


Buddhist Psychology Workshop: ONLINE

How we can use this highly detailed “Dharma map” to better understand and overcome our mental and emotional suffering here in 2020.

Dave Smith,
Buddhist Teacher,
Mindfulness and
Emotional
Intelligence
Trainer

March 20, 2020

Without a doubt, the English language is rich, descriptive, and complex in many ways. This is particularly true when it comes to explaining the elements of the physical and material world. However, it remains fairly clumsy when it comes to describing the process and the mechanics of the inner life and the mind. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there is no common ground among conversations pertaining to meditation, psychology, consciousness and the growing field of secular mindfulness. We are just now beginning to understand the inner workings of the mind-body process through cognitive science and neuroscience. Among the current enthusiasm, what often gets left by the wayside is that a detailed and highly developed map of the mind was constructed by the Buddha and his students over 2500 years ago. This has been preserved in a body of text known as the Abhidharma.



Criteria for the Study and Practice of Buddhist Psychology


When we begin to study or attempt to understand the psychology of present-moment consciousness from a Buddhist perspective, we need to have a foundation for what it is that we are actually hoping to accomplish. The study of “consciousness” thru the practice of Dharma is rich, fascinating, detailed, intellectually stimulating and can even give a sense of superiority if the interest is merely academic.

To begin, I will outline some simple criteria as to the purpose of this exploration.

The end result of this exploration is to know suffering, its arising, its stopping, and the path, which leads to its end. The Buddha himself claims to teach just one thing- suffering and its end. (four noble truths/tasks)

The “*knowing*” of this process is to be developed within the framework and practice of mindfulness meditation, and then applied to all areas of our lives. The development of mindfulness plays a key role in the destruction of greed, hatred and confusion: that which puts an end to suffering and/or the experience of nibbana

Study of the Dharma and the practice of meditation should go hand and hand, as one has the ability to inform the other and vice versa. A balanced approach will produce the best result. This correlates to the 3 stages of panna: comprehension, performance and accomplishment.



The Noble Quest: MN 26 (Pali Canon)

“I considered” This dhamma I have reached is deep, hard to see, difficult to awaken to, quiet and excellent, not confined by thought, unreachable by mere reason, subtle, sensed only by the wise. But people attach to their “place” they delight and revel in their place.

(1). Dukkha, Denial and Ignorance (Understanding: Panna)

- *It is hard for people who attach, delight and revel in their place to see this ground: the this-conditioned, conditioned/dependent arising.*


(2). Mindfulness and Dependent Origination (Meditative Training: Samadhi)

- *Also, hard to see this ground: the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all bases, the fading away of craving, non-reactivity, stopping, nibbana.*

(3). Nibbana, Nirodha and the 3rd Noble Truth (Ethics/Non-harming: Sila)

In reflection:


- *“If I were not to teach the dhamma and others were not to understand me; that would be tiring and vexing for me. Why should I now reveal what I reached with difficulty?”*
 - *This dhamma is not easily awoken to by those in thrall to greed and hate. Those dyed by desire, covered by a mass of darkness, will not see what goes against the stream, subtle, deep, hard to see and fine.”*
-

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of blue dots on the left side of the slide, transitioning into a solid blue horizontal bar at the bottom.

(1). Dukkha, Denial and Ignorance (Understanding: Panna)

What is Dukkha?: Birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, death is dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are dukkha; association with the what is unwanted/unpleasant/ uncomfortable is dukkha; separation from the wanted/pleasant/comfortable is dukkha; not getting what is wanted is dukkha.

In short, the 5 aggregates are dukkha.



The Five Aggregates (universal experience): five khandas

"And what are the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are dukkha? The clinging- aggregate of form, the clinging-aggregate of feeling, the clinging- aggregate of perception, the clinging-aggregate of inclinations, the clinging-aggregate of consciousness: These are called the five clinging- aggregates that are dukkha."

Form

We make contact with the physical world thru the 5 senses. This creates the conditions for c-ness to arise-the moment that an organ comes into contact with an object. We can bring our attention to all or any of these experiences at any given time. Although we see that most of the time our attention is pulled in a particular direction and we habitually follow whatever experience is the most prominent or whatever seems to be the most interesting; or important and so on. Tuning into sensory awareness is a preliminary tool when developing mindfulness. We are encouraged to fully-embodiment the totality of our sensory experience.

