

Viññāṇa-khandha

The aggregate of consciousness

The five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*)

or groups or heaps which combined together constitute an individual existence, a person/being, of which we have the notion of “I”, he or she.

1. The aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhandha*)
 2. The aggregate of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*)
 3. The aggregate of perception (*saññākkhandha*)
 4. The aggregate of mental / volitional formations (*saṅkhārakkhandha*)
 5. The aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*)
- material aggregate
- mental aggregates
(inseparably linked)

SN 22.37 Ānanda sutta

‘What are the things for which arising is evident, vanishing is evident, and change while persisting is evident?’

‘The arising of form (*rūpa*) ... feeling (*vedanā*) ... perception (*saññā*) ... formations (*saṅkhāra*) is evident, its vanishing is evident, and change while persisting is evident.

**The arising of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is evident,
its vanishing is evident,
and change while persisting is evident.**

uppāda

vayo

aññathatta

These are the things for which arising is evident, vanishing is evident, and change while persisting is evident.’

Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) ...

- definitions and some important points

is that, which is conscious or aware of an object, which cognizes (*vijānāti*) an object

is the bare cognition of the object

arises associated together with the other 3 mental aggregates (= *cetasikas*)

occurs as a flux: stream of consciousness (*viññāṇa-sota*)

does not constitute an abiding mind substance

is not a transmigrating entity or soul

arises and falls away immediately

has the universal characteristics *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* - like the other *khandhas*

is conditioned (by object, base, attention, previous consciousness in the process, habits...) -> **Paṭṭhāna!**

throughout life, there is always any type of consciousness, but only one at a time.

Consciousness in Suttanta and Abhidhamma:

6 consciousness (*viññāṇa*) according to Suttanta

1. Eye-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*)
or seeing consciousness
2. Ear-consciousness (*sota-viññāṇa*)
or hearing consciousness
3. Nose-consciousness (*ghāna-viññāṇa*)
or smelling consciousness
4. Tongue-consciousness (*jivhā-viññāṇa*)
or tasting consciousness
5. Body-consciousness (*kāya-viññāṇa*)
or tangible / touching consciousness
6. Mind-consciousness (*mano-viññāṇa*)

89 (or 121) consciousness (*citta*) according to Abhidhamma

2 kinds

2 kinds

2 kinds

2 kinds


2 kinds

the rest: 79 (or 111) types of “mind-consciousness”
with the heart base as physical base (*vatthu*)
and the mind itself as mind base (*āyatana*)

Visuddhimagga: *citta* = *mano* = *viññāṇa* (“are same in meaning”)

(but in some contexts used differently; e.g. in Paṭiccasamuppāda *viññāṇa* refers only to *vipāka-cittas*)

SN 22.95 Pheṇapiṇḍūpama sutta - A Lump of Foam

5 khandhas	comparision
matter (<i>rūpakkhandha</i>)	foam
feeling (<i>vedanākkhandha</i>)	water bubble
perception (<i>saññākkhandha</i>)	mirage
mental / volitional formations (<i>saṅkhārakkhandha</i>)	trunk of a banana tree
consciousness (<i>viññāṇakkhandha</i>)	magical illusion / trick / ghost 

(...) Suppose, *bhikkhus*, that a magician or a magician's apprentice would display a magical illusion at a crossroads. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a magical illusion?

So too, *bhikkhus*, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a *bhikkhu* inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be **void, hollow, insubstantial**. For what substance could there be in consciousness?

(...)

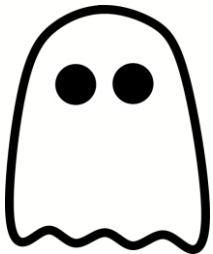
=> no attraction, no identification, but revulsion, dispassion → liberation

Consciousness is ...

void, hollow, empty of any substance
insubstantial, unreal

just deceiving and fooling us,
pretending and simulating existence,
substance, permanence

but in reality it is impermanent, empty,
and conditioned and dependent of other
impermanent phenomena



Don't be the fool, the deceived one, who is clinging and identifies with consciousness,
but understand

Anattā:

There is no self, ego-entity, personality (*attā*)

- neither in consciousness nor any of the 5 *khandhas*
- nor collectively in their combination
- nor apart from them

SN 22.59 Anattalakkhaṇa sutta (extract: part of consciousness)

Consciousness is nonself. For if, bhikkhus, consciousness were self, this consciousness would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of consciousness: ‘Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.’ But because consciousness is nonself, consciousness leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of consciousness: ‘Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.’

Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?” — “Impermanent, venerable sir.” *anicca*

“Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?” — “Suffering, venerable sir.” *dukkha*

“Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’?” — “No, venerable sir.” *anattā*

Any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all consciousness should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: **‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’**

=> eradication of *taṇhā, māna, diṭṭhi* (= *papañca*)

“Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences revulsion (*nibbindati*) ← *nibbidā-ñāṇa* = 8th insight knowledge towards consciousness. Experiencing revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.

Through dispassion (*virāga*) his mind is liberated (*vimutti*). *magga- + phala-ñāṇa* (14th + 15th insight knowledge)

When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘It’s liberated.’ He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.’”

paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa (= knowledge of review, 16th insight knowledge)

SN 22.1 Nakulapita sutta

The Buddha to the sick householder Napulapita:

“You should train yourself thus: **‘Even though I am afflicted in body, my mind will be unafflicted.’**
Thus should you train yourself.”

And Ven. Sāriputta explains to Napulapita the meaning in detail according to each of the 5 aggregates:

“How one is afflicted in body and afflicted in mind,
and how one is afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind?”

(explanation with all *khandhas*, here for *viññāṇa-khandha*.)

“He regards **consciousness** as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self,
or self as in consciousness.” (...)



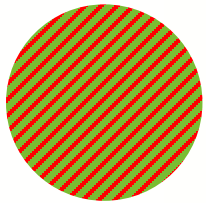
4 wrong views for each of the 5 aggregates -> 20 wrong views

1. consciousness as self
2. self as possessing consciousness
3. consciousness as in self
4. self as in consciousness.

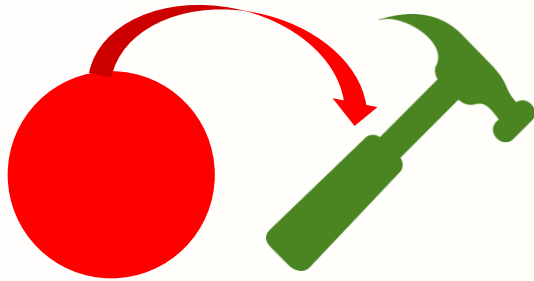
Consciousness (*viññāṇa*)

self (*attā*)

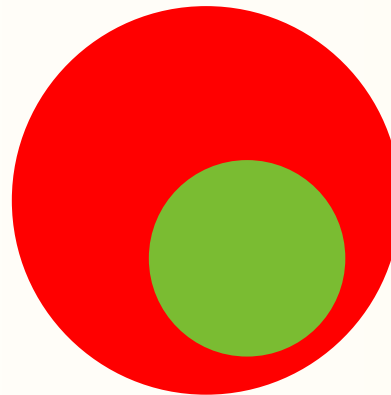
1. *viññāṇa* = *attā*



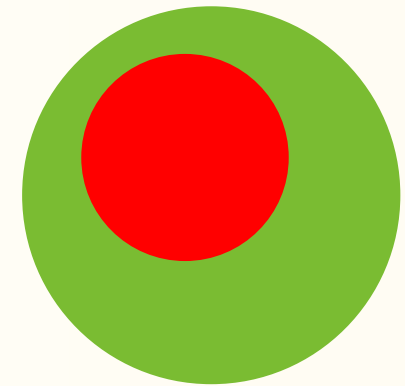
2. *attā* owns *viññāṇa*
viññāṇa is an instrument
for *attā*



3. *attā* > *viññāṇa*,
viññāṇa is a subset of *attā*



4. *attā* < *viññāṇa*,
attā is a subset of *viññāṇa*



SN 22.1 Nakulapita sutta

(...)

“He lives obsessed by the notions: ‘I am consciousness, consciousness is mine.’

As he lives obsessed by these notions, that consciousness of his changes and alters.

