup>23</sup>

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| (1) the latent tendency of sensual desire, | <i>kāma,rāga</i>  |
| (2) the latent tendency of aversion,       | <i>paṭigha</i>    |
| (3) the latent tendency of views,          | <i>ditṭhi</i>     |
| (4) the latent tendency of doubt,          | <i>vicikicchā</i> |
| (5) the latent tendency of conceit,        | <i>māna</i>       |
| (6) the latent tendency of existence, and  | <i>bhava,rāga</i> |
| (7) the latent tendency of ignorance.      | <i>avijjā</i>     |

<sup>19</sup> Paul Fuller explains that the influx of views is the attachment to knowledge, while the influx of ignorance is false knowledge itself (2005: 78 f): see op cit ch 3.

<sup>20</sup> See BDict: āsava.

<sup>21</sup> Latent tendencies are closely related to feelings: see **Vedanā**, SD 17.3 (3.2).

<sup>22</sup> S 36.6.8bcd/4:208 (SD 5.5).

<sup>23</sup> See also **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(12)/3:254), **Anusaya S** (S 45.175/5:61) & **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383).

The latent tendency of sensual desire is lust itself, which is a “latent tendency” in the sense that it has gained strength (*thāma, gat’atthēna*). Items (3)-(4) are eliminated upon *streamwinning*; (1)-(2) upon *non-return*; (5)-(7) upon *arhathood*. **The Anusaya Suttas 1 and 2** (S 35.58-59) explain how the latent tendencies are to be abandoned and to be uprooted respectively.<sup>24</sup>

### **2.3.3 Views (*ditthi*)**

The third key Buddhist term we need to know here is “view” (*ditthi*), which basically is what we *believe* our experiences to be. Again here, the early Buddhists have at least three terms, where modern philosophers and scholars might use “belief.” Take the example where someone views pain as being pleasurable: this is regarded as *a perversion of perception, of thought and of view*. The way we *perceive* things fuels how we *think* about ourselves, others and the world, and if this continues, we form strong *views* about ourselves, others and the world.<sup>25</sup>

**The Vipallāsa Sutta** (A 4.49) speaks of 4 kinds of perversion, thus:

Bhikshus, there are **these 4 perversions** [distortions] of perception, perversions of thought, perversions of view. What are the four?

(1) Taking the impermanent as permanent,<sup>26</sup> bhikshus, is a perversion of perception, perversion of thought, perversion of view.

(2) Taking the painful as pleasurable,<sup>27</sup> bhikshus, is a perversion of perception, perversion of thought, perversion of view.

(3) Taking the not self as the self,<sup>28</sup> bhikshus, is a perversion of perception, perversion of thought, perversion of view.

(4) Taking the impure [unattractive] as pure [attractive],<sup>29</sup> bhikshus, is a perversion of perception, perversion of thought, perversion of view.

These, bhikshus, are the four perversions [distortions] of perception, perversions of thought, perversions of view. (A 4.49/2:53), SD 16.11

As such, the proper way of viewing things, that is, wise attention, is to see all things in this world as being impermanent (*anicca*), painful (*dukkha*), not self (*anatta*) and impure (*asubha*). Impermanence is the easiest to understand, as we can easily see how things change, break, or die. Pain is a feeling which we are unable to tolerate beyond a short duration. Not-self means that all things, animate or inanimate, do not have any abiding entity. Impurity means that since all things change and decay, they attain a state which is naturally unpalatable.

### **2.3.4 Consciousness (*viññāna*)**

We need to understand that in early Buddhism *consciousness* has 2 important functions as (1) cognitive consciousness, and as (2) existential consciousness. The first is the consciousness that occurs at our six sense doors (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), and the second is basically our rebirth consciousness (*jāti* or *paṭisandhi viññāna*), or in later terminology, the life-continuum (*bhavaṅga citta*).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> S 35.58-59/4:32; see also Abhs:SR 172; and **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14(5).

<sup>25</sup> On the perversions, see **Satipatthāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (4.1a) & **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52; Vism 22.68), SD 16.11.

<sup>26</sup> *Anicce ... niccan ti*, lit “the permanent in the impermanent.”

<sup>27</sup> *Dukkhe ... sukhan ti*, lit “the pleasurable in the painful.”

<sup>28</sup> *Anattani ... attā ti*, lit “the self in what is not self.”

<sup>29</sup> *Asubhe ... subhan ti*, lit “the pure in the impure.”

