

Difference Between Citta, Mano and Manokamma

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An edited transcript of a YouTube video

[GDW 104 Explanation of D1](#)

Introduction

Many of you develop your views from different sources; for example, by reading dhamma books, researching on the internet, or consulting your teachers. There is also a lot of literature available for free distribution. Many of these come from teachers in the Thai Forest Tradition who speak from personal experience rather than from scriptural knowledge and understanding. Although the descriptions of their experiences are probably accurate, the words they use can sometimes be confusing. What we will try to do in this discussion is to see what the suttas actually say about citta and mano and then go on to decide whether the words that various writers use refer to the same thing, or whether they are, in fact, talking about different things.

Is the mind luminous?

This is the first question that often comes up in any discussion about citta. The idea of an ‘original mind’ having ‘Buddha nature’—meaning that the mind is innately luminous and radiant but defiled by incoming corruptions—is a central feature, and much emphasised, in Tibetan and Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. But the view that everyone is basically already enlightened and just need to awaken to, or realise, this themselves, is not shared by Theravadins.

Nevertheless, we can find in the Pāḷi scriptures some basis for the view that the mind is luminous. The Upakkilesa Sutta (AN 4.50), for example, seems to suggest that the mind is originally pure but, like the sun and the moon, can lose their radiance and cease to shine when clouded by corruptions. More explicitly, in the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN 1.51), the Buddha says:

“Luminous, monks, is this citta. And it is corrupted by incoming corruptions”.

Though the idea of innate luminosity is not a prominent feature in the Pāḷi-based teaching on the mind; nevertheless, if we look more closely into the suttas, we find that the luminous mind is *the* basis for developing the citta.

Let us look more closely at what the Buddha says in AN 1.51 and 1.52 respectively:

“Luminous (*pabhassaram*), monks, is this mind (*cittam*). And it is corrupted by incoming (*āgantukehi*) corruptions (*upakkilesehi*). That an uninformed worldling knows not according to what has occurred (*yathābhūtam*). Therefore I say, ‘There is no development of the citta for the uninformed worldling’.”

“Luminous, monks, is this citta, and it is freed from incoming corruptions. The informed noble disciple knows this according to what has occurred. Therefore I say, ‘For the informed noble disciple there is development of the mind.’”

What this seems to imply is that, first of all, you have to experience the luminosity of the mind before you can develop it. But to experience the luminosity of the mind, you first have to get rid of the five hindrances because it is when the five hindrances are abandoned, even if this happens temporarily, that you can experience the mind's radiance. And it is only then, the Buddha says, that there can be development of the citta.

This means that if you want to develop the citta, you must start by realising its luminosity and this comes *after* you have abandoned the five hindrances. This is an essential first step, according to what the Buddha says, because there can be no development of the citta, if this does not happen. You start to develop the citta only when it has become luminous, i.e. when it has been cleared of the incoming corruptions. But this is *only the beginning* of development, it does not mean you are already enlightened. It is after clearing or abandoning the five hindrances, and you move on to develop the citta, that from there you may eventually get awakened. You can see how different this is from the views that are not based on the Pāḷi suttas.

To go further into how a luminous citta can and needs to be further developed for it to be awakened, we need to understand how citta is related to *mano* and *viññāṇa*. These are three Pāḷi terms used, in different contexts, to refer to different aspects of the mind and its abilities or functions. *Citta* and *mano* are both often translated as mind while *viññāṇa* is quite universally translated as consciousness. Ajahn Thānissaro translates *mano* as intellect and *citta* as mind or heart, and, it is indeed the case that generally people understand *citta* to mean the emotional side of the mind while *mano* is used to refer to its intellectual side. However, we need a clearer and more systematic analysis of all three terms and their interrelationship to better understand how the mind can be developed in Buddhist teaching.

Rune Johansson's work on citta, mano, viññāṇa

The most comprehensive research that I have come across on these three terms is in an article by Rune Johansson entitled "Citta, Mano, Vinnana—a Psychosemantic Investigation", published in 1965 in the *University of Ceylon Review*.

Before I continue with my discussion of the main points of his paper, I would like to express my admiration for Johansson's scholarship. He was researching in the 1960's when the *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries were not yet digitalised. So, he had to read through all the hard copies of the *Tipiṭaka*, noting down every occurrence of *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*, without the aid even of a personal computer, which was not yet available at that time.

You can find a detailed table of occurrences of the three terms in the suttas in his paper which provides a comprehensive analysis of the three terms as they occurred in different contexts in the *Tipiṭaka*. To communicate his analysis, Johansson used many psychological terms which may be quite difficult for most lay people to grasp.

What I've done is to distil his analysis of the three terms and express the major points in layman language which will be easier to understand. I have also summarised his comparison of citta, mano and viññāṇa in the table below which shows, at a glance, the similarities and differences between citta, mano and viññāṇa in relation to 14 possible features or characteristics of the mind.