With the change and alteration of consciousness, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

It is in such a way, householder, that one is **afflicted in body and afflicted in mind.**”

“And how, householder, is one afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind?

He does not regard **consciousness** as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness.

He does not live obsessed by the notions: ‘I am consciousness, consciousness is mine.’

As he lives unobsessed by these notions, that consciousness of his changes and alters.

With the change and alteration of consciousness, there do not arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.

It is in such a way, householder, that one is **afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind.**”

Visuddhimagga chapt. 14 (Khandhaniddesa – Explanation of the aggregates)

Ven. Buddhaghosa (Pāli), English translation by Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivamsa

Whatever has the characteristic of awareness [of an object], taken together, is called “*viññāṇakkhandha*”.

Herein [in the explanation of the *nāma-khandhas*], I shall place *viññāṇakkhandha* at first (...), because if *viññāṇakkhandha* is known, the other *khandhas* are easier to understand.

(...) How *viññāṇa* has the characteristic of awareness?

“It is aware of this, it is aware of that, friend, therefore it is called awareness (*viññāṇa*).” - MN 43

Consciousness explained and classified according to Dhammasaṅgaṇī
- differently than in Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha!

Viññāṇa is onefold according the characteristic if awareness; but it is threefold regarding its types: wholesome (*kusala*), unwholesome (*akusala*) and others (*abyākata*, “indeterminate”).

Generally:

- Exact definitions are given for all *cittas* according to characteristic, function, manifestation and proximate cause (-> *vithi*)
- Often examples are mentioned and the respective objects and physical bases

Visuddhimagga chapt. 14 (Khandhaniddesa – Explanation of the aggregates)

Ven. Buddhaghosa (Pāḷi), English translation by Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivamsa

Wholesome consciousness is fourfold according to the division of plane:

Kāmāvacara, rūpāvacara, arūpāvacara and *lokuttara*.

8 sense-sphere wholesome consciousness:

Feeling (*vedanā*): pleasant or neutral

Knowledge (*ñāṇa*): with or without

Promptitude (*saṅkhāra*): prompted or unprompted



5 finematerial-sphere wholesome consciousness:

Association with the *jhāna* factors:

Initial application (*vitakka*)

Sustained application (*vicāra*)

Rapture (*pīti*)

Happiness (*sukha*)

Concentration (*samādhi*)

= one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*)



4 immaterial-sphere wholesome consciousness:

Association with the *arūpa-jhānas*:

Based on infinite space

Based on first *arūpa-jhāna* (infinite consciousness)

Based on nothingness

Based on third *arūpa-jhāna* consciousness (neither perception- nor non-perception)



4 supramundane wholesome consciousness:

Association with the 4 paths (*magga*):

Path of stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga*)