<sup>30</sup> On the cognitive and existential consciousnesses, see **Viññāna**, SD 17.8a (6) & **The Unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

It might be at once pointed out here that our unconscious views and latent tendencies might be said to be “stored” in the second form of consciousness. But this is metaphorical language. Thought processes cannot be stored anyway, just as fire, lightning, or electricity is not stored anywhere. When the conditions are right, they occur. Let me drive home this point with a brief version of a famous skillful means used by the Buddha: a pupil holds a candle and asks his teacher, “Where does this fire come from?” The teacher blows the flame out, and replies, “Tell me where the fire has gone, and I will tell you where it comes from!”<sup>31</sup>

These two aspects of consciousness are not explicitly distinguished or explained in the early texts, but elaborated in post-Buddha schools.<sup>32</sup> They often occur together in the Suttas, and have been identified and analysed by **William Waldron** (2003: 42-45), whose findings I summarize here, with some of my own comments.<sup>33</sup> The first passage was actually first identified (in our times) by **Rune EA Johansson** (1965: 199), where he correctly identifies the second *viññāṇa* as the “rebirth-*viññāṇa*,” or what is here called *existential consciousness*. He quotes from **the Upāya Sutta** (S 22.53), which points out that desire for any of the five aggregates, the last of which is consciousness, provides a “support” for consciousness, which, however, disappears along with the desire:

If, bhikshus, a monk has abandoned lust for (the form element ..., the feeling element, ... the perception element ... for the formations element) **the consciousness element**, with the abandoning of lust, the basis is cut off. There is no establishing of consciousness.

And when that **consciousness** is unestablished, not growing, non-generative, it is liberated...  
(S 22.53/3:53 f), SD 29.4

**The Anātha,piṇḍik’ovāda Sutta** (M 143) contains a long passage where Sāriputta in his instruction to the dying Anātha,piṇḍika, applies the two meanings of *viññāṇa*.<sup>34</sup> After exhorting Anātha,piṇḍika not to let his consciousness be dependent on anything else (ie the sense-faculties, the five aggregates, etc), Sāriputta, at two significant points, instructs him to train himself thus:

“I will not cling to mind-consciousness, and my **consciousness** will not be dependent on mind-consciousness.” (M 143,7)

“I will not cling to consciousness, and my **consciousness** will not be dependent on consciousness.” (M 143,11)

There is no tautology here. The former “consciousness” refers to “cognitive consciousness” (*mano-viññāṇa*) while the latter, to the “existential consciousness” or rebirth consciousness (*paṭisandhi,viññāṇa*).<sup>35</sup> In other words, at the moment of death/rebirth, his mind does not cling to worldly thoughts, but should be focused in calm and clarity, so that the rebirth is a wholesome one.

The two kinds of consciousness are intimately connected with our unconscious views. **Johansson** suggests that this very reciprocity contributed to the “dimension” of consciousness, thus:

*Viññāṇa* refers mainly to the stream of conscious processes which characterizes the human mind, but it is also...responsible for the continuity both within this life and beyond. [I]t is probably more adequate to call it the dimension of consciousness... It is by nature dynamic and continually changing ... It may become more and more dependent on the stimuli from the external world and may be stuffed with contents and memories, which transform *viññāṇa* to the new personality of

<sup>31</sup> See the fire parable in **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,19/1:487) & SD 6.15 (4).

<sup>32</sup> Esp Yogācāra: see WS Waldron 2003: 41-45.

<sup>33</sup> For my own findings, see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (6) & **The Unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

<sup>34</sup> M 143.5-14/3:259-261, SD 23.9.

<sup>35</sup> See **The unconscious mind**, SD 17.8b (3).

the next birth ... In the former type of context [the “dimension” of *viññāṇa*], it is more of an inner functional unit, inner space, store-room; in the latter, more of the concrete, conscious processes which are the inhabitants of this inner room. (Johansson 1965: 63 f)

These twin consciousnesses, like fire, lightning, or electricity, are, as it were, *always there*. Our cognitive consciousness is like the “immanent” fire, lightning, or electricity. What switches the senses on, the turn or flick of a “switch,” as it were, is existential consciousness. It should be noted that in reality *the switch* is not a device, but *the moment* of switching on or off. But we should not read too much into this metaphor: this consciousness is neither immanent nor permanent, but changing moment by moment. This is how we know things, and do things, but most of them operate subliminally, on the unconscious level. We are a bundle of habits.

### **2.3.5 Formations (*saṅkhāra*)**

**2.3.5.0** At the heart of early Buddhism is the teaching of not-self (*anattā*), that is, the denial that the unchanging self exists. Our sufferings arise from our mistaken view that there is such an abiding self. How is this self-view formed? It decidedly arises from ignorance (*avijjā*), on account of which we form habitual tendencies or “formations” (*saṅkhāra*) of mental, verbal and bodily actions. This feeds our consciousness (*viññāṇa*) [2.3.4]. These three are in fact the beginning of the dependent arising formula.<sup>36</sup>

British philosopher, **Claire Carlisle**, has presented a very useful analysis of *saṅkhāra* as “habits.”<sup>37</sup> Here I shall summarize her presentation with some of my own comments.<sup>38</sup>

**2.3.5.1 FORMATIONS ARE HABITS.** Formations (*saṅkhāra*) are not just habits, but they replicate themselves and attract other similar habits—and they have karmic consequences. As unawakened beings, our notions of good and evil are rooted in ignorance, and we act accordingly. This is how we form our habits of thinking, speaking and acting.

The term *saṅkhāra* has both senses of “conditioned” and “conditioning.”<sup>39</sup> Our actions are unconsciously conditions by how we think, and such actions in turn condition future actions. Such thoughts occur exponentially: they are called “mental proliferation” (*papañca*).<sup>40</sup> And they are very powerful force behind our actions, lying dormant but ever ready to strike. They become latent tendencies [2.3.2].