Feeling

Once contact is made in the present moment a feeling “tone” will arise

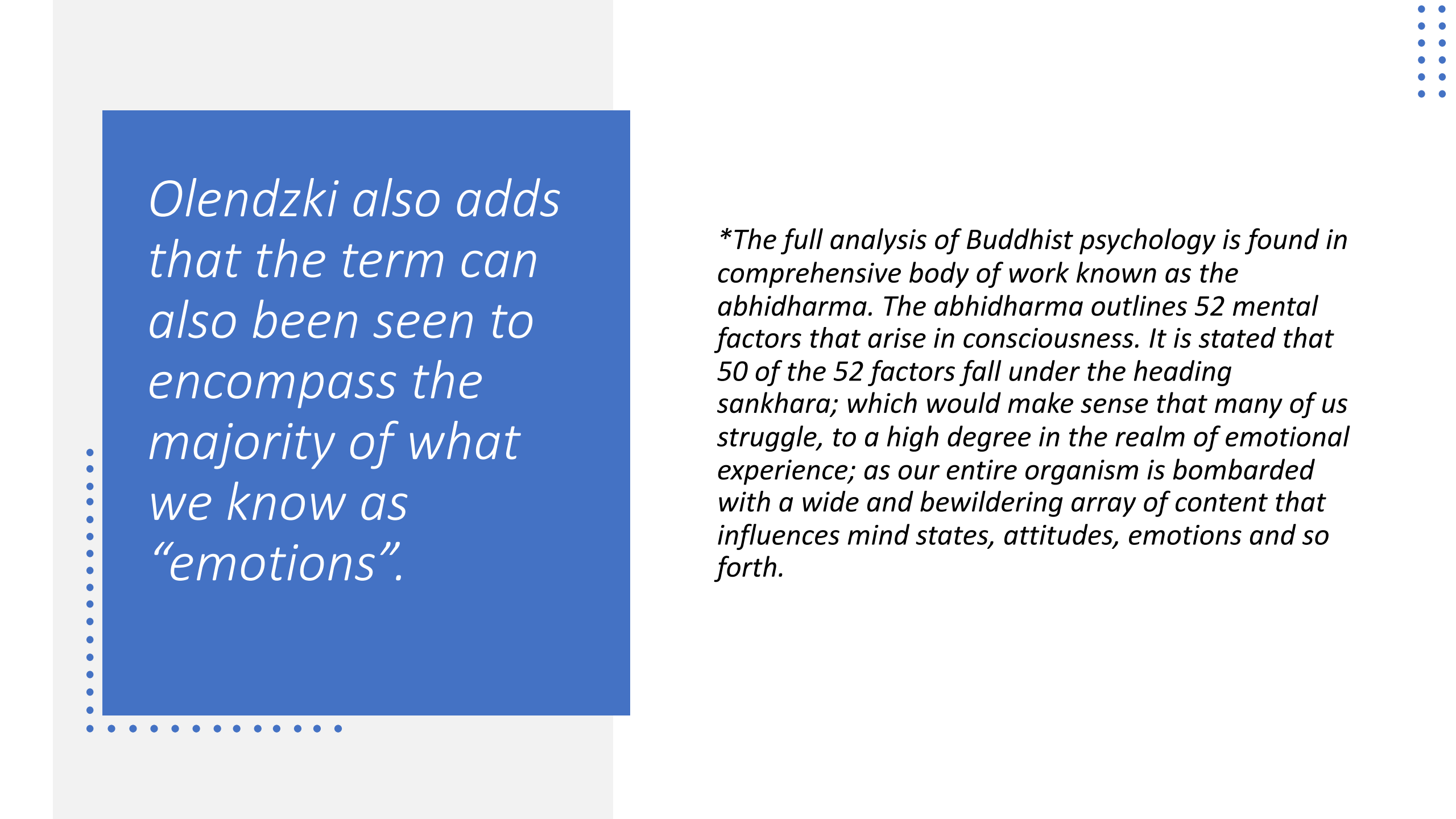
- **Pleasant +**
 - **Unpleasant -**
 - **Neutral 0**
- This seems fairly obvious, but with further investigation we see that we almost always reach for what is pleasant and push away what is unpleasant. When things are neutral we usually just get bored and try to distract ourselves any way possible. Depending on the conditions we may have more than one feeling tone present at one time. If we look closely, there is usually a prominent feeling arising in each moment. Placing the attention on the feeling tone of the breathing body is very helpful because it is almost always pleasant or neutral. It is also always available and “only” available in the here and now.

