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# **A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma:**

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**The Abhidhammattha Sangaha  
Of Ācariya Anuruddha**

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3. Matter (*rūpa*); and
4. *Nibbāna*.

### §3. Four Classes of Consciousness (*Catubbidha Citta*)

*Tattha cittaṃ tāva catubbidhaṃ hoti: (1) kāmāvacaraṃ; (2) rūpāvacaraṃ; (3) arūpāvacaraṃ; (4) lokuttaraṃ cā ti.*

*Of them, consciousness (citta), firstly, is fourfold: (1) sense-sphere consciousness (kāmāvacara); (2) fine-material-sphere consciousness (rūpāvacara); (3) immaterial-sphere consciousness (arūpāvacara); and (4) supramundane consciousness (lokuttara).*

#### Guide to §3

**Consciousness:** The first chapter of the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* is devoted to an examination of *citta*, “consciousness,” or “mind,” the first of the four ultimate realities. Consciousness is taken up for study first because the focus of the Buddhist analysis of reality is experience, and consciousness is the principal element in experience, that which constitutes the knowing, or awareness, of an object.

The Pali word *citta* is derived from the verbal root *citi-* “to cognize, to know.” The commentators define *citta* in three ways: as agent, as instrument, and as activity. As the agent, *citta* is that which cognizes an object (*ārammaṇaṃ cintetī ti cittaṃ*). As the instrument, *citta* is that by means of which the accompanying mental factors cognize the object (*etena cintetī ti cittaṃ*). As an activity, *citta* is itself nothing other than the process of cognizing the object (*cintanamattaṃ cittaṃ*).

The third definition, in terms of sheer activity, is regarded as the most adequate of the three: that is, *citta* is fundamentally an activity, or process, of cognizing or knowing an object. It is not an agent or instrument possessing actual being in itself apart from the activity of cognizing. The definitions in terms of agent and instrument are proposed to refute the wrong view of those who hold that a permanent self or ego is the agent and instrument of cognition. The Buddhist thinkers point out, by means of these definitions, that it is not a self that performs the act of cognition, but *citta*, or consciousness. This *citta* is nothing other than the act of cognizing, and that act is necessarily impermanent, marked by rise and fall.

To elucidate the nature of any ultimate reality, the Pali commentators propose four defining devices by means of which it can be delimited. These four devices are: (1) its characteristic (*lakṣhaṇa*), that is, the salient quality of the phenomenon; (2) its function (*rasa*), that is, its performance of a concrete task (*kiṇṇa*) or achievement of a goal (*sampatti*); (3) its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*), that is, the way it presents itself within experience; and (4) its proximate cause (*padaṭṭhāna*), that is, the principal condition upon which it depends.

In the case of *citta*, its characteristic is the knowing of an object (*viñāṇa*). Its function is to be a “forerunner” (*pubbangama*) of the mental factors in that it presides over them and is always accompanied by them. Its manifestation — the way it appears to the meditator’s experience — is a continuity of process (*sandhāna*). Its proximate cause is mind-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*), because consciousness cannot arise alone, in the complete absence of mental factors and material phenomena.

While *citta* has a single characteristic that remains the same in all its diverse manifestations, the Abhidhamma distinguishes *citta* into a variety of types. These types, also called *cittas*, are reckoned as 89 or, by a finer method of differentiation, as 121. What we ordinarily think of as consciousness is really a series of *cittas*, momentary acts of consciousness, occurring in such rapid succession that we cannot detect the discrete occasions, which are of diverse types. The Abhidhamma not only distinguishes the types of consciousness, but more importantly, it also exhibits them as ordered into a *cosmos*, a unified and closely interwoven whole.

To do so, it employs several overlapping principles of classification. The first of these, introduced in the present section of the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha*, is the plane (*bhūmi*) of consciousness. There are four planes of consciousness. Three are mundane: the sense-sphere, the fine-material sphere, and the immaterial sphere; the fourth plane is the supramundane. The word *avacara*, “sphere,” which qualifies the first three planes, means “that which moves about in, or frequents, a particular locality.” The locality frequented is the plane of existence (also *bhūmi*) designated by the name of the sphere, that is, the sensory, the fine-material, and the immaterial planes of existence. However, though the three spheres of consciousness have a particularly close connection with the corresponding planes of existence, they are not identical. The spheres of consciousness are categories for classifying types of *cittas*; the planes of existence are realms, or worlds, into which beings are reborn and in which they pass their lives.

A definite relation nevertheless exists between the spheres of consciousness and the planes of existence: a particular sphere of consciousness comprises those types of consciousness that are typical of the corresponding plane of existence and that *frequent* that plane by tending to arise most often there. Consciousness of a particular sphere is not tied to the corresponding plane but may arise in other planes of existence as well; for instance, fine-material and immaterial sphere *cittas* can arise in the sensory plane, and sense-sphere *cittas* can arise in the fine-material and immaterial planes. But still, a connection is found in that a sphere of consciousness is *typical* for the plane that shares its name. Moreover, the kammically active *cittas* of any particular sphere, the *cittas* that generate *kamma*, tend to produce rebirth into the corresponding plane of existence, and, if they succeed in gaining the opportunity to generate rebirth, they will do so only in that plane, not in any other plane. Hence, the tie between the spheres of consciousness and the corresponding planes of existence is extremely close.

