

# The Buddhist Analysis of Mind

as edited by

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Professor K. N. Jayatilleke in *The Message of the Buddha* (2000) scrupulously elucidates what the Buddha said about “*Analysis of Mind*” after, first making some qualifications concerning different approaches to this topic:

“The present concise account of the Buddhist theory of mind is based on the early Buddhist texts, and leaves out for the most part the elaborations to be found in the later books of the Theravada tradition such as the *Abhidhammarrha-saṅgaha*. The main reason for doing so is that otherwise there is a danger of losing sight of the wood for the trees.

Another reason for this is that some of the later traditions of Buddhism developed only certain aspects of the original teaching, exaggerating their importance to such an extent as to distort other aspects. Such seems to have been the case with the Idealist (Vijnana-vada) schools of Buddhism, which spoke of a universal mind as a vast reservoir in which the individuals’ minds were waves or ripples. In such a universe both the individual minds of various beings as well as the external material world were illusions created by the mind. The entire universe is a creation of the mind (*sarvam buddhimáyam jagat*) and physical objects do not exist outside our perceptions of them. In some of the Maháyana schools of thought this universal mind was conceived as the ultimate reality or the eternal Buddha, though never as a creator God.

## REALISM

Some Western scholars also tried to give an idealistic interpretation

to early Buddhism by translating the first verse of the Dhammapada to mean ‘All things are preceded by mind, governed by mind and are the creations of the mind’ (*man-pubbaògama dhamma mano-settha mano-máya*). But the correct interpretation of this stanza, which is also supported by the commentary (*Dhammapadatthakatha*) is ‘Conscious states of mind are led by will, are governed by will and are the products of will; so if one speaks or acts with an evil will,, suffering comes after one like the wheel that follows the beast of burden who draws the cart.’

Besides, it is clear from the early Buddhist texts that original Buddhism was realistic and held that the world of matter existed independent of our mind (*citta-vippayuttam*) and was not an illusion produced by it. Though our perceptions and our language distorted the nature of reality, this was only to the extent that a dynamic material world in a continual state of flux was perceived as permanent, solid and substantial.

### **ATTITUDE TO TRADITION**

The Theravada tradition, in my opinion, has on the other hand to some extent ignored the conception of the transcendent mind to be found in the early Buddhist texts. This has, led to misconceptions on the part of scholars and, perhaps, some Buddhists that Nirvana was a state of oblivion or annihilation. It is, I think, important that Buddhists who have been asked by the Buddha not to accept things merely because they are to be found in tradition (*ma paramparaya*) should be prepared to examine their own traditions.

We must not forget that even in the time of the Buddha, some concise statements made by him regarding matters of doctrine were elaborated and developed by monks and nuns. The Buddha very often commended these expositions of the Dhamma. On the other hand, there were others who made erroneous expositions and came

to false conclusions in interpreting the statements of the Buddha. There was Sati for instance, who thought that ‘the consciousness of a person ran along and fared on without change of identity’ *viññáóam ... sandhavati saísarati anannam*) like a permanent soul, whereas the Buddha points out that consciousness is causally conditioned (*papicca-samuppáda*) and changes under the impact of environment, etc.

Then there is the case of the monk who argued that the doctrine of *anattá* (no-soul) implies the denial of personal responsibility. It is said that ‘a certain monk entertained the thought that since body, feelings, strivings (conative acts) and intellect are without self, what self can deeds not done by a self affect?’ (M III 19): The Buddha thought that this was an unwarranted corollary of his teaching since there was the continuity of the ‘stream of consciousness’ (*viññáóasota*) without identity in re-becoming from existence to existence and this was called ‘the dynamic or evolving consciousness’ (*saívappanika-viññáóá*). Individuality continues though the person is ‘neither the same’ (*na ca so*) ‘nor another’ (*naca anno*).