Pāli Canonical Terms Related to Mind			
Feature	Citta	Mano	Viññāṇa
1 Developed	√	√	
2 Defiled	√	√	
3 Purified	√	√	
4 Restrained	√	√	
5 Liberated	√		
6 Conditioned / Constructed	√	√	√
7 3 Characteristics	√	√	√
8 Aggregate			√
9 Sense organ		√	
10 Thinking	√	√	
11 Personality	√		
12 Sentience	√	√	√
13 Coordinator of 5 senses		√	
14 Rebirth process			√

The first characteristic listed in the table is 'developed'. You may perhaps find it strange that citta and mano can be developed but not viññāṇa. Similarly, citta and mano can be purified, but not viññāṇa. But if we take the first three characteristics together, it is quite easy to understand that as viññāṇa is not defiled in the first place it obviously does not need to be purified whereas both citta and mano can be defiled and therefore they need to be purified and developed. Viññāṇa, as bare awareness, provides the base for the five senses to register their experiences and for mano and citta to play their respective roles. Continuing down to the 4th characteristic, you can see again that citta and mano can be restrained but not viññāṇa. But when it comes to liberated, only the citta can be liberated but not mano or viññāṇa. I will be discussing these points later.

All three of them, however, are similar in being conditioned phenomena or saṅkhāras, meaning that they are the products of causes and conditions. And, because of this, all three therefore also exhibit the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha and anattā; or impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

However, only viññāṇa is classified as one of the five aggregates, not citta or mano. And only mano is a sense organ, not citta or viññāṇa. This is because mano functions as the organ for cognising and, in this sense, is like the eye which is an organ for the sense of seeing. But mano is different from the five sense organs which are physical in nature whereas mano, the sixth sense, is not physical.

Interestingly, although mano, in popular understanding, is referred to as the intellect while citta is thought of as the emotional part of the mind; according to Johansson's findings, both citta and mano have the ability to think.

When we come to the characteristic of personality, we must note that it is used slightly differently from ordinary usage which refers to an individual's distinctive overall character. In our context, citta is considered to have personality in the sense that it is often personified by the Buddha in the suttas. For example, you will sometimes have a bhikkhu talking to himself, telling his citta; "Hey, you have been leading me by the nose for aeons. Now, I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to meditate, and be free, be liberated."

I am sure many of you have the same experience of talking to yourself. For example, when you wake up early on a Sunday morning, one part of you may think: "It's Sunday, no work today, good day for meditation. Must get up early." But another part of your mind will say, "Hey, no work today means I can sleep longer, let me go back to sleep and enjoy my rest day." So, which one are you? Are you the good guy or the bad guy? Just like the bhikkhu, you probably think of yourself as the good guy talking to his citta which is personified as the bad guy.

Mano and viññāṇa is never personified in this way in the suttas, only citta. So I suppose Aggacitta can be taken to mean the 'peak of the bad guys'!

The 12th characteristic, sentience, means having the faculty of consciousness including the ability to be aware and cognise. In this respect, all three, i.e. citta, mano, and viññāṇa, have this ability to be conscious, aware, to cognise and to know.

The mind in relation to the 5 senses

Now we come to the distinctive characteristic of mano as the coordinator of the five senses. The five senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body—are all selfish in nature in the sense that each is concerned only with its own respective particular object. For example, the eye can only see or be aware of colours. The eyes are not bothered by what the ears hear, or what the nose smells, or what the body feels. But if each of the five senses does their own specialised jobs, however effectively, the organism cannot survive, with all the five senses doing their own thing and going their separate ways! This is why the sixth sense, mano, is needed. The eye sees, but the mind is aware of the seeing. In the same way the mind registers what the other sense organs are perceiving and coordinates them into a meaningful experience. It is this coordinating function of the mind that enables the organism to function effectively and to survive.

When you are in pain, the consciousness of pain comes from the body, but it is the mind that registers awareness of the pain in the body and deliberates on the appropriate action in response. When you are doing open awareness meditation and you are trying to be aware of what's happening at the five senses, it is actually *mano* that is working, being aware of hearing, aware of seeing, aware of tasting, and aware of bodily sensations.

The Buddha explains the function of *mano* quite explicitly when he answers Brahmin Uṇṇābha's question in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 48.42.

“There are these five sense faculties, good Gotama, of different spheres, different action, and they do not share in each other's sphere of action ... As these five faculties are of different scope and range, and do not share in each other's sphere of action, what is their resort (*paṭisaraṇa*), and who profits from their combined activity?”

He was a Brahmin, so he probably expected the Buddha to say it's the Atman, the concept of soul in Brahmanism. But the Buddha's answer was that it is *mano* that is the resort (or refuge) of the five sense faculties, and it is *mano* that oversees the spheres of action of the five sense faculties.

There is another important difference between the mind and the five senses. The five senses can only register objects in the present moment. For example, you can only see something with your eyes if that object is right in front of you. But what you saw last night in a video, on YouTube or on TV, you can't see now as you are sitting here listening to me speaking. It's the same for the other four senses; you can only hear, smell, taste, and feel with the body whatever is in the present moment, right here, right now.

