Elements of Abhidhamma

Henk Barendregt

Han Fortmann Center for mindfulness
Radboud Universiteit

Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Acknowledgements

Slides based on

- Abhidhamma courses by Sayadaw U Nandamālabhivaṃsa
- *Abhidhammatha Sangaha* by Ācariya Annuruddha, edited by Bikkhu Bodhi
- Vipassana meditation guided by the most venerable Phra Mettavihari (1944-2007)

I thank Daw Agganyani and Ms. Rutty Besoudo for usefull discussions

If an interpretation is my own, than it will be indicated as follows

[HB] ......

Consciousness

Consciousness makes human beings feel happy or suffer

Improper understanding of consciousness causes madness and war

Hence it is important to get more insight in this phenomenon

Consciousness always has an *object* (content):

looking at the square ■ provides such an object

Next to an object consciousness also always has a *type*:

we can look at the square e.g. with happiness, restlessness or hatred

Usually people strive to optimize the contents of consciousness

The assumption is that beautiful objects cause happiness; this is not necessarily so

In meditation one strives to optimize the types of consciousness

It is a mental training working with consciousness types

Meditation

Meditation has as goal to find *peace*: with oneself, others and the world

Buddha discovered that the first is less obvious than one would think: we are not the boss and fully realizing this is very confronting

Usually we try to hide the fact that shows that we are not the boss by emotions, thoughts, and the corresponding behaviour

This hiding is symptomatic and has negative side-effects: we become 'addicted' to our thoughts, emotions and behaviour We must continue it, at the expense of hurting ourselves and others

Meditation is concerned with the consciousness types that we use Meditation can have a purifying effect that sets us free

Kinds of meditation

There are two main kinds of meditation operating on consciousness:

- *concentration meditation* strives to increase beautiful types

- *insight meditation* strives to decrease negative types

Insight meditation needs to some extent also concentration meditation

High points of the two kinds of meditation:

concentration M   *absorptions*   :   relatively stable forms of bliss

insight M   *enlightenment*   :   permanent elimination of negative types

if elimination is completed one is Arahant

Concentration M: systematic observation of the same object

Needs discipline and effort

Insight M: observing change with proper distance (not to get sucked away)

Needs discipline, effort, concentration, and *mindfulness*

Physics: discreteness of mater

Discrete is the opposite of continuous

Continuous objects are imaginary parts of space completely filled with matter

Main thesis in physics (according to Nobel laureate Feynman):

matter is discrete; it is composed of atoms (in space)

In fact this discrete structure occurs at three levels:

elementary particles, atoms, molecules

elementary particles combine to atoms

atoms combine to molecules

all materials are a mixture of molecules

Abhidhamma: discreteness of consciousness

Consciousness is discrete; it is composed of *cetas* (in time):

shortliving conscious flashes having their own object and type

● ●
↑
ceta

$\longrightarrow$ time
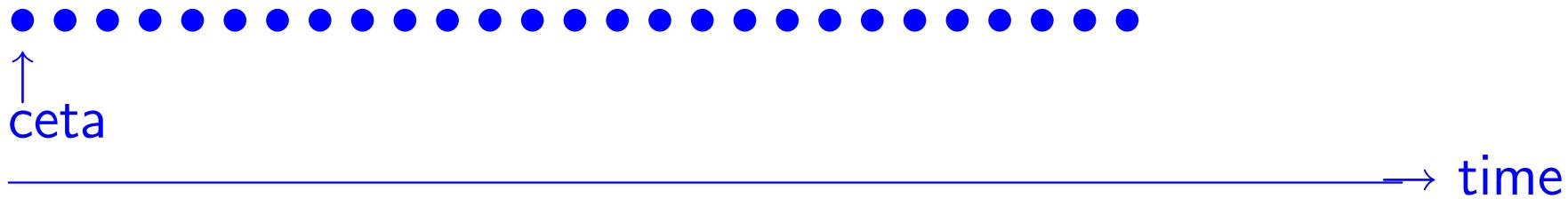
Cf an oldfashioned movie on celluloid, consisting of many picture frames

making a continuous impression

There are unwholesome, wholesome and indifferent ceta types

according to the amount of suffering that is caused by them

The Abhidhamma lists 89 types of cetas (relevant to enlightenment):

