



## Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

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### viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ (consciousness without a surface or Pure Consciousness)

Gautama Buddha taught the Dhamma. The pali word Dhamma is translated as the 'doctrine' and includes the characteristics of reality, the causes of suffering and the path of training to experience the highest happiness, Nibbāna. The teachings of the Dhamma utilizes the pali language of ancient India and was used to record the teachings of the Buddha.

The death of the Buddha is estimated to be 543 BCE, 2565 years ago (543 + 2022). Soon after the passing away of the Buddha, 500 arahants met to recite the Dhamma and Vinaya.<sup>1</sup> The meeting gave birth to the Pali Canon. The Theravada tradition states that the Pali Canon was recited orally from the 5th century BCE to the first century BCE, when it was written down in Sri Lanka at the end of the first century BCE, about five hundred years after the death of the Buddha. The surviving record we know today as the Pali Canon began about 800 CE.

Commentaries have been written to clarify the meaning of the pali language in the Pali Canon for people living at a particular time, place and culture. Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are modern translators who have written commentaries to help clarify the meaning of the pali language. Commentaries may be helpful with ones' understanding and practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya, however, one is at liberty to accept them or not. This essay is but another commentary.

The pali word viññāṇa is translated as consciousness or awareness. Viññāṇa is tainted by the "allness of the all." "Allness of the all" is the translation of the pali phrase ātanasabba defined in Saṃyutta Nikāya 35.23 Sabba Sutta: The All, and is defined as sense media: sense faculties and sense objects. Sense faculties are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Sense objects are forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangibles, and mind-objects. Viññāṇa has been imagined by modern commentators as consciousness that is tangled with the sense media, and is metaphorically pictured as landing on the surface of sense media, therefore, viññāṇa has been translated as 'consciousness with a surface'. The western disciples of Ajahn Chah has translated viññāṇa as 'sense consciousness'.

Viññāṇa is the consciousness factor in dependent co-arising, the chain of causation that describes the causes of suffering.

#### Dependent Co-arising (paṭicca samuppāda)

1. ignorance (avijjā),
2. volitional formations (sankhārā),
3. consciousness (viññāna) at the six sense media (see "The Shape of Suffering" by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu p. 8 and MN 18 below),
4. mentality-materiality (nāmarūpa),
5. six sense bases (saḷāyatana),
6. contact (phassa),
7. feeling (vedanā),
8. craving (taṇhā),
9. clinging (upādāna),
10. becoming (bhava),
11. birth (jāti), and
12. suffering

- a. aging and death (jarā maraṇaṃ),
- b. sorrow (soka),
- c. lamentation (parideva),
- d. pain (dukkha),
- e. grief (domanassa), and
- f. despair (upāyāsa).

Viññāṇa is also the consciousness-aggregate in the five aggregates which constitute the person.

#### **Aggregates (khandhā)**

1. material form (rūpa khandha),
2. feeling (vedanā khandha),
3. perception (saññā khandha),
4. mental formations (saṅkhāra khandha), and
5. sense consciousness (viññāṇa khandha).

The consciousness of the arahant in the pali language is anidassana viññāṇa and is not defined in the Pali Canon. The pali word 'anidassana' is translated as something that is not being side by side or close together. Anidassana viññāṇa is consciousness that is not side by side or close together with sense media, that is, consciousness that is not tangled or conditioned by the sense media. Anidassana viññāṇa is metaphorically pictured as not landing on the surface of sense media, therefore, anidassana viññāṇa is translated as 'consciousness without a surface'. Consciousness without a surface, is directly known, free from any influence or dependence on conditions.

#### Majjhima Nikāya 49 Brahma-nimantanika Sutta: The Brahma Invitation

Translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

"Consciousness without surface, endless, radiant all around, has not been experienced through the earthness of earth ... the liquidity of liquid ... the fieriness of fire ... the windiness of wind ... the allness of the all."

#### Dīgha Nikāya 11 Kevatta (Kevaddha) Sutta: To Kevatta

Translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

"Where do water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing?

Where are long & short, coarse & fine, fair & foul, name & form brought to an end?

And the answer to that is:

Consciousness without feature, without end, luminous all around: here water, earth, fire, & wind have no footing. Here long & short coarse & fine, fair & foul, name & form are all brought to an end. With the cessation of [the activity of] consciousness each is here brought to an end."

The question in Kevatta Sutta may be stated as: Where is there independence from the sense media, elements of nature and from mind and matter? The answer is anidassana viññāṇa. The activity of mind is thinking, perceiving, sensing and feeling. Anidassana viññāṇa is primordial consciousness that is noticeable when the mind is at rest and experiences peace, and the consciousness is not tangled or obscured by the sense media or by thinking, perceiving, sensing and feeling. Anidassana viññāṇa is the motionless screen of Pure Consciousness on which the contents of consciousness appears. The contents of consciousness are the sense media and can also be described as thoughts, perceptions, physical sensations and feelings.

Anidassana viññāṇa is outside of time and space; in a dimension where there is no here, there, or in between (Udāna 1.10), no coming, no going, or staying (Udāna 8.1). Lying outside of time and space, it would not come under the consciousness-aggregate, which covers all consciousness near and far; past, present, and future.<sup>2,3</sup>

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya

Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Part III, Chapter 1, Division I, 48 (6) Aggregates

“Whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: this is called the consciousness aggregate.”

And because anidassana viññāṇa is not involved with the six sense media, this consciousness is not a factor in dependent co-arising.<sup>2,3</sup>

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya

Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

18 Madhupiṇḍika Sutta: The Honeyball; paragraph 16

“Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises.”