But the mind is different. The movie you saw last night is not available on your device right now so you cannot see it with your eyes, but your mind can still remember it, recall it and think about it. Also, when you are asleep at night, all your five senses appear to be shut down; you're not aware of what the eyes see nor what the ears hear, etc. And yet, you can have a nightmare or a dream during which you are doing all sorts of things which seem to be as real as if you are awake. But it is all created by the mind. Your body is lying asleep on your bed.

Mind, body and rebirth

There is a different kind of situation in which the mind seems to be still functioning when the body is lying still, and apparently unconscious, in operating theatres or intensive care units in hospitals. This comes from accounts of 'out of body experiences' by some patients who survive death threatening situations during which the medical team of surgeons, doctors and nurses are frantically trying to save their lives. The heart has stopped beating and the patient is considered clinically or even brain dead. However, after the hospital team successfully resuscitates the patient, who literally comes back from the brink of death, s/he is

able to describe, in vivid detail, all the surgical and medical procedures that the team of doctors were performing while s/he was supposed to be unconscious!

The doctors are completely baffled by this as a layman would not know the procedures and yet from the patient's description, it seems s/he was 'up there' observing everything that the doctors were doing! There is no scientific explanation for this as the instruments showed that the brain and the five senses were not functioning during the procedures. But the mind was still able to observe all the procedures even though the five senses and the brain were apparently out of action. This is why it is referred to as an 'out-of-body experience'. Of course, not everyone has such experiences; but the fact that some people do, provides us with interesting examples of the mind's special abilities.

There are also examples of people who have a different kind of special gift: they can have premonitions of future happenings or are able to foresee the future, so to speak. It seems their minds can look into the future and 'see' things that have as yet not happened. But for the ordinary person who does not have this special ability, the mind can only think about the future by making projections of what could or might happen, based on one's past experiences.

Indeed, it is our past experiences that provide us with the basis for thoughts or feelings about the present as well as the future. For example, once while I was watching a short BBC clip on Syrian refugees in Europe, it struck me that the adults were looking very anxious and worried whereas the children were happily running all over the camp just playing among themselves. Why the difference? The children had no fear because they did not know what it meant to be refugees, they did not have enough knowledge and experience to know the dangers confronting them, so they were not worried about the future and could still play happily in the present. But the adults were all too aware that they were now refugees, with no job and no clear idea of how they would be settled after fleeing from their country. This knowledge and their past experiences filled their minds with anxiety and worry, not just about their current situation but also about what the future might have in store for them.

It is the mind, as the coordinator of experiences coming in from the five senses and having the ability to recall and reflect on past experiences, that can formulate and communicate abstract concepts and ideas. It is the mind, too, that can think about the future in relation to both past and present experiences and understand what it means to practise mindfulness, develop the citta and endeavour to reach nibbāna.

We have discussed the similarities and differences between citta, mano and viññāṇa in relation to the 13 characteristics listed in the first column in the table above. We are now on the last item of rebirth. As Buddhists do not believe in the idea or existence of a soul, the question then is: *What is the basis for believing in rebirth?* This is where the concept of viññāṇa comes in. As explained earlier, viññāṇa is usually translated as consciousness. This, in a very general sense,

usually refers to the mental makeup of a sentient being. It is a continuity arising from sense experiences and mental processes, and subject to causes and conditions. And it is *viññāṇa* as the basis for this continuity of consciousness that flows in rebirth from one sentient existence to the next.

From the discussion so far, it appears that there are more similarities than differences between *citta* and *mano*. We shall now look at the Abhidhamma model of the *citta* to see how it can add more to our understanding of the relationship between *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa*.

The Abhidhamma model of citta

Origins and purpose of the Abhidamma

First, we must note that there is a consensus among most scholars that the Abhidhamma, unlike the suttas, does not contain the 'original' words of the Buddha. Legend has it that the Buddha's former mother came down from Tusita Heaven to Tāvātimsa Heaven to listen to the Buddha preaching the Abhidhamma, while he was seated on Sakka Devarāja's throne. But this is only a legendary account, with no support in any of the suttas. The Abhidhamma is now believed to have developed after the Buddha passed away. It is therefore different from sources of the Buddha's teachings to be found in the suttas in the Pāḷi canon such as the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṃyutta Nikāya and Aṅguttara Nikāya.

I believe that initially the Abhidhamma was the outcome of the very profound meditative experiences of the theras who then tried to systematise the teachings of the Buddha. It is well known that the Buddha taught according to the temperaments, inclinations and spiritual maturity of the people he was talking to. So, he would sometimes say one thing to a particular person or a particular group of people. At other times, he would say something different to another person. It seems to me that the whole purpose of the Abhidhamma was to try to systematically analyse the Buddha's teachings, to show in greater detail how they all fit into a coherent and comprehensive overview of everything as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*, so that we can be better informed in our attempt to liberate ourselves from *saṃsāra*.