12 unwholesome, 21 wholesome and 56 indifferent

Mental factors: cetasikas

Cetasikas run in parallel with the ceta and determine its type

• •
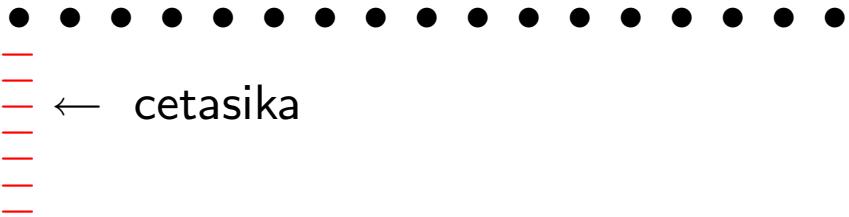
$\leftarrow$ cetasika

It is said that a cetasika has the same object as its ceta;

[HB] this is not necessary if one considers that a cetasika is part of its parallel ceta

[HB] and consider the cetasika to 'observe' via its ceta

Voorbeelden van cetasika's:

  mindfulness, compassie;
  concentratie;
  haat, hebzucht, rusteloosheid
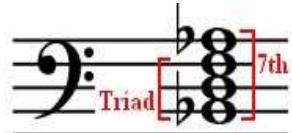
parallelle input   sequence of chords

Kinds of cetasikas

A cetasika can have degrees of strength

There are unwholesome, variable and beautiful cetasikas

Unwholesome cetasikas make their ceta unwholesome

Wholesome cetas do not have unwholesome cetasikas

There are 52 cetasikas: 13 variable, 14 unwholesome and 25 beautiful

A ceta is unwholesome if and only if it has a unwholesome associated cetasika

Some cetasikas

	unwholesome	variable	beautiful	#
universals	restlessness ignorance . . . (total 4)	contact volition . . . (total 7)	mindfulness equanimity . . . (total 19)	30
occasionals	greed hatred . . . (total 10)	energy joy . . . (total 6)	compassion wisdom . . . (total 6)	22
#	14	13	25	52

List of unwholesome and variable cetasikas and abbreviations

Universal unwholesome			Universal variable		
delusion	moha	m	contact	phassa	ph
shamelessness	ahirika	ah	feeling	vedanā	v
fearlessness of wrong	anotappa	ao	perception	saññā	sa
restlessness	uddhacca	u	volition	cetanā	c
			one-pointedness	ekagattā	e
			life faculty	jīvittindriya	ji
			attention	manasikāra	ms
Occasional unwholesome			Occasional variable		
greed	lobha	l	initial application	vitakka	vt
wrong view	diṭṭhi	di	sustained application	vicāra	vc
conceit	māna	ma	decision	adhimokkha	am
hatred	dosa	d	effort	vīriya	vi
jealousy	issā	is	joy	pīthi	pi
stinginess	macchariya	mc	willingness	chanda	ch
remorse	kukucca	ku			
sloth	thīna	th			
torpor	mida	mi			
doubt	vicikicchā	vk			

List of beautiful cetasikas and abbreviations

Universal beautiful			Occasional beautiful		
faith	saddhā	sd	right speach	sammāvācā	sm
mindfulness	sati	s	right action	sammākammanto	sk
shame	hiri	hi	right livelyhood	sammā-ājīvo	sj
fear of wrong	otappa	ot	compassion	karunā	k
non-greed	alobha	al	shared joy	muditā	mu
non-hatred	adosa	ad	wisdom	paññā	p
equanimity	tattramajjhattatā	ta			
tranquility {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -passaddhi	kp / cp			
lightness {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -lahutā	kp / cp			
malleability {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -mudatā	km / cm			
adaptability {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -kammaññatā	kk / ck			
proficiency {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -pāguññatā	kp / cp			
rectitude {body / ceta}	{kāya / ceta} -ujjakatā	ku / cu			