**2.3.5.2 MY HABITS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.** Our past habits shape our present, both of which shape our future. Our actions, conscious or unconscious, have consequences.<sup>41</sup> As Charles Reade puts it: “Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny.” (1903: 377). This echoes the Buddhist teaching of karma. As Carlisle explains:

In both cases, the connection between actions and their consequences is not to be understood moralistically—it is not that wholesome deeds are rewarded and unwholesome ones punished. Rather, a purely naturalistic law ordains that as a seed is, so the fruit will be (and here again we find the idea that the same principle underlies both physical and psychical reality).

<sup>36</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16. On formations, see **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6.

<sup>37</sup> See Claire Carlisle, “Becoming and un-becoming: the theory and practice of *anattā*,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 7,1 2006:75-89.

<sup>38</sup> See Carlisle 2006:80-83.

<sup>39</sup> See Carlisle 2006:80 f. On etym of *saṅkhāra*, see Silburn 1955:200.

<sup>40</sup> See eg **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2).

<sup>41</sup> On how karma can be unconscious, see **The unconscious mind**, SD 17.8b.



From a Buddhist point of view, actions matter so much because, ... they *affect* and *form* the individual, not just for the duration of the action but for the future: one kind of action leads to another. This means that the focus of moral or spiritual life is the individual's responsibility for his actions, habits, and dispositions. Of course, the effects of one's actions on others must be considered, but this kind of consideration—or the lack of it—is integral to the actions themselves. (Carlisle 2006: 81)

**2.3.5.3 HABIT IS A RESPONSE TO SUFFERING.** Our habits are an attempt to ease suffering, but which usually does not really work; that is why they become *habituated*: we keep doing them in the hope of getting some positive result, or getting out of a negative situation, or simply because we do not know what else to do. We are caught in the rut of such habits as long as we do not understand that this entails *suffering*, the first noble truth. Our habits only invoke suffering, and we do not understand why.

People are caught up with habits and rituals because they seem to make life easier, more comfortable, and more *lived*. We might even feel a sense of achievement when we have completed habitual act or task (like Sisyphus) [1.1], but we need to keep on doing the same thing again and again. Ironically, habits inevitably turn out to be a source of suffering. Not only do we suffer when we lose those things that we are accustomed to, but our suffering is multiplied by our habitual, and unconscious, reactions of like and dislike to our bodily and mental sensations.

**2.3.5.4 HABIT IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH ATTACHMENT.** This association, notes Carlisle, is implicit in the etymology of “habit,” which comes from the Latin *habere*, which means to have or to hold. The connotations of possession and belonging, whether desirable or not, even suggest some extent of bondage or addiction.

The self, as popularly conceived, can be said to be “bundles of habits.” William James remarks rather wistfully that if only the young were to realise “how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while they are in the plastic state” (1977: 20).

Things (including ideas) that we are *attached* to do not really satisfy us: for, if they do, then we would not be attached to them. We are attached to things, and these things are always external to us, which we see as filling a lack in our lives. Only when we cultivate such wholesome qualities (especially love) *within* ourselves, could this sense of lack be overcome. This is the second noble truth.

**2.3.5.5 HABIT INVOLVES INATTENTION.** Habit, on account of its routine and repetitiveness, is likely to involve a diminishing attention: we tend to become less mindful of an action we keep doing over and over. As Marcel Proust puts it, “the heavy curtain of habit (the stupefying habit which during the whole course of our life conceals from us almost the whole universe ... ).”<sup>42</sup>

This metaphor, notes Carlisle, reminds us that the word “habit” may refer to clothing, to a particular form of dress; that is, to something that covers one up. Perhaps every habitual action is a movement of veiling, a perpetuation and consolidation of oblivion or ignorance. The question now is of what is covered up—who *wears* the habit?

For those whose identity depends on their habits (clothing) and external behaviour, they clearly lack any self-identity, no matter how many layers of habits. What habits conceal, then, is precisely this emptiness, this lack of a fixed, permanent, substantial core: “If habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing our first” (Proust 2006: 140). Mindfulness *unconceals* habits, and this revelation weakens and eventually unravels them, so that we see our true self.

**2.3.5.6 HUMAN NATURE IS NOT FIXED.** The claim that the self is a product of habit means that *human nature is not fixed*. However strong the force of habit, it does not amount to *determinism*: even the most

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<sup>42</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* vol 2 (tr Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff), London, 2006: 893.

entrenched habits can be changed. This leads us to the third noble truth: that freedom from suffering *is* possible. Habits are constructed, and therefore they can be deconstructed.

When habit is examined in the light of mindfulness, it is a learning process. Indeed, to master a skill, the best way is a habitual act, such as learning a new language, or repeatedly reciting a sutta, or ever bringing the distracted mind back to the meditation object. Habitual attention is a powerful tool of inner stillness and clarity.