In its development through the years, the Abhidhamma became more theoretical and intellectual. Perhaps this may render it more suitable for followers who have a theoretical inclination and enjoy going into greater details. But it is necessary to bear in mind that what the Abhidhamma offers is an approximate model of reality for the sole purpose of total liberation; it was not designed to answer all questions about reality. It would be a mistake to try and make use of the Abhidhamma as a general theory that can explain every phenomena we encounter in the real world. However, it is of course useful to refer to the Abhidhamma to refine our understanding of particular concepts, especially in relation to the Buddhist concept of the mind.

A modern simile of a glass of water

To make it easier for us to understand the Abhidhamma model, let us imagine that we have in front of us a glass of clear, distilled water. As you know distilled water is sterile and quite insipid; there is nothing inside, no elements, no minerals, no chemicals. This glass of distilled water is comparable to viññāṇa because viññāṇa is pure awareness, pure like distilled water. And, because it is not defiled, viññāṇa does not have to be purified or developed.

Now, imagine that we have some coloured droplets of dye, representing the three mental aggregates of vēdanā, saññā and saṅkhārā (feelings, perception, and volitional formations). What will happen if we drop the droplets of dye in different proportions into separate glasses of clear water? We will get an infinite number of coloured glasses of water, each of them different from the others depending on the proportion and type of droplets we put into the glasses; some can be darker, some lighter, some murky, some clear, etc. Similarly, viññāṇa is coloured by different combinations of vēdanā, saññā and saṅkhārā. Another analogy that we can use here is music where we have just seven basic notes: do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do. But an infinite variety of melodies can be created from different combinations of these seven basic notes.

The Abhidhamma model of the citta, therefore, conceptualises it as comprising viññāṇa, as pure or bare consciousness, combined with the aggregates of vēdanā, saññā and saṅkhārā.

It may sometimes be just vēdanā and saññā, without saṅkhārā. There are altogether 6 types of viññāṇa corresponding to the 6 senses. It is important to understand that viññāṇa cannot exist or arise independently but must always be accompanied by vēdanā and saññā, and sometimes saṅkhārā. Similarly vēdanā and saññā and saṅkhārā can only arise when viññāṇa is present. So, they are interdependent.



In the simile of the coloured glasses of water, viññāṇa is a solvent like the pure distilled water and the other three mental aggregates are the solutes like the droplets of colour dye. Without water as a solvent the dyes cannot dissolve to produce a coloured solution and without the dyes the pure distilled water cannot be coloured.

You have to be careful when you engage in discussion with Myanmar monks because they sometimes translate citta as mind, and sometimes as consciousness. But citta is not just viññāṇa or consciousness. In fact, as we have seen, the Abhidhamma model of the mind requires us to understand citta as involving not just viññāṇa or consciousness but also the three other mental aggregates.

We must also be aware that in English we generally distinguish the mind from the five senses, and in the suttas it is conceptualised as the sixth sense (NOT in the sense of extrasensory perception though). But in the Abhidhamma model, if citta is translated as ‘mind’, it refers to all types of consciousness at all the six sense doors combined with any of the three aggregates of vēdanā, saññā or saṅkhāra. The 6 different types of consciousness are, e.g. eye consciousness (cakkhuvīññāṇa), ear consciousness (sotavīññāṇa), nose consciousness (ghānavīññāṇa) and so on, corresponding to each sense. When you see something with your eyes, eye consciousness (cakkhuvīññāṇa) arises together with feeling and perception—and all three are collectively called the citta related to the eye. Therefore, to understand the Abhidhamma model of citta better, we need to have a clearer idea of the five aggregates of rūpa, vēdanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa.

The 5 aggregates

Rūpa—form

Rūpa is simple; it refers just to the physical body and the objects of the other four senses.

Vēdanā—feeling

Vēdanā is the Pāḷi word for feeling. But, unlike the word ‘feelings’ in English which can carry all kinds of complex associations, vēdanā in Pāḷi has a very rudimentary meaning. Vēdanā is just three possible kinds of feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Saññā—perception, identification

Saññā is often translated as perception but again we must differentiate it from the English word ‘perception’ which can be used in different ways involving different connotations. Saññā in Pāḷi refers to the process by which we identify or recognise things or experiences. This involves both identification and spontaneous memory. For example, someone gives you something to eat. You taste it and remember immediately that you have tasted something like this before—that is spontaneous memory. But if it is something which you have never tasted or seen before, then as

you eat it the mind will register or cognise it so that the next time you encounter a similar item, perception, as spontaneous memory, will arise, making you re-cognise it.

So, *saññā* has two functions; one is spontaneous memory, which is recognising something which has been experienced before, and the other is spontaneous identification, which is registering a brand new experience so that you will be able to recognise it the next time. Recognition literally means you have cognised it before and you are now re-cognising it.