## CHARACTERISTICS

One of the main features of the Buddhist theory of mind is that barring the mind in the Nirvanic state, all mental phenomena are causally conditioned (*papicca-samuppanna*). According to Buddhist tradition causal laws operate not only in the physical realm (*utu-niyama*) or biological realm (*bija-niyama*), but in the psychological realm (*citta-niyama*) as well. Likewise, mental events are more fleeting than the material events of the body, although as a stream of events they outlast the body, whereas the body disintegrates at death. Yet while past phenomena continue to influence and condition the ever-changing present, there is no substratum which can be called a permanent soul. Nor does it make sense to say that the phenomena

are in any way associated with or related to such a soul.

The present is conditioned not merely by the past but also by the factors of heredity and environment. Also, conscious mental phenomena have a physical basis. The *Papphána* speaks of 'the physical basis of perceptual and conceptual activity.' There is mutual interaction between the physical basis and the mental activity. The mental phenomena are not mere accompaniments of neural or brain phenomena. The nature of the causal relations that hold among mental phenomena and their relations to the body, the physical, social and ideological environment are also analysed and the correlations explained in terms of them. In short we have the earliest historical account of a naturalistic view of the mind.

This knowledge with regard to the mind is to be had by observation and introspection. Introspection is considered to be an unreliable instrument for the study of mental phenomena, according to Western psychologists. This is partly because introspection can only tell us about our private mental experience, and since these cannot be checked by others, they cannot be trusted. The Buddhist theory is that introspection can be refined and developed by the culture of the mind. Besides, such mental development results in the emergence of extra-sensory powers of perception such as telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. This development of the mind is said to sharpen our observation and widen its range since with the development of telepathy, direct and indirect, the minds of others become amenable to public observation like physical objects. The elimination of personal bias makes one's observations objective. Jhánic introspection is described as follows: 'Just as one person should objectively observe another, a person standing should observe a person seated or a person seated a person lying down, even so, should one's object of introspection be well-apprehended, well-reflected upon, well-contemplated and well-

penetrated with one's knowledge' (A 111. 27).

## **MODERN WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY**

With regard to one's own person, it is true that with the growth of objectivity one's emotions tend to evaporate under the scrutiny of objective observation. As a modern textbook of psychology, says: 'If affective states are immediately at hand to be observed, their description and interpretation are not easy to come by, for they prove to be remarkably elusive. Try to observe in yourself the turbulent feelings aroused in anger. Ask yourself, "What, does anger consist of?" If you are able, when angry, to get yourself in the frame of mind to ask this question, you are also in a fair, way toward dispelling the anger' (Frank A Geldarad, *Fundamentals of Psychology*, John. Wiley & Sons, New York, London, 1963, p. 38). It is true that watchfulness (sati) regarding one's own emotions tends to dissipate them but this too is an important psychological fact. It is a fact that can be made use of to make our minds more stable and serene.

Many modern textbooks of psychology with a behavioural bias have not only completely discarded the concept of a soul but regard psychology as 'the science of human behaviour.' This is because human behaviour can be publicly observed and measured while human experience cannot. This orientation has its uses. We have learnt a lot about the physiological, biochemical and neural basis of what we call psychological behaviour. As a result we have learnt to some extent to control such behaviour by surgical or biochemical means. But despite these advances in psychology mental tensions and anxiety have been on the increase in societies in which the tempo and philosophies of life give no room for intelligent self-restraint, relaxation, self-analysis and meditation as a means to achieving a healthier mind.

Buddhist psychology, on the other hand, while giving a comprehensive account of the nature of human experience and behaviour also provides the means by which we can understand, control and develop ourselves by a process of self-analysis and meditation, which changes our natures and makes it possible to live happily ourselves and with others.

## **PSYCHOPHYSICAL UNIT**

Man, according to Buddhism, is a psychophysical unit (*námarúpa*). This is made up of three components—the sperm and the ovum which go to make up the fertilised ovum or zygote along with the impact of the stream of consciousness of a discarnate spirit (*gandhabba*) or what is called the re-linking consciousness (*patisandhi-viññáóá*).