Drilling cetasikas

ad	adosa	anti-hatred		ku	kukucca	remorse
ah	ahirika	shamelessness		l	lobha	lust
al	alobha	anti-greed		m	moha	ignorance
am	adhimokkha	decision		ma	māna	conceit
ao	anotappa	fearlessness		mc	macchariya	avarice
c	cetanā	volition		mi	middha	torpor
ch	chanda	willingness		ms	manasikara	attention
cj	cetaujjukatā	rectitude of mind		mu	mudita	shared joy
ck	cetakammaññatā	adaptability of mind		o	otappa	fear of wrong
cl	cetalahutā	lightness of mind		p	pañña	wisdom
cm	cetamudutā	pliency of mind		ph	phassa	contact
cn	cetapagguññattā	adaptability of mind		pi	pītti	joy
cp	cetapassaddhi	tranquility of mind		s	sati	mindfulness
d	dosa	hatred		sa	sañña	perception
di	diṭṭhi	wrong view		sd	saddhā	confidence
e	ekaggattā	one-pointedness		sj	sammaājīva	right livelihood
hi	hiri	shame		sk	sammakammantā	right action
is	issā	jealousy		sv	sammavācā	right speech
ji	jīvitindriya	life-faculty		ta	tattramajjhahattatā	equanimity
k	karuna	compassion		th	thīna	sloth
kj	kāyaujjukatā	rectitude of state		u	udacca	restlessness
kk	kāyakammaññattā	adaptability of state		v	vedana	feeling
kl	kāyalahutā	lightness of state		vc	vicāra	sustained application
km	kāyamudutā	pliency of state		vi	vīriya	energy
kn	kāyapāgguññatā	proficiency of state		vk	vicikicchā	doubt
kp	kāyapassaddhi	tranquility of state		vt	vitakka	initial application

■ : variable   ■ : unwholesome   ■ : beautiful

Classifying cetas

Cetas are divided according to their type in three planes:

sensual, *sublime*, and *supramundane*

Sensual cetas	mostly receiving sensory input and directed to sensual pleasure
Sublime cetas	absorptions (concentration meditation)
Supramundane cetas	enlightenment (insight meditation)

plane	#
sensual	54
sublime	27
supramundane	8

Again we see that there are 89 types of cetas

The ceta(type)s can be unwholesome, wholesome and indifferent

plane/kind	unwholesome	wholesome	indifferent	#
sensual	12	8	34	54
sublime	0	9	18	27
supramundane	0	4	4	8
#	12	21	56	89

The (un)wholesome cetas are having a kamma effect in the future

An unwholesome ceta will have ([HB] most probably) a negative effect

A wholesome ceta will have ([HB] most probably) a positive effect

Under 'indifferent' we find cetas in which the effect occurs

plus 2 technical cetas for all humans and 18 more for Arhants

Full table of cetas

With effect (kamma)		Indifferent	
Unwholesome	Wholesome	Resultant	Functional
A^l_{sda}, A^l_{sd}, A^l_{sa}, A^l_s, A^l_{da}, A^l_d, A^l_a, A^l A^d_a, A^d A^m_{vk}, A^m_u	K_{sna}, K_{sn}, K_{sa}, K_s, K_{na}, K_n, K_a, K	V^h_{sna}, V^h_{sn}, V^h_{sa}, V^h_s, V^h_{na}, V^h_n, V^h_a, V^h V^k_C, V^k_S, V^k_G, V^k_J, V^k_K, V^k_R, V^k_I, V^k_{Is} V^a_C, V^a_S, V^a_G, V^a_J, V^a_K, V^a_R, V^a_I	K^{ar}_{sna}, K^{ar}_{sn}, K^{ar}_{sa}, K^{ar}_s, K^{ar}_{na}, K^{ar}_n, K^{ar}_a, K^{ar} H^{ar} D^5, D^n
	R^k_1, R^k_2, R^k_3, R^k_4, R^k_5 A^k_1, A^k_2, A^k_3, A^k_4	R^v_1, R^v_2, R^v_3, R^v_4, R^v_5 A^v_1, A^v_2, A^v_3, A^v_4	R^{ar}_1, R^{ar}_2, R^{ar}_3, R^{ar}_4, R^{ar}_5 A^{ar}_1, A^{ar}_2, A^{ar}_3, A^{ar}_4
	M^{so} M^{sa} M^{an} M^{ar}	P^{so} P^{sa} P^{an} P^{ar}	