Both spontaneous identification and spontaneous memory are not intentional. For example, when you are practising open awareness, following ADA Anchor, you are instructed to anchor your mind to the five senses. But sometimes memories just pop up, out of the blue; you did not intentionally arouse those memories, they just popped up. That is *saññā*—spontaneous memory. Notice that you have no control over the memories that arise whether it is in the course of meditation or in your daily life. This is why you may be able to forgive but you are not able to forget, because memory is not easy to erase. Memories can pop up sometimes when you least want them to.

We must distinguish clearly between *saññā* as spontaneous memory and intentional or deliberate memory. For example, if you are running late for a meeting and rushing to arrive in time. When you arrive at the venue, you reach into your pockets and find that your keys are not there. You ask yourself, “Where did I put my keys? When was the last time I used them?” As you try hard to recollect the last time you used your keys, you are using deliberate memory to recall something.

Trying hard to recall or recollect something involves intention—and therefore it is not *saññā*. Of course, recollection or deliberate memory must depend on the *saññā* that had happened at an earlier time. But trying to recollect or using deliberate memory to recall an earlier experience is very different from *saññā* when it happens as spontaneous memory.

Let us take another example. If you are the leader of a community, you are bound to get a lot of people coming to you to complain about all kinds of things, especially their colleagues. If you have been told unfavourable things about a particular member of your staff, you know that the next time you meet that person your mind may be coloured by what you have heard. So, you may try very hard to be objective; to put what you have heard to the back of your mind, to keep an open mind and not jump to any conclusions. You remind yourself that the complaints you have heard are based on other people’s experience, you tell yourself to form your opinion based on your own observations of, and relationship with, the person. You have a very clear intention—not to allow your perception to be coloured by other peoples’ perceptions; yet it will still be to some extent.

Saṅkhārā—volitional or intentional constructions

Saṅkhārā, which refers to volitional or intentional constructions of the mind, is used in many different contexts in the Pāḷi canon. Sometimes it is used to refer to all conditioned phenomena. But, in the context of saṅkhārā as one of the five aggregates, it refers only to volitional constructions of the mind. For example, I gave you the instruction to ‘lock’ your eyeballs in a single direction when you start open awareness meditation. But then something catches your attention, you see something moving at the corner of your eye, your curiosity is aroused and you turn to look at it. Then you remember: “Bhante said to ‘lock’ my eyeballs, not to turn to look at anything.” It’s too late—you did not catch the intention in time. Clearly the intention to turn and look was there—that is saṅkhārā.

This happens very fast but is still different from memories popping up beyond our control, which are therefore not intentional. But, after a memory pops up, and you decide to push it away because it is something unpleasant, then that is intentional, it is saṅkhārā—an intentional construct in your mind. If it is a pleasant memory and you hang on to it so that you can continue to enjoy the nice feelings from that past experience—that too is intention or saṅkhārā. It is the same with feelings; feelings arise by themselves, spontaneously, beyond our control. But, after the feelings have arisen, and you react one way or another, then intention or saṅkhārā has come into the picture.

Viññāṇa—consciousness

The fifth aggregate viññāṇa is usually translated as consciousness. Viññāṇa as consciousness has a very rudimentary function—to receive what the senses are registering, as in the simile of a glass of distilled water. As noted earlier, each of the senses can be conscious of specific kinds of things; the eye of colours; the ears of sounds, the body of sensations, etc. Therefore, consciousness, as one of the five aggregates, can be classified into six different types corresponding to the sense organs: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness.

To make the distinction between viññāṇa and saññā clearer, let us look at two more examples. During your younger days, you may have played this game, at youth camps, in which you are asked to identify objects that have been enlarged, sometimes by several hundred times. You may have had difficulty recognising a pinhead or even your own skin because when enlarged a hundred times your skin looks like the surface of the moon, very rough and full of potholes. Looking at the object, your consciousness or awareness is present, as viññāṇa, but saññā or perception may have some difficulty doing its job of identification or recognition.

To take another example; if I am speaking to you in English, a language that you understand, the moment I say something you immediately understand me because the mind is able to interpret and reconstruct the sounds that the ear hears into words that you already know and sentences that you can understand. This process works so fast that you think it is simultaneous and spontaneous. But if I speak in

Myanmarese, a language that you don't know, you will hear just a whole series of sounds. Your hearing awareness can register the sounds but the mind does not recognise them and is unable to interpret and reconstruct them into words you know or understand. The two separate parts of the process are distinct when your mind cannot draw on the experience of having learnt Myanmarese.

Apart from awareness and perception, feelings and even volitions can also be involved in mental processes. The citta comprises all these separate departments which must work together for the citta to function. It is like a company or corporation with several departments. Each department has its own function or job but all of them must work together for the company to function efficiently and successfully. It is the same with the citta.