Indeed, the best way to break a negative habit is a wholesome mindfulness. Habits are seldom broken by a single act, unless it is of such a profound power as to inspire samvega (religious urgency) or infuse joyful faith (*pasāda*) in us. Samvega arises when we are confronted by some sort of life-threatening, or near-death, or ground-removing experience (like when the Buddha sees the first three of the four sights).<sup>43</sup> Joyful faith is represented by the fourth sight.

To break a habitual mind is to become creative. The goal of creativity is profound joy. The truly spiritual is able to flood himself with such joy from within; for, he is awakened, and free from suffering.

### 3 We have *no* control over our views

**3.0** In the ultimate analysis, *human nature is not fixed*. But most of us, caught up in habitual tendencies and unconscious views, do not see this. Indeed, we often exist day to day resigned to the belief, conscious or unconscious, that we are inexorable creatures of habit. As we think, so we are.

In this essay, we will focus on *the nature of beliefs and views*, based on Everitt and Fisher's typology of three kinds of belief, which is only briefly in their book (1995: 54 f), but which Burton (2005) discusses them in some useful detail. The three kinds of belief are as follows:

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| (1) unconscious beliefs, that is, beliefs as dispositions       | (2005: 119-124) |
| (2) post-conscious beliefs: a past thought that is absent now   | (2005: 124-126) |
| (3) repressed beliefs: unconscious beliefs that are significant | (2005: 126-129) |

#### **3.1 DISPOSITIONAL VIEWS**

It might seem paradoxical to claim that there are some views (or beliefs) of which we are not conscious. We all believe a great many things that we are not entertaining or considering. These views are said to be **dispositional views**. Philosophers and scholars remind us that believing a proposition or claim needs to be distinguished from other propositional attitudes such as entertaining and considering a proposition. To entertain a proposition is merely to "hold it before the mind." To consider a proposition is to entertain and examine it.

We can entertain or consider a proposition without believing it. I can now, for example, entertain and consider the proposition that the earth is a cube without believing it. We can also believe something without entertaining or considering it. This morning, for example, I believed that the earth was round, but I did not entertain or consider that proposition. (Lemos 2007: 8)

We believe a great many things without our being conscious of it. Surely, we must have been conscious at some time for it to be our view. However, Everitt and Fisher think not, and give the example of the proposition that "There are more than ninety-nine ants in the world." Presumably, this is something I have never thought about, but when it is brought to my attention, I would agree to it. And this proposition does not strike me as a revelation. Bimal Matilal gives his own example of the belief that "the floor will not melt under my feet" (1986: 192). As such, they argue, these dispositions are unconscious beliefs.

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<sup>43</sup> See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (7f).

This idea means that there may be an indefinite number of views that we may consent to but about which we have never thought about.<sup>44</sup> For instance, not only do I believe that “there are more than ninety-nine ants in the world,” but I also believe “there are more than one hundred ants in the world,” that “there are more than one hundred and one ants in the world,” and so on. Furthermore, I believe that “there are more than ninety-nine people in the world,” and so forth. I have never thought about these propositions, but would agree with them when they come to my attention.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.2 OCCURRENT VIEWS

**3.2.1** When we *believe* (that is, consciously accept) some proposition that we are entertaining, then our belief is said to be an **occurrent view**. My belief *some time ago* that Singapore is an island was a dispositional view. Since I am *now* entertaining the proposition that Singapore is an island, it is now an occurrent view. We now have a very good idea how a latent tendency becomes a preconscious motivator behind our deliberate actions.

The latent tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance lie deep in our unconscious like a dormant volcano. Occasionally, some lava oozes out, or some lava might spew forth into the sky, or flow down the sides and destroy the surrounding area. When we notice the signs and move away in time, we will be safe. Only when we foolishly stay on, or even are near such natural disasters, that we will be hurt or killed.

**3.2.2** Similarly, thoughts of lust, aversion or ignorance may arise, and we notice them, we feel (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) them as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral) or even entertain them (*sañjānāti*, recognize then). But as long as we do not take any of them into consideration (*abhisankharoti*), we do not turn them into karmically negative actions.

**3.2.3** Again here we need to remind ourselves not to superimpose Western, academic or alien meanings onto the new terms that are used here to explain the mental processes as taught in early Buddhism. These terms must be taken in their own contexts, and be defined by them. Some Western philosophical terms may be convenient parallels with Buddhist ideas. But parallels, as we know, never meet. They act here as bridges for understanding new ideas.

Take, for example, the simple English word “believe,” has more than a single term in Pāli, such as *jānāti* (he knows), *cinteti* (he thinks), and *saddahati* (he believes in). Although the word *jānāti* is usually translated as “he knows” (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular), this is not always in the sense of “justified true belief,” that is, knowledge as we commonly understand it. In some contexts, it has a sense of view or unquestioning acceptance, eg “What I know, you know, too” (*yaṃ ahaṃ jānāmi taṃ tvaṃ jānāsi*, D 3.1.3/1:88). Where spiritual knowledge is meant, a stronger verb, *pajānāti* (he understands) is used, eg “He who here itself understands the destruction of his own suffering” (*yo dukkhassa pajānāti idh’eva khayam attano*, Sn 626).