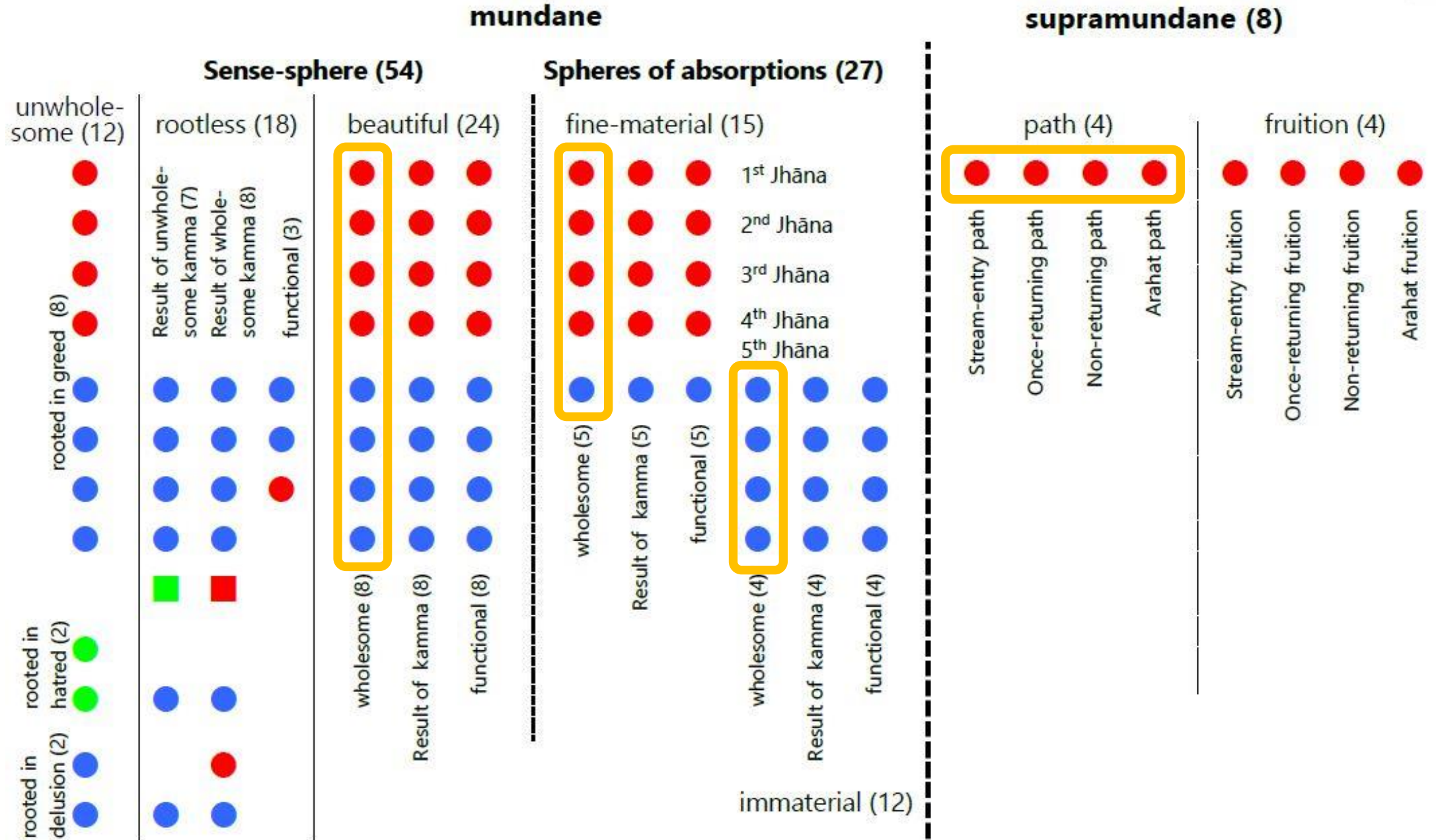
Path of one-returner (*sakadāgāmi-magga*)

Path of non-returner (*anāgāmi-magga*)

Path of Arahant (*arahatta-magga*)



Wholesome (*kusala*) consciousness in 4 planes:



Visuddhimagga chapt. 14 (Khandhaniddesa – Explanation of the aggregates)

Ven. Buddhaghosa (Pāḷi), English translation by Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivamsa

Unwholesome consciousness is of one kind only according to plane: *Kāmāvacara*.

According to root it is threefold:

8 rooted in greed (*lobhamūla*):

Feeling (*vedanā*): pleasant or neutral

Association: with or without wrong view (*diṭṭhi*)

Promptitude (*saṅkhāra*): prompted or unprompted



2 rooted in hatred (*dosamūla*):

Feeling only unpleasant

Associated always with aversion (*paṭigha*)

Promptitude (*saṅkhāra*): prompted or unprompted



2 rooted in delusion (*mohamūla*):