Perception

- The role of perception is to differentiate one object from another. It is thru the aggregate of perception that the world makes sense to us. This is where we can start to get ourselves into all types of trouble. The role of perception in our lives has tremendous value in some areas but can be in-accurate in others. In some ways, all forms of Buddhist meditation can be seen as-perception-reorganizing.
- That is, to see the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal nature of experience-(the 3 marks of existence). We have so many perceptions about so many things and they come and go very quickly. We often don't really know what to do with them. Perceptions will often give rise to negative emotions or mind states. Based on our moment-to-moment perception we may begin to experience anger, fear, jealousy, doubt and some degree of craving. In mindfulness we are encouraged to begin to question and investigate our perceptions. Are they causing us peace or restlessness? Are they even true? Letting go of the perceptual tendencies of the mind and simply returning to the breath is an important and useful action to take while practicing mindfulness meditation

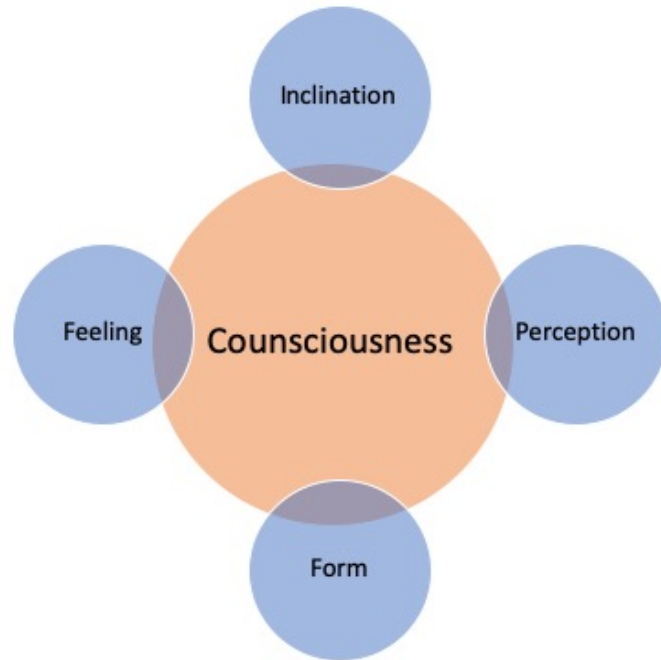
Inclinations

- Based on the info we receive from feeling and perception we are “inclined” to do something about what we perceive to be happening. For us, this can go many different ways. So, if we take the time to pause and check out our motivating “pulls” we can intervene and take a different action.
- This is where mindfulness can really begin to make a difference in our lives. We see that we don’t have to follow our initial reactivity, we can learn to re-train, and we can let go of harmful inclinations and work towards cultivating a better way to go about things. This is really the root of developing mindful awareness, the ability to try different things and to take another approach.
- This 4th aggregate which is translated from the term (sankhara). Sankhāra means 'that which has been put together' and 'that which puts together'. Other English translations for sankhāra include conditioned things, determinations, fabrications and formations (or, particularly when referring to mental processes, volitional formation).
- **Buddhist scholar and academic Andrew Olendzki defines the term sankhara as: intention, volition, choice, decision, activities of body, speech, and mind, and dispositions.**



Olendzki also adds that the term can also been seen to encompass the majority of what we know as “emotions”.