The standard description of Nibbāna after death is, “All that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here” (Majjhima Nikāya 140 An Analysis of the Properties and Itivuttaka 44 The Nibbāna-element). Anidassana viññāṇa does not ‘relish’ the sense media and therefore shares this property with Nibbāna.

The properties of anidassana viññāṇa and of Nibbāna are the same, in that both are: not tangled by the sense media, directly known, unconditioned, outside of time and space.

Ancient commentaries “have objected to the equivalence of anidassana viññāṇa with Nibbāna, on the grounds that Nibbāna is nowhere else in the Canon described as a form of consciousness. Thus they have proposed that consciousness without surface [anidassana viññāṇa] be regarded as an arahant’s consciousness of Nibbāna in meditative experience, and not Nibbāna itself [thereby, making Nibbāna an object of consciousness]. This argument, however, contains a flaw: If Nibbāna is an object of mental consciousness (as a dhamma), it would come under the all [“allness of the all”], as an object of the intellect [mind]. ... [There are passages in the Pali Canon that] describe Nibbāna as the ending of all dhammas. For instance, Sutta Nipata V.6 quotes the Buddha as calling the attainment of the goal the transcending of all dhammas. Sutta Nipata IV.6 and Sutta Nipata IV.10 state that the arahant has transcended dispassion, said to be the highest dhamma. Thus, for the arahant, Nibbāna is not an object of consciousness. Instead it [Nibbāna] is directly known without mediation. Because consciousness without feature [anidassana viññāṇa] is directly known without mediation, there seems good reason to equate the two [anidassana viññāṇa with Nibbāna.]”<sup>3</sup>

Anidassana viññāṇa is boundless Pure Consciousness that is not tangled with the activities of mind. Viññāṇa is consciousness tangled with the activities of mind: thinking, perceiving, sensing and feeling and also tangled with the sense media. Viññāṇa is the ordinary consciousness of most people and is in the foreground of experience. Anidassana viññāṇa is ever present here and now but is ordinarily in the background of experience; when the mind is brought to silence and stillness then anidassana viññāṇa will be made known. Pay attention to anidassana viññāṇa by withdrawing attention from the busy mind.

Enlightenment is a permanent shift of experience in which anidassana viññāṇa is in the foreground, mind and ordinary tangled consciousness is no longer the center of ones’ attention. The training that conditions this shift is to study and practice the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path as well as the other teachings of the Buddha.

Bringing the mind to silence and stillness is undertaken by using a meditation anchor such as sensing the breath and perceiving the sound of silence. While the mind is occupied with the meditation anchor, pay attention to the awareness that surrounds conceptual and sensual experience, this awareness is anidassana viññāṇa. The frequent redirection of attention to pure awareness forms the habit of being interested in pure awareness more so than with the activities of mind.

Anidassana viññāṇa is unbounded consciousness, eternal, infinite, unconditioned and the one reality, Nibbāna. Because this consciousness has no boundaries or limitations there must only be one common consciousness that all beings share. This ground of consciousness is the foundation of metta bhavana (loving-kindness meditation), the recognition that all beings are in essence identical and share the same primordial consciousness.

Ajahn Chah gave a dhamma talk called “Tuccho Pothila”. In this talk I believe Ajahn Chah was referring to anidassana viññāṇa when he taught “‘the one who knows’ in accordance with the truth – known as Buddho.”

“By having continuous sati [mindfulness] and sampajañña [clear comprehension] we will be able to know the mind. This one who knows is a step beyond the mind, it is that which knows the state of the mind. ... That which knows the mind as simply mind is the one who knows. It is above the mind. The one who knows is above the mind, and that is how it is able to look after the mind, to teach the mind to know what is right and what is wrong.” ... “cultivate the Buddho, the clear and radiant awareness; that which exists above and beyond the ordinary mind, and knows all that goes on within it.”

May this reflection help with your understanding and practice of the Dhamma so that Nibbāna will be experienced here and now.

#### Footnotes:

1. The Vinaya is the discipline for training the mind. Arahants are persons who have awakened to the nature of reality, the Dhamma, and purified the mind of defilements.
2. This observation was made by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu in note 1 of his translation of Dīgha Nikāya 11 Kevatta (Kevaddha) Sutta: To Kevatta.
3. This observation was made by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu in note 9 of his translation of Majjhima Nikāya 49 Brahma-nimantanika Sutta: The Brahma Invitation.

## **Announcements**

- Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center has a presence on Meet-Up social media and we ask that you please sign-up for every event that you are planning to attend at [www.MeetUp.com](http://www.MeetUp.com). Some people are intimidated by a small number of attendees and a larger number will be encouraging.
- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at [www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps).

## **Activities of the Meditation Center**

- Sitting meditation is held everyday at 6:30AM and 5:30PM. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email [mittameditation@gmail.com](mailto:mittameditation@gmail.com) on the days and time you would like to participate.
- The days of the full moon, new moon and the two half moons are called in Pāli: The Uposatha, and is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the eight precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30PM meditation. You may elect to take the five precepts instead of the eight and may determine to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc).
- Meditation Workshop is held on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00AM and 1:00PM. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email [mittameditation@gmail.com](mailto:mittameditation@gmail.com) if you are planning to participate.
- Question and Answer Tea is held on the third Sunday of each month at 3:00PM. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email [mittameditation@gmail.com](mailto:mittameditation@gmail.com) if you are planning to participate.

- Every Monday at 4:00PM the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave. just before 9:00AM and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.
- For more additional information please send an email to [mittameditation@gmail.com](mailto:mittameditation@gmail.com). We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

## **Request for Support**

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its' mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website: [www.mittameditation.com](http://www.mittameditation.com).
- Volunteering your skills, energy and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyana-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the support page of the website: [www.mittameditation.com](http://www.mittameditation.com) and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.