The psychic and organic physical components grow and mature in a state of mutual interaction. There is reliable evidence that certain children are born with memories of a previous life, which correspond to those of a real life of a dead person and that they could not have acquired these memories by any social contact with the dead person's friends or relatives in this life (see Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, New York, 1966). There is also evidence that hypnotised subjects regressed to a prenatal period give accounts of prior lives which they claimed to have lived and which have been partly historically verified as factual (see Morey Bernstein, *The Search for Bridy Murphy*, New Edition, 1965; also Dr Jonathan Rodney, *Explorations of a Hypnotist*, Elek Books, London, 1959). The above theory can also be experimentally verified if identical twins brought up in the same environment show some marked differences of character. All the available evidence cannot be more plausibly accounted for than on the above theory, although it has not as yet merited the attention of psychologists as a

whole.

The belief that the Buddhist doctrine of *anattá* implies a denial of any kind of survival after death rests on a misunderstanding of this doctrine. The doctrine denies a permanent entity or soul which runs through different existences without change of identity but does not deny the continuity of an evolving consciousness. Although the emotionally charged experiences are more fleeting than the changes in the body, their memories registered in the unconscious mind outlast the body and determine its state of re-becoming in different forms of cosmic existence. As the *Saíyutta Nikáya* says in one place: 'Though his material body is devoured by crows and other animals, yet his mind (citta), if long-practised in faith, virtue, learning and renunciation, moves upward and goes to distinction' (S. V. 370).

## **MENTAL FACTORS**

The components of the mind are classified into four branches (*khandha*) or groups (*káya*) namely (1) feeling or hedonic tone (*vedaná*), (2) sense-impressions, images or ideas and concepts (*saññá*), (3) conative activities and their concomitants (*saòkhára*) and (4) intellectual activity (*vinnana*).

Vedana is the feeling-component, which accompanies our impressions and ideas. They range from the pleasant to the unpleasant through the neutral. Its source may be physical or psychological. When we cut our finger we feel physical pain. When we hear that a close friend or relative has died suddenly the anguish we experience has a psychological origin. These feelings are classified as six according as they originate in the five senses or in the mind with an idea or concept. Since these may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, there would be eighteen in all. As associated with one's family life or with a life of renunciation, there would be

36 and as past, present or future 108 in all. Likewise, pleasure may be material (*amisa*) as being associated with the satisfactions of needs or wants, or spiritual (*niramisa*) as being associated with a life of selflessness, compassion and understanding. The pleasures experienced in the mystical states of consciousness, personal or impersonal (i.e. *rúpa* or *arúpa jhánas*) are classified in an ascending scale, each one being ‘higher and more exquisite’ (*uttaritaram panitatararam*) than the lower. Nirvana is the ‘highest happiness’ (*paramam sukham*) but the happiness in it is not conditioned. It is not subject to the presence of any conditioned *vedani* although the happiness can be positive (*vimuttisukhapatisamvedi*).

The experience of conditioned pleasant, unpleasant and neutral hedonic tone is associated with the impressions and ideas we have as a result of sense-contacts or the conceptual activity of the mind in imagining, remembering, reasoning, listening to others, reading books, etc. These impressions, ideas and concepts constitute *sanna*.

The last on the list of mental factors is *viññáóa* which covers knowledge and belief. Knowledge of moral and spiritual matters constitutes *paññá*. This involves greater depth of understanding regarding the nature of reality. The difference between *sanna*, *viññáóa* and *paññá* is well illustrated in the Visuddhimagga by the simile of the coin. When a child sees a coin it is only the colour and shape that interests him. A peasant knows its value as a means of exchange. A master of the mint knows its exact value and nature since he can distinguish between a counterfeit coin and a genuine one. There is a wider sense in which the word *viññáóa* is used, but we shall examine that below.

## **SANKHARA**

We have left out the word *saòkhára*, which in a psychological

context is used in three senses. First; in the sense of volitions as in the sentence *avijjá paccaya saòkhára*, which means that our volitions are conditioned by our true or false beliefs, which constitute ignorance. We sometimes think rightly and do good or think wrongly and commit evil. We tread in *saísára* like a blind man with a stick, who sometimes goes on the right and sometimes on the wrong track in trying to reach his destination.

In the second sense, *saòkhára* is used to denote our conative or purposive activities. They may be bodily processes and may include reflex actions such as breathing (*assasa-passasa*) as well as conditioned behaviour such as habits. They may be verbal activities involving cognitive and discursive thinking in waking life or even in dreams. Finally, they may be purposive thinking or ideation involving impressions, ideas or concepts associated with feelings. These are called *káya-saòkhára*, *vac-saòkhára* and *citta-saòkhára* respectively.