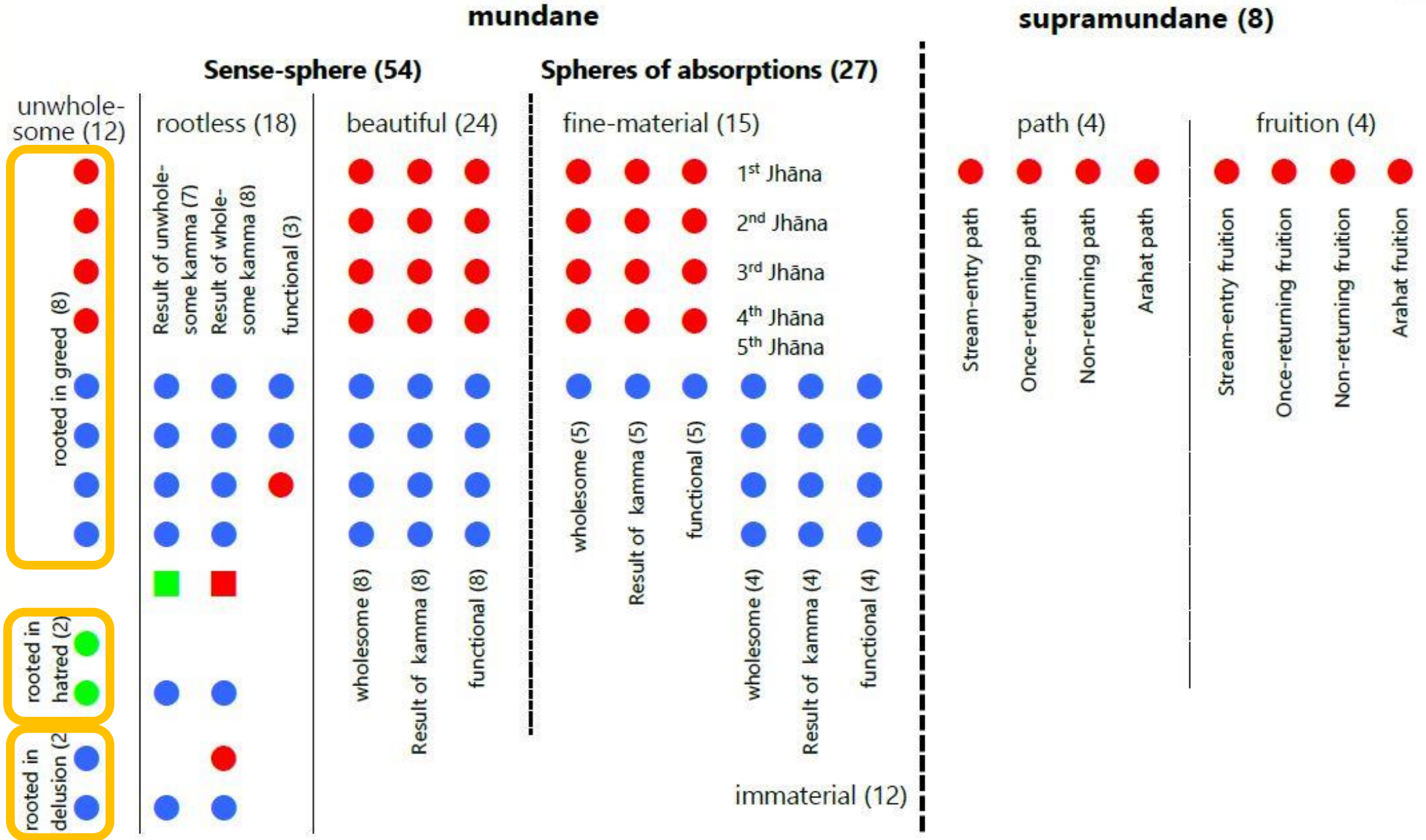
Feeling only neutral

Association with doubt (*vicikicchā*)

Association with restlessness (*uddhacca*)