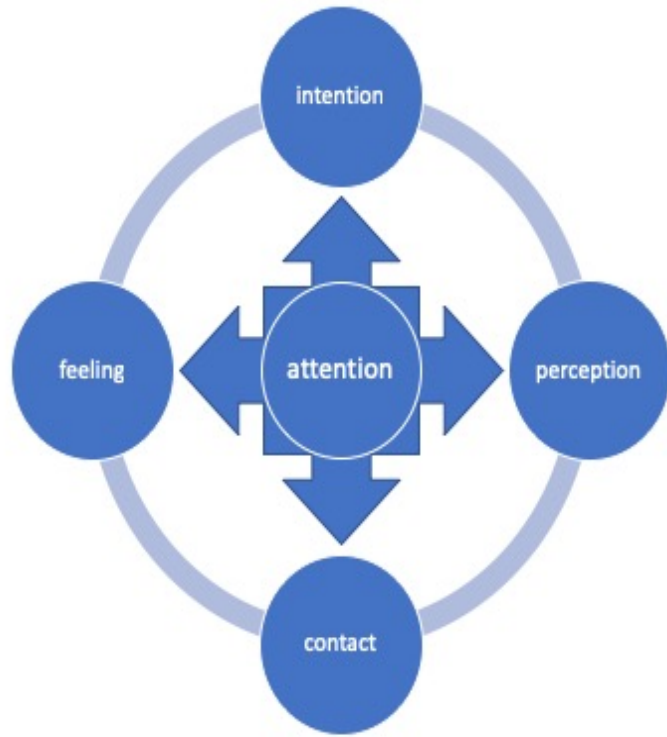
**The full analysis of Buddhist psychology is found in comprehensive body of work known as the abhidharma. The abhidharma outlines 52 mental factors that arise in consciousness. It is stated that 50 of the 52 factors fall under the heading sankhara; which would make sense that many of us struggle, to a high degree in the realm of emotional experience; as our entire organism is bombarded with a wide and bewildering array of content that influences mind states, attitudes, emotions and so forth.*



Consciousness

(universal)

Simply put, consciousness is the container that holds all of these Factors together. From the view of Buddhist psychology, c-ness is an event, it's an episode, and it arises and passes away one moment at a time. It is not a noun, it's not a thing. It's a verb, it's what is happening. It arises based on conditions that allow it to so.



Name-Form-Consciousness (subjective experience)

nama-rupa

contact
feeling
perception
inclination
attention



Contact

- We contact each moment thru range of experiences. The 6 sense doors, and their objects. (See, taste, hear, smell, touch and mind-cognition)
- We can bring our attention to all or any of these experiences at any given time. Although we see that most of the time our attention is pulled in a particular direction, (usually the mind/thoughts) and we habitually follow whatever experience is the most prominent or whatever seems to be the most interesting; or important and so on. Tuning into sensory awareness allows us to see that there is more going on than we may have considered.

Attention

The final factor defining the mind is attention. The role of attention within the practice of mindfulness as well its overall role in our lives is obviously tremendously important.

Early Buddhism defines attention as: “making in the mind.” Its function is to direct all the other mental factors toward an object. Attention is like the rudder of a ship directing it toward its destination. Attention manifests by colliding with whatever object it takes on and becomes confronted by that object, whether it be a sound, sight or thought. This is to say that attention has an element of stress built right into it. It may be no surprise that many people struggle with it.

5 aggregates and Nama- Rupa

- **Name-Form**

- 1. Contact
- 2. Feeling
- 3. Perception
- 4. Inclination
- 5. Attention

Five Aggregates:

1. Forms
2. Feeling
3. Perception
4. Inclination
5. Consciousness



Universal Mental Factors

An Abhidharma Perspective

- According to the Abhidharma, c-ness arises and passes away each moment as a series of episodes in a continuing process-again and again- to yield to the subjective stream of c-ness. C-ness itself is rather simple and austere, consisting merely of the cognizing of a sense object by means of sense organ. This simple event serves as a seed around which a number of other mental factors crystallize to c-ness creating meaning from the experience that we are having:
- This happens quite rapidly and relentlessly at the doors of all 6 senses.
- Like the classic image would say; just like a king with his entourage, c-ness never arises alone. It is always attended by a number of other mental factors that help to structure, shape and inform c'ness in a number of different ways.
- While the Abhidharma lists 52 mental factors that arise in c-ness; it is stated that there are 7 factors, which are present in every single mind moment. These are called the Universal Mental Factors.