We may perform these actions or indulge in these activities aware that we are doing so (*sampajana*) or unaware that we are doing so (*asampajana*). We can walk, aware or unaware that we are walking. We can talk aware that we are talking or unaware as in sleep. We can think or have trains of thought aware or unaware of what we are doing. The latter would constitute unconscious mental processes.

Likewise, we perform these activities with varying degrees of control. Normally we have no control over our reflexes but it is said that the yogin who has attained the fourth jhána has them under control. Lastly these activities may be initiated by an internal stimulus (*sayam-katam*) or an external one (*param-katam*).

The third sense of *saòkhára* denotes all those factors which accompany conscious volitional activity. If, for example, we are bent on doing a good deed these may be right beliefs (*samma dipphi*), some degree of awareness (*satindriya*), or a quantum of selflessness etc.

## RELATIONS

All these psychological states are causally conditioned. They may be conditioned by contact with one's physical, social or ideological environment, by the physiological state of the body which is itself a product of heredity, and by our psychological past consisting of our experiences and upbringing in this life or even by the potentialities of prior lives. At the same time we can decide our goals and ideals and direct our courses of action since, despite the conditioning, we have an element of free will which we can exercise in our decisions and effort.

The various relations holding between different types of psychological and physical states have also been analysed. Thus, as we have already stated, there is mutual interaction (*annamanna-paccaya*) between body and mind. The relation between an appropriate stimulus and the sense-organ it can activate is called the object-condition (*árammaóá-paccaya*). A dominant purpose that we intend to achieve governs and controls all the subsidiary activity it involves; so the relation between such a purpose and the activity it governs becomes a dominant-condition (*adhipati-paccaya*). A gradual development of awareness (*sati*) about our own activity of body, speech or mind reveals to us these intricate relations.

## THE CONSCIOUS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

While, as we have stated above, *viññáóá* was used in the sense of intellectual activity in a specific sense, in the general sense it denoted the whole of our mental activity, conscious or unconscious.

We have already come across the concept of unconscious mental processes in speaking of ideational activity (*cittasaòkhára*) of which we are not aware. In one place it is said that a yogin by observing directly with his mind how 'the mental *saòkhára* which are disposed

in the mind of a particular individual' presumably in his unconscious mind, can predict what he will think at the next moment (A I 171). It is also said, of a living person that part of his 'stream of consciousness' (*viññáóa-sota*) is present in this world (*paraloke patittitam*) and part in the world beyond (*paraloke patittitam*). Without a sharp division into two parts (*ubhavate abbochinnam*, (D III 105). This means that a man's stream of consciousness has a conscious and unconscious component. Our conscious mental activity gets into this unconscious and accumulates in it; continuing to influence our conscious behaviour.

In the unconscious are also the latent tendencies of the mind, called the *anusayas*, the desire to satisfy our senses and sex (*kamaraganusaya*), our egoistic impulses (*bhavaraganusaya*), or aggression (*patighanusaya*), as well as the belief we cling to in the unconscious mind (*dibbhanusaya*), doubt (*vicikicchánus aya*), conceit (*mananusaya*) and ignorance (*avijjá nusaya*) (A I 9). The goal of the religious life, it is said, is not attained until they are completely eradicated.

There are also several levels of consciousness and the Nirvanic state is distinguished from all of them. There is the level of normal consciousness (*sanna-sanni*) in the average person. Then, it is possible that one is insane being either a neurotic (*khitta-citta*) or a psychotic (*unmattaka*) and, if so, one has an abnormal 'disjointed consciousness' (*visannasanni*). There is also the 'developed consciousness' (*vibhútasanni*) of a person who has cultivated the personal or impersonal forms of mystical consciousness. The Nirvanic mind is distinguished from all of them as well as from a state of coma or oblivion (*asanni*). It is attained with the cessation of all conditioned forms of ideation.