Recap

We now have a better picture of the five aggregates of a sentient being. Of the four mental aggregates, *vēdanā* is very rudimentary feeling; *saññā* is spontaneous memory or registration of something new; and *viññāṇa* is just pure consciousness. All other mental states, if they don't fall into these three classifications, can be grouped under *saṅkhārā*. Whether they are intentions, mindfulness, concentration, greed, hatred, delusion, or non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion; they all come under *saṅkhārā*. *Saṅkhārā*, therefore, is a blanket term for all mental states that are not *vēdanā*, *saññā*, or *viññāṇa*.

Old and new kamma

When we look deeper into the five aggregates, we can see that four of them are resultants; for example, your physical body is a resultant of your past kamma. When I say past kamma, I am not talking just about past life kamma. The body that you have right now, is the product of whatever actions that you have done, in the past life as well in this present life, up to this very last moment. Everything that you have done, even what you ate this morning, is making your body what it is now. This is what is meant when we say your body is a product of past kamma, the result of all the actions that you have done.

As for *vēdanā* or feelings, we have no control over them. For example, sometimes your body feels uncomfortable when you are trying to meditate, then you adjust your body a bit and you feel comfortable. Then, after some time, you feel uncomfortable again. You cannot run away from your body's feelings. You have no choice, you cannot tell your feelings to wait, allow you to finish your meditation session first, then let the discomfort start. If the discomfort is there, you cannot choose. You need to get help from *saṅkhārā* to decide how you can cope with the discomfort to continue your meditation.

We have seen earlier that we also have no choice over *saññā*; memories can spontaneously just pop up. For example, you suddenly bump into a childhood friend whom you have not seen for 20 or 30 years. The first thing that pops up in your

mind, as soon as you recognise her or him, will be the last time you were together, the last experience you had with her or him. If it was a nasty experience, then immediately negative feelings will arise. This will happen regardless of whether that person has or has not changed since you last met. It will still be your experience in the past that will be the first spontaneous memory to pop up, without any intention or volition on your part. But you have a choice *after* the impression has arisen—you can use your wisdom to reflect, to acknowledge that after so many years things may have changed, and decide not to just fall back on your past impressions.

We also have no control over *viññāṇa*; if our sense organs are in good working order, our consciousness will receive whatever impacts upon them. For example, if your ears are in good order and there is a sudden loud sound, you have no choice but to hear the sound. And if your nose is in good order, if somebody comes into the room with durian, you have no choice but to smell it even if you don't like durian. For those who like durian, the moment they smell it, they may start to salivate. Again, this is the body's spontaneous response arising from experiences in the past.

So, *rūpa*, *vēdanā*, *saññā*, *viññāṇa*—they are all resultants. You cannot control them, and you cannot avoid them or even guard against them. So, what can you do? Fortunately, there is *saṅkhārā*—the part of the mind that you can deploy to reflect on and control your responses. Over the other four which are resultants, you have no control or choice. Born with the five aggregates, you must live with them. But how you react to them—that will constitute *kamma*.

As the Buddha said in *Kammanirodha Sutta* (SN 35.146) whatever we experience with the six senses are past or old *kamma*. This is particularly true in the case of the five senses because you have no control over whatever you experience with the five senses; they are all determined by, or products of, past *kamma*. For example, I frequently walk barefoot. Once in a blue moon, I may step on a pebble that causes me great pain. But the fact is that I have stepped on millions of pebbles, none of which have caused me any pain. That's because none of them hit me on this particular spot that is causing me pain. I have no choice over this, I cannot even tell when or which pebble may cause me pain. My pain is the resultant from my bad past *kamma*.

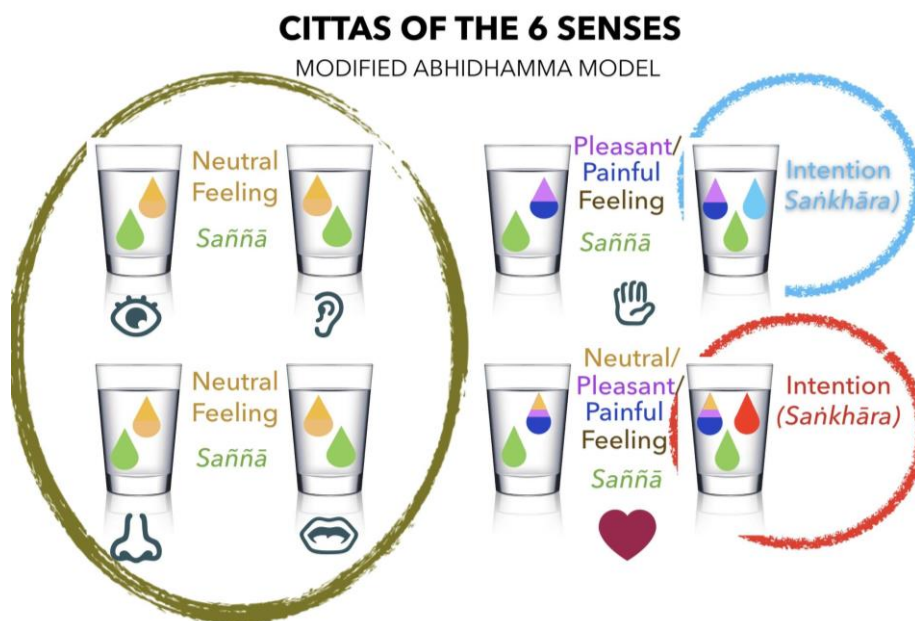
So, whenever you have any painful feelings, you too have no choice as that is the result of your past *kamma*. How the mind reacts to what is perceived at the senses, that is new *kamma*. You create new *kamma* when you react. If you react to it in an unwholesome or negative way, then you create unwholesome *kamma*. If you respond to it in a wholesome or positive way, then the result is positive *kamma*.