**Sense-sphere consciousness (*kāmāvacaracitta*):** The word *kāma* means both subjective sensuality, that is, craving for sense pleasures, and objective sensuality, that is, the five external sense-objects — visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible

objects. The *kāmahūmi* is the sensory plane of existence, which comprises eleven realms — the four woeful states, the human realm, and the six sensory heavens (celestial realms). Sense-sphere consciousness includes all those *cittas* that have their proper domain in the sensory plane of existence, though they may arise in other planes as well.

**Fine-material-sphere consciousness (*rūpāvacaracitta*):** The fine-material sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the fine-material plane of existence (*rūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the states of meditative absorption called the *rūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness that mostly moves about in this realm is understood as belonging to the fine-material sphere. The *rūpajjhānas* are so called because they are usually attained in meditation by concentrating on a material object (*rūpa*), which may be a device such as the earth-*kaṣiṇa*, etc. (see Chapter 9, §6) or the parts of one's own body, etc. Such an object becomes the basis on which the *jhānas* are developed. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *rūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the fine-material sphere.

**Immaterial-sphere consciousness (*arūpāvacaracitta*):** The immaterial sphere is the plane of consciousness corresponding to the immaterial plane of existence (*arūpabhūmi*), or the plane of consciousness pertaining to the immaterial absorptions — the *arūpajjhānas*. Any consciousness that mostly moves about in this realm is understood as belonging to the immaterial sphere. When one meditates to attain the formless meditative states beyond the *rūpajjhānas*, one must discard all objects connected with material form and focus upon some non-material object, such as the infinity of space, etc. The exalted states of consciousness attained on the basis of such objects are called *arūpāvacaracitta*, consciousness of the immaterial sphere.

**Supramundane consciousness (*lokuttaracitta*):** The word *lokuttara*, “supramundane,” is derived from *loka* = “world” and *uttara* = “beyond, transcending.” The concept of “world” is threefold: the world of living beings (*sattaloka*), the physical universe (*okāśaloka*), and the world of formations (*saṃkhāraloka*), that is, the totality of conditional phenomena, physical and mental. The notion of world relevant here is the world of formations, that is, all mundane phenomena included within the five aggregates of clinging. That which transcends the world of conditioned things is the unconditioned element, *Nibbāna*, and the types of consciousness that directly accomplish the realization of *Nibbāna* are called *lokuttaracitta*, supramundane consciousness. The other three types are called, in distinction, *lokiyacitta*, “mundane consciousness.”



We thus see that consciousness can be classified by way of plane into four broad divisions: sense-sphere consciousness, fine-material-sphere consciousness, immaterial-sphere consciousness, and supramundane consciousness. Consciousness can also be

classified on the basis of other principles besides plane. One principle of classification that plays an important role in Abhidhamma philosophy is kind, or nature (*jāti*).

With respect to its nature, consciousness divides into four classes: unwholesome, wholesome, resultant, and functional. Unwholesome consciousness (*akusalacitta*) is consciousness that is accompanied by one or another of the three unwholesome roots — greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Such consciousness is called unwholesome because it is mentally unhealthy, morally blameworthy, and productive of painful results. Wholesome consciousness (*kusalacitta*) is consciousness that is accompanied by wholesome roots — non-greed (*alobha*), or generosity (*dāna*), non-hatred (*adosa*), or loving-kindness (*mettā*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), or wisdom (*paññā*). Such consciousness is mentally healthy, morally blameless, and productive of pleasant results.

Both wholesome and unwholesome consciousnesses constitute *kamma*, volitional action. Those *cittas*, or states of consciousness, that arise through the ripening of *kamma* are called “resultants” (*vipāka*). These constitute a third class of *citta* distinct from the former two, a class that comprises both the results of wholesome *kamma* and the results of unwholesome *kamma*. It should be understood that both *kamma* and its results are purely mental. *Kamma* is volitional activity associated with wholesome or unwholesome *cittas*; its results are other *cittas* that experience the maturation of *kamma*.

The fourth class of consciousness, according to the division by way of nature, is called in Pali *kiriya* or *kriyā*, rendered here as “functional.” This type of consciousness is neither *kamma* nor *kamma* resultant. It involves activity, yet this activity is not kammically determinate and thus is not capable of producing kammic results.

Resultant consciousness and functional consciousness are neither wholesome nor unwholesome. Instead, they are classified as indeterminate (*abyākata*), that is, consciousness that cannot be determined in terms of the dichotomy of wholesome and unwholesome.

### **Sense-Sphere Consciousness (*kāmāvacaracittāni*) — 54**

#### **Unwholesome Consciousness (*akusalacittāni*) — 12**

### **§4. Consciousness Rooted in Greed (*lobhamūlacittāni*) — 8**

*Tattha katamaṃ kāmāvacaraṃ?*

1. *Somanassasahagataṃ diṭṭhigatasampayuttaṃ asaṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
2. *Somanassasahagataṃ diṭṭhigatasampayuttaṃ saṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
3. *Somanassasahagataṃ diṭṭhigatavippayuttaṃ asaṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
4. *Somanassasahagataṃ diṭṭhigatavippayuttaṃ saṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
5. *Upekkhāsahagataṃ diṭṭhigatasampayuttaṃ asaṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
6. *Upekkhāsahagataṃ diṭṭhigatasampayuttaṃ saṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*
7. *Upekkhāsahagataṃ diṭṭhigatavippayuttaṃ asaṃkhārikam ekaṃ.*