The 89 types of cetas

Codes s: mental joy (*somanassa*), d: wrong view (*ditthi*),

a: unprompted (*asankhara*), [HB] spontaneous;

n: with knowledge (*ñāna*); so: sotapanna, sa: sakadagami, an: anagami, ar: arhant

C: eye (*cakkhu*), S: ear (*sota*), G: nose (*ghāna*), J:tongue (*jivhā*), K: body (*kāya*).

■: Based on lust ■: Based on hatred ■: Based on ignorance

■: Rootless ■: Beautiful ■: for Arhants only

Cognitive/emotional units

There is a third level in which there is a discrete process:

next to cetasikas, cetas also *vithis*

These are sequences of cetas forming cognitive/emotional units

vithi

← cetasika ↑
          ceta

⟶ time
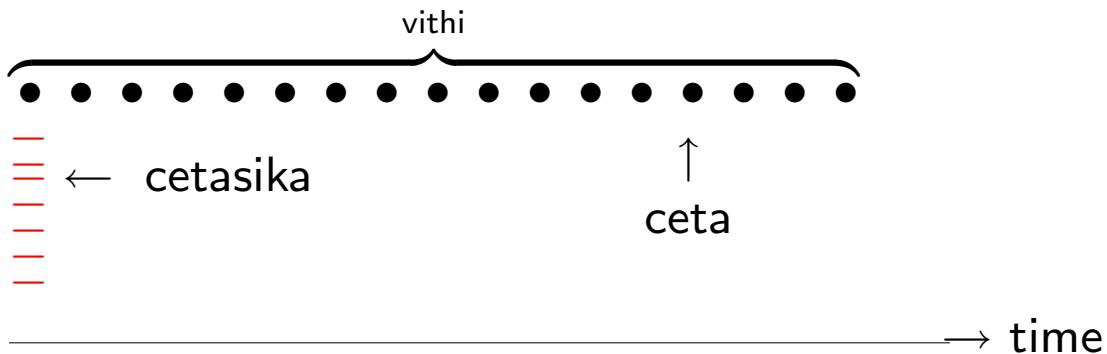
These are sequences of cetas forming cognitive/emotional units

For sensory input there are 17 cetas (s-vithi),

for mind processes 12 cetas (m-vithi)

Baseline consciousness: bhavanga

[HB] Vithis occur when there is input, thoughts, feelings or output

Besides these vithis there is *baseline consciousness* or *bhavangha*

[HB] Baseline consciousness occurs most of the time

For each person it consists of a fixed cetatype with a fixed object

This bhavangha ceta with object occurs

- at the moment of birth (very first ceta)

- at the moment of death (very last ceta)

- at any moment when there is no vithi

it is an important factor influencing the course of one's life

There are only 8 of the 89 ceta's that can peform the function of bhavangha:

V^h_{sna}, V^h_{sn}, V^h_{sa}, V^h_{s}, V^h_{na}, V^h_{n}, V^h_{a}, V^h

Cognitive/emotional process

Cognitive-emotional unit: vīthi

sensory input vīthi

● : karma
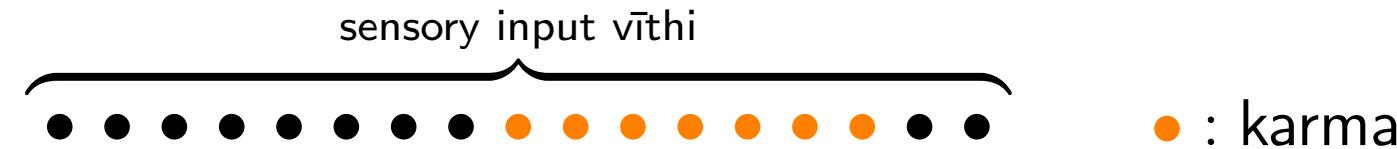
Cognition and emotion: sequence of vīthis