A modified Abhidhamma model of the citta

We are now ready to re-examine the Abhidhamma model of the *citta*. In the Abhidhamma, as we have found earlier, *citta* refers not just to the sixth sense but to all the six senses. I introduced the analogy of a glass of pure distilled water

representing pure consciousness which is then coloured by droplets of dye representing the other three mental aggregates. For the four sense experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting, it is important to bear in mind, even if it may be a bit difficult to understand initially, that the feelings in these sense experiences are, in themselves, neutral. It is the mind that creates a pleasant feeling if it likes the experience and an unpleasant feeling if it has a negative perception of the experience.

But, in the case of the body, it is different because feelings can be either pleasant or unpleasant. For example, when you are sitting down, you may feel comfortable or uncomfortable. If you feel neutral, it means you are comfortable. As we have noted, for all the five senses, including feelings of the body, there is no volition or intention involved.



I used to think, in my younger days, that this was a linear process, i.e. one thing happens at a time followed by the next part of the process. But now my view is that all five sense experiences can arise simultaneously with the presence of consciousness. Even if the mind is not aware of it, the body is conscious of many things happening within itself. For example, when your mind is focused on understanding what I am saying, you may lose touch with your body; you may forget you are seated on a hard surface; you may not feel any discomfort, or whether it is too hot or too cold. It's only when the feelings become very intense and obvious, that you become aware of them as they demand your attention.

Volitions in bodily processes

When we examine more carefully what happens inside the body, we find that, in fact, there can be volitions involved inside the body's processes. For example, when you eat something, the food goes into your mouth. As soon as this happens, the body recognises or identifies what it is and instructs the glands, in the mouth and the digestive system, to produce the required enzymes to digest what you have eaten. This process involves recognition or *saññā*. It also involves volition because once the body recognises what you have put in your mouth, it instructs the glands to start work.

An even more obvious example is when bacteria enter your body. As soon as this happens, the body is able to recognise the bacteria, almost as if it is saying to itself: "Oh, these guys had come in before." Immediately, the immune system is instructed to produce the particular antibody that has worked before in the past. If this strain of bacteria has come in before, and the body has produced an effective antibody against it, then with the same antibody put to work, the bacteria will be killed off and the body returned to good health.

Nowadays scientists even talk about cellular memory. Memory is actually a mental process, it is not something physical. So, if cells can have memory, this implies there can be mental processes going on in the cells in our body. All of these processes are taking place in our bodies, without the conscious knowledge of our minds. The body is coordinating all the processes in our lungs, our heart, our kidneys, our liver, our pancreas, continuously all the time. It seems that our bodies are more intelligent than we think, or even know. So many things are happening all at once that if your mind were to try to control all the processes in your body, you would probably go crazy.

Involuntary movements during meditation

Even more amazing is this phenomenon that sometimes happens to yogis when they sit in meditation. When some yogis become very relaxed and calm during meditation, their bodies may start to sway. Some sway very gently, some may move very vigorously, even violently. People who are not so knowledgeable about meditation practices may attribute such phenomena to being possessed by deities, spirits or even ghosts. They may think it is a case of what the Hokkiens call *jip mor cao huey*—meaning to become deranged due to meditation. There are also cases of people with psychiatric problems who have disturbing experiences when trying to meditate.

Besides such explanations for why the bodies of some yogis feel a compulsive need to move, the theory of qi therapy offers an interesting and more credible explanation.

Theory & practice of qi therapy

Most meditation teachers ask their students, when meditating, to control their bodies, to be as still as possible, not to move, to sit as still as a rock. And yes, indeed the mind can override the intentions or intuitive inclinations of the body. But if you meditate under a teacher who believes in, understands, or practises qigong, then he will say that is alright to allow the body to move, but just be mindful and aware of what is happening.

The interesting thing is that sometimes due to qi therapy, the body can move in ways that are out of the ordinary. For example, your body can bend or tilt in ways that normally would upset your natural balance, and yet you somehow do not fall out of balance. This is where it is the body's intelligence that is guiding its movement. According to qi therapy, the qi is intelligent and knows how to balance itself. You become ill when the qi is not flowing properly or has been blocked in some way. To unblock the qi, you can consult an acupuncturist who will try to release the blockages with his treatment. Or you see a qigong master who can use his qi to heal you.