**3.2.4** Closer to the western sense of “believe” would be the verb *cinteti* (“he thinks, reflects, is of the opinion” or “he ponders, thinks over, imagines, plans”). In fact, it can well be translated as the English word “he thinks.” One of the best examples of this usage is “Do not think so!” or “Don’t worry!” (*mā cintāyi*, J 1:50). As for *saddahati*, although usually translated as “he believes,” it can be either in a cognitive sense (as used

<sup>44</sup> See Moser, Mulder & Trout, 1998: 53 f.

<sup>45</sup> See Burton 2005:120.

in the western sense) or in the affective sense (more common in the Suttas).<sup>46</sup> As such, it cannot always be synonymous with the English “he believes.”

### 3.3 TWO SENSES OF “OCCURRENT”

We have just noted that when we consciously believe some proposition that we are entertaining, then it becomes an *occurrent* view. However, philosophers also recognize another kind of *occurrent* view, that is, one that is a recognition of a current event.<sup>47</sup> The following examples will show the difference between *dispositional view* and *occurrent knowledge*:

<u>dispositional view</u>	<u>occurrent view</u>
(1) “Fire is hot.”	“I can feel that the fire is hot.”
(2) “When will it stop raining?”	“The rain has stopped.”
(3) “In breath meditation, we watch the breath.”	“I am watching my breath.”

where in logical terms, we have the following:

- (1) It is occurring to S that p.
- (2) S is thinking that p.
- (3) S is thinking “p.”

These examples are based on Wayne A Davis’ *Meaning, Expression, and Thought* (2003: 322 f), where he says that the “that” in (1) and (2) restricts “p” to declarative sentences. In (3), “p” may be imperative or interrogative, but *occurrent*, says Wayne, is expressed only when “p” is declarative. Thus S may well be thinking, “When will it stop raining?” but this obviously entails no belief. But “S is thinking ‘It stopped raining,’” implies that S believes that it has stopped raining.

This is where the term “**occurrent knowledge**” is meaningful. When I am attentively observing an event, say, a leaf falling from a tree, and I know it to be so, then this is called *occurrent knowledge*, that is, knowing what is happening right now before me. However, if I do not see it as an *impermanent* event (which it really is), but impose some other idea upon it (like unhappily thinking, “These falling leaves are messing up my garden”), then it is a wrong view. But when we are focused on watching our breath in breath meditation without being distracted, that *occurrent knowledge* is attended by right view. As such, *occurrent knowledge* can be either wrong view or right view, depending on the subject’s ethical disposition.

Wayne further notes that the difference between “S thinks that p” and “S is believing that p” does not stand to “S believes that p” in the same relationship. For, “believe” cannot occur in the present progressive, says Wayne, because “‘S is believing that p’ is ungrammatical.” (2003: 322).

But the sentence is actually perfectly grammatical, but may not be *logical*. In Buddhistic terms, this *occurrent* sentence is both grammatical and logical, and makes perfect sense. In fact, it has an important sense in Buddhist teachings, and refers to an action of wrong view, For example, in **the Aṅguli,māla Sutta** (M 86), when the rajah Pasenadi first meets the reformed Aṅgula,māla who has become a monk, and sitting near the Buddha, he is “believing that he is one of the monks,” or “he is not believing that it is Aṅguli-māla.”

<sup>46</sup> There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8, 401,23); also called *avecca-p,pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). See **Āpana S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4 (2.2).

<sup>47</sup> Rescher 2003:8.

Of course, this is being too technical. For, in proper idiomatic English, we would rather say “Pasenadi thinks that he is a monk,” or that “Pasenadi thinks that he is not Aṅgulimāla.” But the fact remains that Pasenadi’s state of mind is that of a view, and he acted accordingly. That is until the Buddha declared that that monk *is* Aṅgulimāla, and Pasenadi is understandably shocked.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of Pasenadi’s not recognizing the monk Aṅgulimāla at their first meeting is only a mild case of wrong view, which is quickly righted upon the Buddha’s telling the fact to him. There are very much more serious occasions of believing that are unwholesome because they feed and prolong wrong view, which in turn bring about suffering.

For example, when a person sees plastic flowers, and thinks “These are permanent,” or when being told by his guru or pastor that if he believes in a certain idea, he would have eternal life, thinks, “I have eternal life.” These are more serious cases where not only are such views wrong (they do not accord with reality), but they are also karmically potent, bringing about painful karmic fruits.

## 4 Post-conscious views

### **4.1 INSTINCTS, SKILLS AND VIEWS**

Everitt and Fisher (1995)<sup>49</sup> propose a second type of unconscious belief, namely, any belief (or view) of which we are not presently thinking, but of which we have thought at least once in the past. Such views might also be called *post-conscious*, as their defining feature is that they were, but are no longer, present to consciousness.

Everitt and Fisher claim that there are many such beliefs (or views). Take, for example, my views that “Paris is the capital city of France” and that “ $2 + 2 = 4$ .” These are views I hold and that I have held consciously, for example, when I learned these propositions in school. However, I rarely think about these views now. Most of the time, they are unconscious views; that is, views about which I am not thinking. I can and do, when necessary, bring these views to consciousness, and this is the proof that I do indeed have them.