cognitive process

i−vīthi   m-vīthi   m-vīthi   m-vīthi
             memory   name   meaning
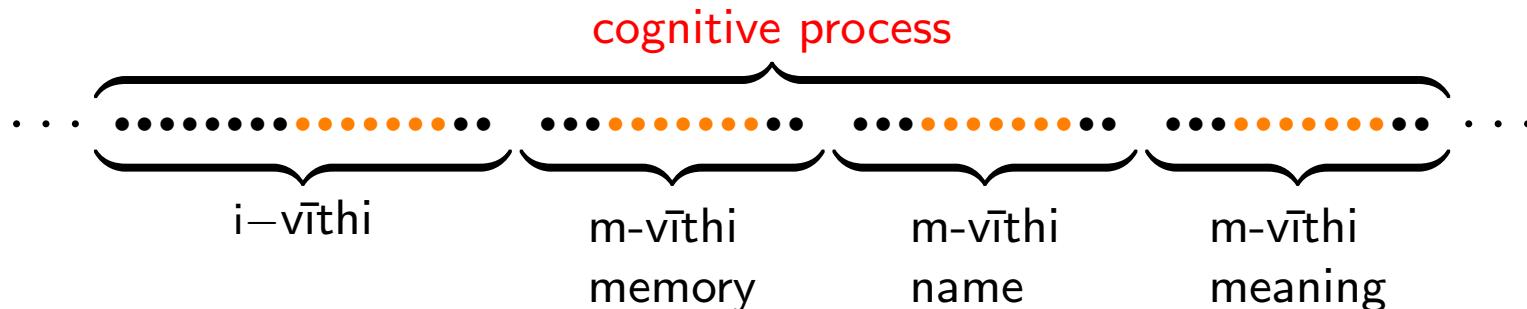
Baseline (sequence of birth cetas)

baseline   cognitive proces   baseline

i-vīthi   m-vīthi   m-vīthi   m-vīthi

Life-path
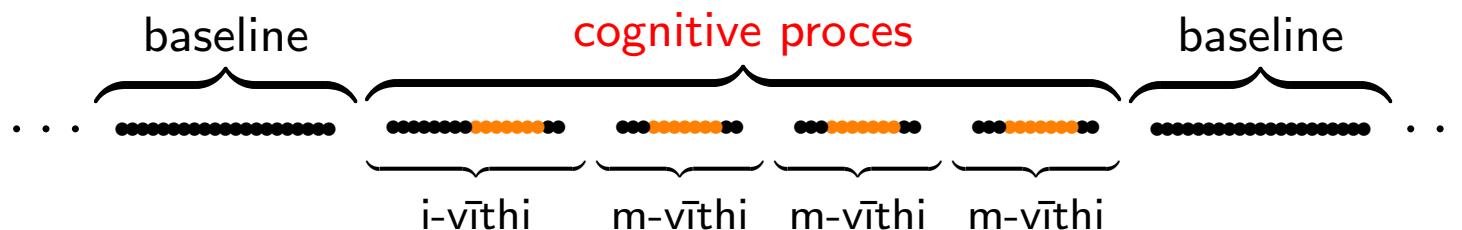
birth   baseline   cognitive process   baseline   cognitive process   baseline   death

Death & Rebirth

According to the Abhidhamma (commentaries?) the last vīthi before death has in the present life 16 instead of 17 cetas, while the 17-th ceta of the vīthi is belived to be the first one of next life. The kammic influence of the last vithi determines the type of the first ceta of the next life and thereby its baseline consciousness.
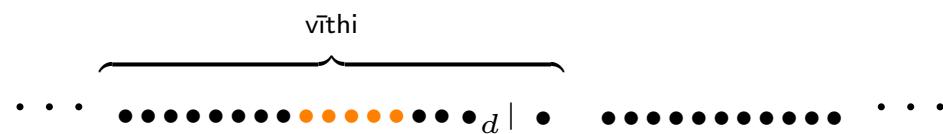
Here $\bullet_d$ is the death ceta which is equal both in type and content to the birth ceta and all baseline cetas.

For papers on the Abhidhamma model and vipassana experience see

`<www.fnds.cs.ru.nl/fndswiki/Theoretical_papers>`.