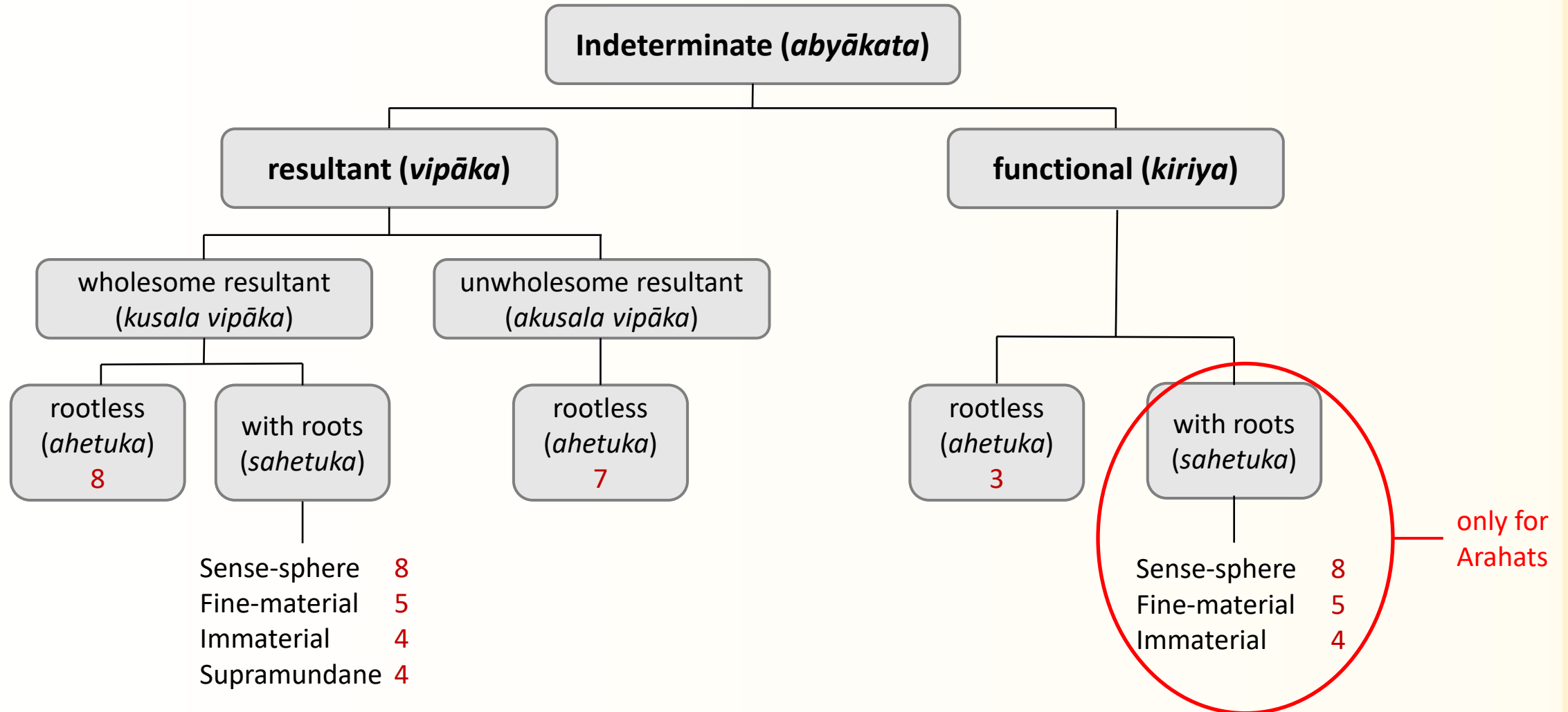
Unwholesome (*akusala*) consciousness only in 1 plane:



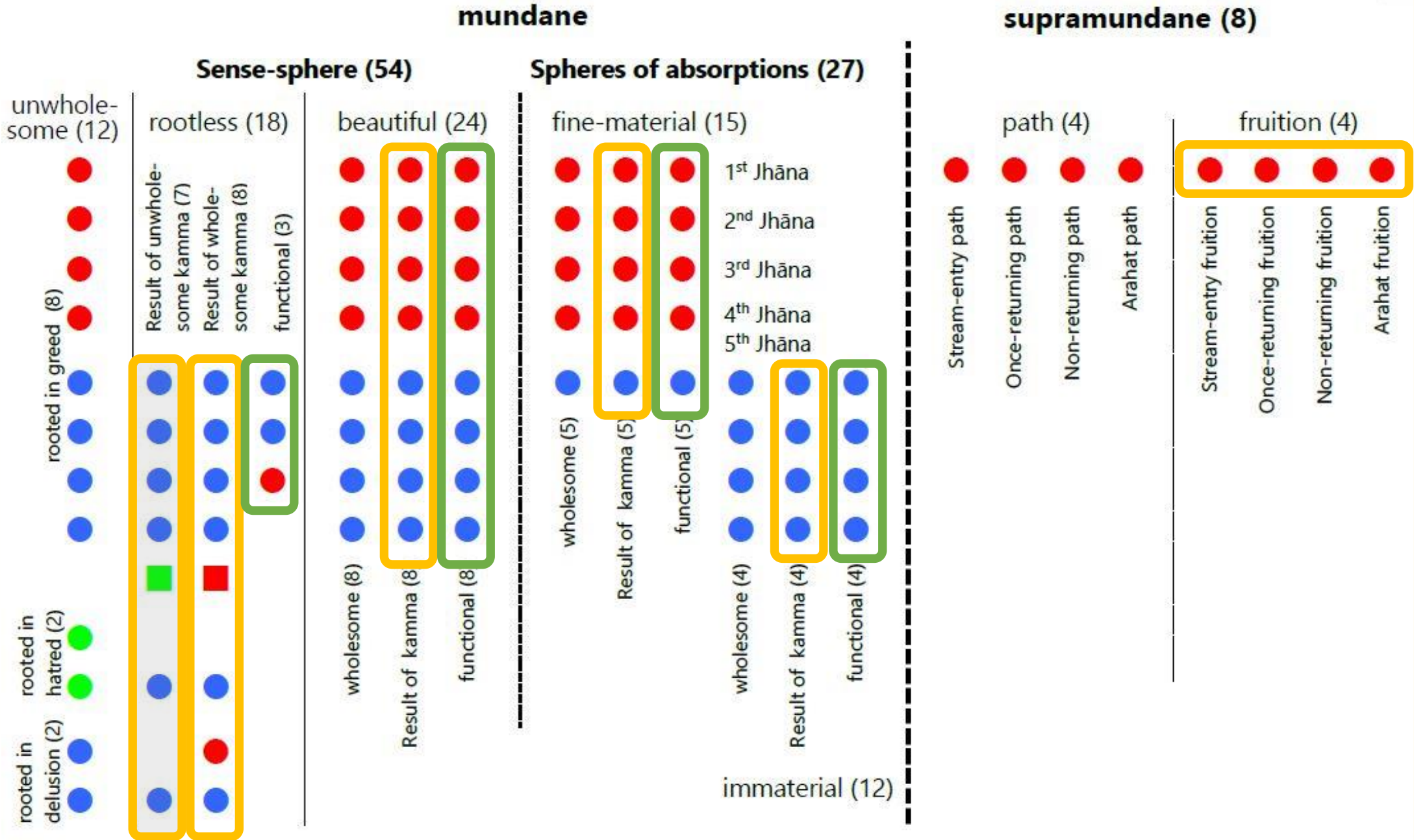
Visuddhimagga chapt. 14 (Khandhaniddesa – Explanation of the aggregates)

Ven. Buddhaghosa (Pāli), English translation by Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivaṃsa

The other (*abyākata*) consciousness:



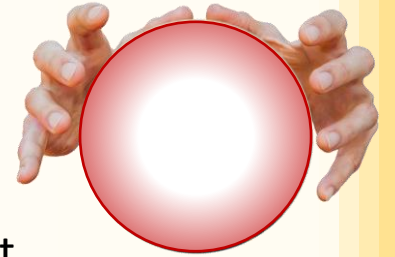
Abyākata: Resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) consciousness :



Aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*): all 89 (or 121) cittas

Aggregate of clinging to consciousness (*viññāṇa-upādānakkhandha*): 81 *lokiya* cittas

- only these are *dukkha-sacca* (the noble truth of suffering)
- only these can be the object of clinging, that means consciousness towards which attachment and wrong view can arise, which are associated with the taints (*āsava*)
- only these are observed and investigated in **Vipassanā** meditation



SN 22.48 Khandha sutta (extract of the part of consciousness)

“*Bhikkhus*, I will teach you the five aggregates and the five aggregates subject to clinging.”

“And what are the **five 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 what are the **five aggregates subject to clinging?** (...)

Whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, that is tainted, that can be clung to: this is called the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging.”

How to observe *viññāṇa* or *viññāṇakkhandha* according to the Satipaṭṭhāna practice?