Some of our practical knowledge (“knowing how”), too, do not seem to depend on theoretical knowledge (“knowing that”) at all. They are inherent (we are born with it) or unconsciously learned. An animal’s instincts and abilities (running, building nests, flying, climbing, etc) do not depend on any conscious knowledge of the principles of flying. Similarly, we learn our mother language without any propositional knowledge of many, or even any, of the grammatical rules. And we learn to use many devices and tools, such as doors, stairs, knives, even electronic gadgets, without the need of any propositions about how they work or how to use them.

On the other hand, some competence knowledge or skills are different: they depend on some initial propositional knowledge, on which we become less reliant as our ability increases. For instance, in learning to play the piano I might need, in the beginning, to think very actively about the techniques that will enable me to be successful in perfecting the skill. However, as I become more adept, the need to hold this information in my consciousness diminishes. With sufficient practice, I rarely if ever need to bring it to mind. After I have mastered the skill, it becomes second nature.

### **4.2 LOOKING BUT NOT SEEING**

We often hardly notice what we are doing, and, even less of what we are thinking. We do not notice how views are being formed in our minds, and how we are blindsided by them. For instance, I may see a tree with green leaves, swaying in the wind, with a crow perched on one of its branches.

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<sup>48</sup> M 86,13/2:101 f (SD 5.11).

<sup>49</sup> This section (4) is partly based on Burton 2005:124-126.

However, the view that I form in my mind is only that of a tree with green leaves, swaying with the wind, but I do not see or know that a crow is perched on one of its branches. Very soon, my mind moves on to other matters. It would be unusual for me to stop and think about the view I have formed—even if then the crow flies out of the tree. I may vaguely sense something flying away at the back of my mind, but give it no further consideration.

What has Buddhism to say about this type of unconscious view? Informed Buddhists generally accept that there is *no permanent self*. However, in most cases, even as informed practitioners, we may still be unconscious of this view in the sense that we do not always examine it further.

In other words, our views are something that we have thought about from time to time perhaps, but we do not often bring them to mind. We believe that we ourselves and other things are *impermanent*, but, we still do not take enough notice of this fact. We are *insufficiently attentive* to what we see or accept.

It is important to understand this process because, according to Buddhist psychology, being inattentive to impermanence leads to inappropriate and ultimately painful emotional responses of selfishness and attachment. Failing to attend to their impermanence, we tend to cling to things, forgetful of the futility of such an attitude and its imminent disappointment and despair.

#### 4.3 WISE ATTENTION

Buddhism teaches the value of attentiveness to impermanence, which the Pali texts call “wise attention” (*yoniso manasikāra*). Commenting on *yoniso manasikāra* as it occurs in **the Sabb’āsava Sutta** (M 2), Bhikkhu Bodhi says: “Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is glossed as attention that is the right means (*upaya*), on the right track (*patha*). It is explained as mental advertence, consideration, or preoccupation that accords with the truth, namely, attention to the impermanent as impermanent, etc.” (M:ÑB 1995: 1169 n33)<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, the fundamental point here is that a life lived with awareness of its brevity and fragility is preferable to one that overlooks this truth. It is worth noting, however, that the practical ramifications of such attentiveness to impermanence are debatable. For instance, persistent awareness of transitoriness could lead one to devalue the things of this world, consistent with a path of renunciation and asceticism. The Buddhist tradition, dominated as it has been by monasticism, often appears to favour this attitude.

Alternatively, a life lived with mindfulness of the ephemeral nature of things is compatible with a more world-affirming view, where one seeks to appreciate and enjoy, without grasping and attachment, the fleeting beauty of things of this world, a beauty that is perhaps enhanced by its fragile transiency. Perhaps we find evidence of this attitude in the Buddhist tradition in, for example, the Zen visual arts and poetry, which often appear to celebrate the aesthetic pleasure derived from the natural world. (Burton 2005: 126)

## 5 Repressed views

### 5.1 UNCONSCIOUS BELIEFS

A third form of unconscious belief identified by Everitt and Fisher (1995: 54 f)<sup>51</sup> is “repressed belief,” or as I prefer it, “repressed view.” It is arguable, they say, that there are views that we have never consciously held and that we would fail to recognize as our views, even if it were suggested that we do these views. We would even deny that we hold such views, such as, “My guru hates me” (which be-

<sup>50</sup> On wise attention, see **Āghāta Paṭivīnaya S** (A 5.162) @ SD 39.6 (2.0) & **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

<sup>51</sup> This section (5) is partly based on Burton 2005: 126-129.

comes repressed fear or anger), or “I have offended my teacher” (which generates guilt-feeling). Some unhappy event in the past must have led us to surmise this. Since it is very embarrassing or fearful thought, we dare not even think of it, as it were. So it is *repressed*, that is, it lies latent in our mind, but hidden from consciousness.