## DREAMS

Dreams occur when the mind is not relatively quiescent in a state of deep sleep nor fully awake. The mind is in a dynamic state and the Buddha compares it to a fire which smokes by night and flares up during the day. According to the *Milindapanha*, dreams are of four types, (1) those due to physiological disturbances in the body, (2) those due to mental indulgence, i.e. wish-fulfilment (*samudacinna*), (3) those due to intervention of a discarnate angel's spirit (*devata*) and (4) prophetic dreams.

## THE IDEAL

The Nirvanic state is the ideal to be attained by all being one of supreme perfection and happiness. Being a state beyond space, time and causation it cannot be conceptually apprehended, since all our concepts are derived from the framework of the space-time-cause world.

Yet in an analogical sense it is often described as a state of transcendent consciousness. In one place it is said that the conditioned saísáric consciousness ceases to be in a state of 'infinite omni-luminous consciousness without distinguishing mark' (*viññáóam anidassanam anantam sabbato-pabham*) (DI 223, M I 329). It is this 'luminous mind' which is said to be in the case of each one of us 'tainted by adventitious defilements' (*pabhassaram idam cittam tanca agantukehi upakkilisehi upakkilittham*) (A I 10.)

Man is, therefore, compared to a piece of gold ore and just as, when the defilements of that ore (*upakkilesa*) are got rid of, it shines with its natural lustre, the mind, it is said, becomes resplendent (*pabhassara*) when its defilements are eliminated. In the case of the mind, the primary defilements of the mind which weaken intuitive insight' (*cetaso upakkilese paññáya dubbali-karane*) (M I 181) are

passion and various forms of greed, ill-will, sloth and torpor, excitement, perplexity and doubt. It is when these and other more subtle defilements are got rid of that the mind becomes relatively perfect and pure (*citte parisuddhe pariyodate*) (D I 76) and acquires its extra-sensory powers of perception and activity. It is the culmination of this process which results in the attainment of Nirvana, a state 'beyond measure' (*attham gatassa na pamanam atthi*) (Sn 1076), 'deep, immeasurable and unfathomable' (M I 487). This transcendent mind is not a soul because it is not personal and is not a self-identical entity. Nor is it a creator God.

### **THEORY OF MOTIVATION**

The ideal state is one in which 'the mind is divested of its strivings and has attained the destruction of all desires' (Dhp 153). It is also a state of perfect mental health. Man suffers from mental disease until he has attained Nirvana.

The goal of Buddhism is, therefore, therapeutic. We have to start with our present condition in which we are impelled to act out of greed, hatred and ignorance. Greed consists of the desire to gratify our senses and sex (*kama-taóhá*) as well as to satisfy our egoistic impulses (*bhava-taóhá*), such as our desire for possessions, for power, for fame, for personal immortality, etc. Hatred consists of our aggressive tendencies (*vibhava-taóhá*) or the desire to eliminate and get rid of what we dislike. Both greed and hatred are fed by ignorance (i.e. erroneous beliefs, illusions, rationalisations) and vice versa. Indulgence in these desires give temporary satisfaction, but there is a law of diminishing returns which operates in our attempt to find satisfaction through gratification. The process eventually makes us slaves of our desires as in the case of alcoholics, misers, sex-addicts, etc.

Our endeavour should be gradually to change the basis of our motivation from greed, hatred and ignorance to selflessness (*caga, alobha*), compassion (*mettá, alobha*) and understanding (*paññá, amoha*).

## PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPES

To do this effectively, we must know what psychological types we are. The earliest historical classification of individuals into different types is in the book called *Puggala-paññátti* (Human Types) of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. In the later tradition classifications were based mainly on the degree to which people possessed the traits of greed, hatred and ignorance as well as their opposites. Different meditational exercises are recommended for them to get rid of the evil traits and develop the good traits they have.

There could, of course, be various sub-types. Some greed-types (*ragacarita*) may have strong sex desires, others the desire for power, etc. The general formula applicable to all would be to sublimate greed by desiring to develop restraint and selflessness, compassion and understanding, to sublimate hate by endeavouring to remove greed, hatred and ignorance, and to aid this process to adopt right-beliefs (*samma-dipphi*) in place of erroneous ones about the nature and destiny of man in the universe.”

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