There are some schools of qigong—for example Yang Sheng Gong—where the master will activate your qi after which you will be able to continue with the treatment yourself. When you go to one of these Yang Sheng Gong sessions, you see everybody doing his/her own thing; some are gently swaying, some may be lying on the floor cycling in the air, others may be doing more bizarre movements. This is because each person has different blockages and so the qi is moving in different ways to get unblocked.

However, the qi can only do this when both body and mind are relaxed. If you are already good at meditating, then when your body and mind become relaxed, you may experience qi therapy. If this happens when you are meditating, you should try to be aware of your body moving when you allow it to move. Then you are practising mindfulness as well as healing your body. You are actually killing two birds with one stone, but without breaking the first precept, or any precepts for that matter.

When body-consciousness arises, most of the time it will arise with saṅkhārā, with volition. There is saṅkhārā in the intentional movements of the body, arising from the intelligence of the body and the qi within the body. The body intelligence leading it to move intuitively is saṅkhārā, with volition and intention involved. The question now is whether these intentions of the body constitute kamma. According to the modified Abhidamma model, the answer is Yes because every citta has intention. There is intention, or saṅkhārā, in all cittas, of the five senses as well as the sixth sense.

However, I do not agree with this model as I think that the experiences coming through the four sense doors are resultants of causes and conditions. No intentions are involved. This is supported by what the Buddha says in several suttas about

intention, citta and kamma which brings me to the concluding discussion on the relationship between citta, mano and manokamma.

Citta, mano & manokamma

From the foregoing discussion we have established that volition or intention is not involved in sense experiences coming through the four sense organs of eyes, ears, nose and tongue. Volition or intention is also not involved in feelings arising within, and spontaneously felt by, the body. Even in mental consciousness, intention is not always involved, for example when memories pop up spontaneously. Intention enters the picture only when we react by following or pursuing the memories or when we react to our sense experiences and follow up with volitions or actions. It is intention that is linked to kamma as the Buddha says in the Nibbedhika Sutta (AN6.63):

“It is intention (*cetanā*), bhikkus, that I call kamma. For having intended, one acts by body (*kāyena*), speech (*vacaya*) or mind (*manasā*).”

Therefore, what we need to guard against or protect are reactions of the mind to what happens in the six senses because these reactions incorporate volitions and intentions that lead to thought, speech and action. In other words, it is specifically citta associated with mind consciousness that must be guarded. When mind consciousness arises, it may arise together with the other three mental aggregates, which are feelings, perception, and in particular volitional formations. That is what we need to look out for. Feelings and perceptions will also affect the way we react, so we must guard against them as well. But, we can not guard against the cittas of the other five senses.

In the context of AN 3.110, citta is used to refer to mind consciousness but we must bear in mind that the Buddha can use the same word with different meanings in different circumstances. And he can also use different words with the same meaning in different circumstances. So, we must be careful not to depend on a blanket definition of citta, thinking that whenever we see the word citta, it must have the same meaning. The contextual situation in which the word citta is used must always be considered.

So why do we need to protect or guard the citta, if we want to die a good death? This is clearly because intention is directly linked to kamma. The Buddha says in Arakkhita Sutta (AN 3.110):

“When the mind (*citta*) is unprotected, bodily action (*kāyakamma*), verbal action (*vacīkamma*) and mental action (*manokamma*) are unprotected.”

The word *manokamma* here refers to kamma as volitions or intentions that are happening in the mind only. When such intentions are expressed physically, they become *kāyakamma*; if expressed verbally as speech, *vacīkamma* or verbal kamma. But if they appear only in the mind or citta, then it is *manokamma*. As thoughts or intentions in the mind, *manokamma* does not involve speech or action. But when

there is verbal action (vacikamma) and bodily action (kayakamma), they all stem from manokamma, the mental intentions of citta.

This is clearly illustrated by the following example. Suppose you are in love with somebody else’s spouse. You know the third precept and you realise you are in danger of breaking a precept. But then your mind, this citta, has this very strong attachment; it is thinking of various ways of seducing that person. Just thinking only, nothing else yet. But this is already manokamma. If there is intent, there is kamma. Then, unable to resist the desire to convey your feelings, you start writing and sending love letters. Now manokamma has become kayākamma. Pretty soon, you cannot stop the urge to convey your feelings, so you call to talk over the phone to say “I love you darling”—then you are also involved in vacīkamma.

As you can see from this example, it all starts from the mind. The bodily kamma does not come from the intentions of the body. It comes from the intention that arose in the mind which is then expressed in a physical way. So, in the context of AN 3.110, citta, in fact, refers to manoviññāṇa or mind consciousness together with all the concomitant three aggregates, particularly saṅkhārā, or intentional formations. Mano in manokamma functions as an adjective implying intention related to mental action, as opposed to bodily or verbal action. Intention and its expression in mental, verbal and bodily actions can be summarised in the diagram below.