The grammar of **repression** must be carefully noted. It is not a conscious act; so, it is not correct to say something like “He repressed his feelings.” If this is consciously done, it is correct to say, “He *suppressed* his feelings” (and if this is by way of sense-restraint, it might well be wholesome). A repressed view is actually a latent tendency, that is, our view of a physical or mental event that is painful, fearful, embarrassing, or highly ego-threatening, that we would rather *deny* its existence, and use various *defence mechanisms* when we are again confronted with any semblance of them.<sup>52</sup>

This notion of “**repressed view**” is a useful conceptual tool in Buddhist psychology. It can be said that the reality of impermanence is often repressed in an unawakened person’s mind because it is an emotionally uncomfortable view. We unconsciously evade noticing the impermanence that is evident in our experiences. Some people go so far as to deny to themselves that they believe that things are impermanent, adhering to consoling religious doctrines of an eternal soul and so forth. A look at a newspaper’s obituary page only shows how innovative the human mind can be in evading the real issue of impermanence. A dearly departed is euphemistically said to have been “called home to the lord,” “gone to heaven,” and so on.

## 5.2 THE BLINKERED MIND

Granted the Buddhist claim that we are inclined to accept that there is a permanent self, it is all too easy to take refuge in such views, as Burton notes,

There is a strong similarity here with Martin Heidegger’s (1962, 279-311) claim in *Being and Time* that, for the most part, people live in an inauthentic relationship with the prospect of their own inevitable death. Dasein, in its everyday fallen state, flees in the face of death. Awareness of our own finitude, Heidegger claims, causes us anxiety, and thus we seek a state of tranquillisation in which reality is avoided rather than faced. Forgetful of our mortality, we are alienated from the prospect of death.

Heidegger also recognises that our inauthenticity supports and is supported by that of other people; it is as though there is a group conspiracy, which Heidegger calls “the they” (*das man*), to evade the disturbing, personal reality that each of us must die. We try to cocoon ourselves from reality by avoiding discussion of death, or talking about it in a banal, impersonal way, without really taking it seriously as something that will happen to us, or we collectively resort to a comforting belief in an afterlife and eternal soul.

(Burton 2005: 126 f)

So too, for Buddhists, we tend to distract ourselves from the disturbing reality of our own finitude, and the impermanence of the things to which and the people to whom we are attached. Presumably, this tendency to evade the painful truth of impermanence explains why it is so difficult for us to remain mindful of it. Our desires, dislikes or ignorance often decisively filter and shape the views that we allow ourselves to consciously entertain. As such, there are latent tendencies not only for wrong views, but also for selfish desire, conceit, anger, and so forth.<sup>53</sup> As Burton notes:

<sup>52</sup> On defence mechanisms, see **Khalaṅka S** (A 8.14/4:190-195), SD 7.9; also SD 24.10b (2).

<sup>53</sup> The texts sometimes mention 7 latent tendencies, viz: (1) sensual desire (*kāma,rāga*), (2) aversion (*paṭigha*), (3) views (*ditṭhi*), (4) doubt (*vicikicchā*), (5) conceit (*māna*), (6) the desire for becoming (*bhava,rāga*), and (7) ignorance (*avijjā*): see **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(12)/3:254), **Anusaya S** (S 45.175/5:61) & **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). See [1] n above, under “latent tendencies.”

In particular, we have a tendency to crave [for] our own continued existence and sensual experiences of various kinds. Indeed, it seems difficult to dispute the Buddhist claim that we have this psychological proclivity, supported as it is by so much evidence. Generally, we do desire pleasant sensual experiences and we often fear death. Now, if one experiences craving for one's own continued existence and craving for sensed objects, then one's awareness of the evanescent nature of oneself and the objects of one's craving is liable to be unpalatable and will thus tend to be repressed. Desires and fears can cloud the mind, allowing it to overlook distressing truths and to fabricate pleasing fictions. (2005:127)

### 5.3 SELF-CONTRADICTION

So we are confronted by a self-contradiction of sort. We might have unconscious views by way of a *disposition* to believe that things or some things are permanent, and we also have the *repressed view* that things are impermanent. The refusal to acknowledge this tension generates delusion and feeds our ignorance. Indeed, even a simple but sustained acknowledgement of this tension is conducive to spiritual growth. Sometimes we have no choice when we are confronted by this tension, and we feel simply shocked by the reality, and immediately try to look for a way out of this existential dilemma. This is called *samvega* (*sam̐vega*).<sup>54</sup>

Indeed the more we are disposed to a wrong view, the more we are likely to feed our repressed view of it. And the repressed view (ie latent tendency) reacts by reinforcing the unconscious disposition. This is the samsaric uroboros, a cosmic serpent or dragon painfully biting its own tail. In the case of the young prince Siddhattha indulging in sense-pleasures, his unconscious dispositions are exposed into consciousness by the four sights. It is such a powerful *samvega* that he has to flee from it to be free himself from it, to have nothing to do with, to find the way out. He later turns to the other extreme of self-mortification in response to the prevalent view that the body is evil and so must be purified by severe penance.

Noticing that neither of these contradictions—sense-indulgence and self-mortification—are conducive to finding the answer to suffering, he recalls the focus and bliss of his meditating in dhyana, as a child of 7, under a jambu tree. This unconscious view, locked in his memory, is brought into consciousness, and he is able to see its value. This memory of a profoundly blissful meditation points him to the middle way, which he then realizes to become the Buddha.