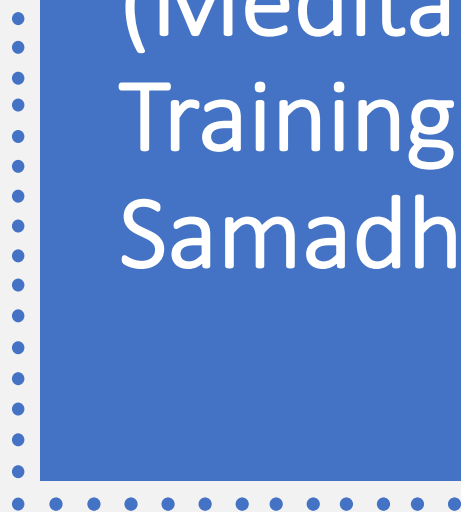



Universal Mental Factors:

- Contact (phasso)
- Feeling (vedana)
- Perception (sanna)
- Inclination-intention (sankara)
- Attention (manisakaro)
- One-pointedness (ekaggata)
- Life Faculty (jivitindriya)

Let's walk thru this process.

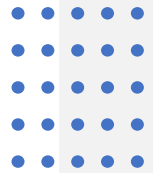
- As we begin our practice, we come into contact with the felt sense of our experience as it arises and passes away.
- We begin-to-notice that the world/life feels a certain way to us-(+0).
- Our experience also make perceptual sense to us (it appears intelligent)-we can differentiate one object from another-(we have names-for-forms).
- We are inclined to take a stance or disposition towards all that we experience (a sense that something can be done).
- We have attention: Attention manifests as a “confrontation” with any particular object- it literally means “making in the mind”-its characteristic is the conducting of the mental factors towards an object.
- One-pointedness is the unification of the mind onto its particular object. The abhidharma states that one-pointedness has non-wandering and non-distraction as its characteristic; its function is to unify whatever mental factors are present; it manifests as peace, ease and contentment and its proximate cause is happiness.
- I will not say much about the life faculty as it is doesn't play a crucial role in the practice of satipatthana/mindfulness. Suffice is to say that a lifestyle that leads to ease and happiness is the aim of the entire Buddhist endeavor



(2). Mindfulness and Dependent Origination (Meditative Training: Samadhi)

Mindfulness

- By applying the practice of mindfulness we are able to understand the original teachings of Siddhartha Gotama. For the sake of overcoming reactivity and consequently suffering in our lives as it unfolds in real time.
- Buddhist Psychology works best only when it is concerned with the practice of the **four noble truths** as applied to living in this modern world.
- The four noble truths encourage a naturalistic and pragmatic approach to the Buddha's teachings thus providing a framework for deep personal and social growth. Through mindfulness we are able to understand these teachings, which allow us to better understanding ourselves.



What is Mindfulness?

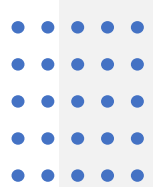
(from the pali
canon)

“What is the power of mindfulness? Here, monks, a noble disciple is mindful; he is equipped with the keenest awareness and circumspection; *he remembers well and keeps in mind what has been said and done long ago.*” (recollect)

“Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of nibbana –namely, the four groundings of recollection. “A monk abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away desire and discontent for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, mind as mind, dhamma as dhamma.

Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta)

1. Mindfulness of body/breath
2. Mindfulness of feeling tone (+, -, 0)
3. Mindfulness of mind states (attitudes of mind)
4. Mindfulness of mind objects (dhammas): categories of experience



This is what is to be
experienced,
understood and
cultivated.

*(Satipatthana- Sutta
Analayo commentary)*

- *Direct experience of the fact that everything changes, if applied to all aspects of one's personality, can powerfully alter the habit patterns of one's own mind.*
- *Not seeing the rising and passing away of phenomena is ignorance, while to regard all phenomena as impermanent-leads to clear knowledge and understanding.*
- *Ones volitional/intentional decision in the present moment is to a considerable degree amendable to personal intervention and control, each decision in turn shapes the habits, character traits, experiences, and perceptual mechanisms that form the content of future decision. (Karma)*

Dependent Arising

The Buddha says, "One who sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma and one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent arising". The Dhamma is the truth discovered by the Buddha.