## 6 The possibility of awakening

### 6.1 UNCONSCIOUS VIEWS CAN BE OVERCOME

The main difficulty with unconscious views is that *we are not aware of them*. Since we are unable to see them, we think that they do not exist. And so they perniciously proliferate and control our whole being. This is the main reason why people, especially the religious, are intolerant of others. Their unconscious views act like a radar, always looking out for any remark, word or gesture that is perceived as being made against them.

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<sup>54</sup> "Samvega" (*sam̐vega*), "sense of urgency," is closely associated with spiritual "seeing" (*dassana*), a close encounter with reality. The *Pali-English Dictionary* defines it as "agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world)." It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms that refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth. For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, often leading to renunciation, whereas in the case of a monastic, it urges him to exert more energy in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. For a discussion, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (7f).



Unconscious views are like memes,<sup>55</sup> and they are in some ways synonymous—they have only one purpose: *to replicate themselves*, that is, I-making (*aham, kāra*). Whatever is perceived as threatening to burst this balloon, this I-pod, of the self, is quickly pushed away, or reactively scorned. Such a person is only comfortable with his own views, and as such is afraid to be proven wrong. The fear of letting go of the old and familiar is so strong, that all learning has stopped.

And yet it is not difficult to overcome unconscious views. We only need to bring them up to the conscious level, into the light of mindfulness, accept them with lovingkindness, and then set them free. When unconscious views are let go of, liberated, they are no more unconscious, they become conscious of themselves as it were. They might be said to be simply *mental energy*, which is then converted into wholesome energy. Lustful desire becomes desire for good; hatred that is dark becomes the hating of evil; and hazy delusion clears to become insight into the wholesome.

## 6.2 GOOD IS POSSIBLE

The main rationale for religion is that it is possible to do good, and that good benefits the individual as well as society. To benefit from good means to enjoy happiness here and hereafter. Happiness here ideally comprises physical independence, economic independence, social independence, emotional independence, and spiritual independence.

*Physical independence* is basically good health, attended by wholesome control of our body and speech (that is, keeping to the five precepts). Such good health allows us to be productively engaged in right livelihood so that we are *economically independent*. We are then in a good position to be a contributive member of our community and society without being misled by the crowd, and yet able to move it in a wholesome direction.

Being *emotionally independent* means that we are capable of thinking for ourselves, and yet capable of understanding individual differences in others to promote solidarity. *Spiritual independence* is our capacity for happiness through inner stillness without the need of external approval or support: we are our own refuge, the Dharma is our refuge.

## 6.3 SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The Buddha's discourses constantly remind us that good is possible, that we can through self-effort awaken to spiritual freedom. **The (Loka) Assāda Sutta** (A 3.102) succinctly explains the nature of the world and the possibility of goodness, thus:

- 1 Bhikshus, if there were no gratification in the world, beings would not be attached to this world. But, bhikshus, as there is gratification in the world, beings are attached to this world.  
Bhikshus, if there were no danger in the world, beings would not be revulsed<sup>56</sup> by this world. But, bhikshus, as there is danger in the world, beings are revulsed at this world.  
Bhikshus, if there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from this world. But, bhikshus, as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from this world.
- 2 But, bhikshus, so long as the world's beings have directly known, as it really is,

<sup>55</sup> See **Memes**, SD 26.3.

<sup>56</sup> OED (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) has only this def: "(transitive) To drag, draw, or pull back; to tear away," and records its earliest usages as follows: **1669**, W Simpson, *Hydrologia Chymica* 78: "This virulent acrimony...becomes by a retrograde motion revulsed into the veins." **1673**, William Harvey, *Anatomical Exercises concerning the motion of the heart and blood* ii 123: "To take away the blood...that it might be revulsed from the lungs." The more common forms of this word are the n "revulsion" and the adj "revulsive." The Merriam-Webster 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary however has "revulsed," which it defines as "affected with or having undergone revulsion." Since the context here is very clear, it is helpful to revive this dying word.

the gratification as gratification,  
 the danger as danger,  
 the escape as escape,  
 to that extent, bhikkhus, they  dwell  with a mind that is *free* from it, detached from it, released from it, not confined to this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. (A 3.102/1:260), SD 14.7

And **the Saḷha Sutta** (A 3.66) celebrates the joy of the liberated mind, that is free from unconscious views:

He understands thus:

Previously there was *greed* in me: that was unwholesome. Now there is none: this is wholesome.

Previously there was *hatred* in me: that was unwholesome. Now there is none: this is wholesome.

Previously there was *delusion* in me: that was unwholesome. Now there is none: this is wholesome.

In this very life itself he himself dwells freed from craving, cool, become cool, experiencing happiness, become divine.<sup>57</sup> (A 3.66/1:193-197), SD 43.6

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<sup>57</sup> *So diṭṭh'eva dhamme nicchāto nibbuto sītibhūto sukha-p,paṭisaṁvedī brahma,bhūtena attanā viharatī ti.*

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