In his statement the Buddha makes an explicit equation between the profound truth he has realized and dependent arising. Again, in describing his own quest for awakening, the Buddha says that immediately before his awaking, when he was sitting in meditation he began enquiring into the chain of conditioning, seeking the causal origination of suffering, and this inquiry led him to the discovery of dependent arising. *So, from one angle one can equate the discovery of dependent arising with the attainment of awakening itself.*

The Buddha says this dependent arising is deep in truth and deep in appearance. It is through not understanding and not penetrating this truth of dependent arising that living beings have become entangled like a tangle of thread.

Thus, dependent arising is not only the content of the Buddha's awakening, not only a philosophical doctrine, but it is also the truth that has to be realized to gain liberation from suffering.

So, this is the key not only to the intellectual understanding of the Dhamma, but to the experience of liberation itself.



Dependent Arising

(from the pali
canon)

“Let be the past, Udayin, let be the future. I shall teach you the Dhamma: when this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”

- *“This conditioned arising is profound and appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this Dhamma that people have become like tangled balls of string, covered with a blight, tangled like coarse grass, unable to pass beyond states of woe, ill destiny, ruin and repetition.”*
- The teaching on D.O. is found within the context of the 2nd noble truth. The aim is to abandon craving and clinging as they arise and thus putting an end to the suffering that comes.



Let 's take a look at craving

(from the pali
canon)

- *“This is craving: it is repetitive, it wallows in attachment and greed, obsessively indulging in this and that: craving for stimulation, craving for existence, craving for non-existence.”*
- That craving is what arises, is central the doctrine of Dependent Arising, it is said to be conditioned by feeling, which is conditioned by contact, which is conditioned by the six senses, which is conditioned by (nāmarūpa), which is conditioned by consciousness OR 5 aggregates.
- Now since The First Sermon regards these five aggregates as shorthand for what is meant by dukkha, then, according to the Twelve Links theory, it is clear that craving is what arises from dukkha. “Craving” describes all our habitual and instinctive reactions to the fleeting, tragic, unreliable and impersonal conditions of life that confront us.
- If something is pleasant, we crave to possess it; if something is unpleasant, we crave to be rid of it. The practice of mindfulness trains us to notice how this reactive pattern arises from our felt encounter with the world in such a way that we cease to be in thrall to its imperatives and are thereby liberated to think and act otherwise.

*A side note:
a clear
distinction
between
desire, craving
and clinging)*

- I have found it to be useful to understanding the distinctions that are made between wholesome and unwholesome desire; pain and suffering; clinging and not clinging to desire. It is extremely helpful, useful and skillful to see and to understand the difference. Intellectually and experientially. Knowing that you can have desire without clinging to it, that you can have goals, aspirations and plans and have a relationship to the results that is centered in non-clinging.
- You can have wholesome desire. Being able to hold your desire without craving you aren't identified and defined by your desire. Not paying attention and living in an unnoticed ocean of desire attached and identified by its outcome is the source of suffering because you don't know how to respond to it wisely. We can begin to let go without trying to annihilate, we can still practice a commitment to our goals without clinging to the outcome.

12-links of Dependent Origination

1. Ignorance- not understanding the meaning and full implication of the 4 noble truths.
2. Karmic formations- habitual activities of mind that are aligned to self-view.
3. Consciousness- the activation of the 6-senses; acting in a dualistic manor-defining the subject as distinct from the object.
4. Name and form- feeling, perception, inclination, attention and their objects.
5. Contact (6 sense base) - eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.
6. Feeling (+ - 0) - painful, pleasant, or neutral bodily or mental experiences.
7. Craving- instinctual desire-to have, to attain, to get away from experiences.
8. Clinging, grasping- leaning in on, or feeding on sensual or mental experience.
9. Becoming- solidifying awareness into a fixed state of mind, one that seeks permanence.
10. Birth ("I") - the experience of being a "separate entity".
11. Decay, death- the sense of ego-loss, through the breaking up of the psychological foundation of self.
12. Suffering- the un-satisfactoriness of this entire process.



We will drop the 1st 2 links (past lives) and the last 3 links (future lives) and investigate how suffering arises in our c-ness and how it can be abandoned.

(3). Nibbana, Nirodha and the 3rd Noble Truth

Sila:
Ethics/Non-
Harming

- We will now take a look at the ethical framework of practice as well.
- We will go through the 52 mental factors and the four respective categories.

- 1. Universals**
- 2. Occasionals**
- 3. Unwholesome**
- 4. Beautiful**