Answers in Cittānupassanā + Dhammānupassanā

Mindfulness of the mind / consciousness (Cittānupassanā)

Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-Sutta, extract of Cittānupassanā section

Translation by Sayadaw U Jotika and U Dhamminda

“Here (in this teaching), *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* dwells perceiving again and again **the mind as just the mind** (not mine, not I, not self but just a phenomenon) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world.”

Observe, investigate, know: mostly through its “colour”

Whether the mind is greedy or not, hateful or not, deluded or not, cramped or distracted, developed or undeveloped, surpassable or unsurpassable, concentrated or unconcentrated, liberated or unliberated.

Internally, externally, both (in oneself and others)

Arising, dissolving factors and both (conditions)

Mindfulness of the Dhamma / the dhammas (Dhammānupassanā)

2nd section: Aggregate of consciousness (khandha pabba)

Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-Sutta, Dhammānupassanā section

Translation by Sayadaw U Jotika and U Dhamminda

“Here, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* dwells perceiving again and again **the five aggregates of clinging** as just the five aggregates of clinging (not mine, not I, not self but just a phenomenon) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world.”

Observe, investigate, know:

This is consciousness. Internally, externally, both (in oneself and others)

Rising and falling. Arising, dissolving factors (conditions) and both.

← existence or non-existence of *avijjā*, *taṇhā*, *kamma*, *nāma-rūpa*

“He is firmly mindful of the fact that **only dhammas exist** (not a soul, a self or I). That mindfulness is just for the getting of insight (*vipassanā*) and mindfulness progressively. Being detached from craving and wrong view he dwells without clinging to anything in the world.”

Mindfulness of consciousness

Who is mindful of the consciousness?

- mindfulness (*sati*)

Who is aware, observes or knows the consciousness?

- consciousness

Who really understands the consciousness?

- wisdom/knowledge (*paññā / ñāṇa*)

Who is the observer? Any self, or I?

Is he permanent, in order to know, remember and compare so many consciousnesses?

The “observing consciousness” is the observer - and it is impermanent and conditioned itself.

“Observing the mind with the mind”

How can a mindful mind observe and know, for example, a deluded or angry mind?

As there is always **only 1 consciousness** at a time, there cannot occur more consciousnesses simultaneously!

The “**observing consciousness**” arises after the observed consciousness, which has already dissolved then.



one of the 8 *mahākusala cittas*

Practice with clear comprehension => 4 *mahākusala cittas ñāṇa-sampayutta*

The previous mind becomes the object of the observing mind in a subsequent thought process (*citta-vīthi*).



Contemplation of mind (Cittānupassanā)

“Observing the mind with the mind” – Explanation with *vīthis*

Example:

Eye-door process: Seeing a visible object and impulsive reaction with aversion

B_p B_v B_a P C Sp St V J J J J J J J T T

↑
Eye-consciousness sees
(*cakkhu-viññāṇa*)

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Javana-cittas: hatred-rooted consciousness reacts
(*dosamūla-cittas*)

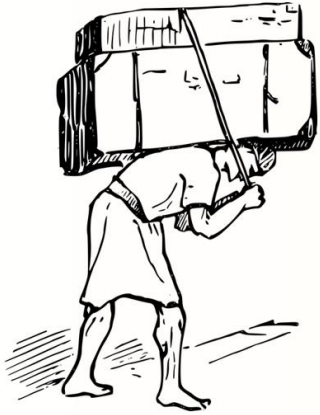
↓
Mind-door process: Object is the *dosamūla-citta* from the preceding process

B_v B_a M J J J J J J J T T

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Javana-cittas: great wholesome consciousness with knowledge observes and knows
(*mahākusala-cittas ñāṇa-sampayutta*)

SN 22.22 Bhāra sutta - The burden

“Bhikkhus, I will teach you the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden, and the laying down of the burden. Listen to that....



“And what, bhikkhus, is the **burden**? It should be said: **the five aggregates subject to clinging**. What five? The form aggregate subject to clinging, the feeling aggregate subject to clinging, the perception aggregate subject to clinging, the volitional formations aggregate subject to clinging, the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging. This is called the burden.

= first noble truth of suffering

“And what, bhikkhus, is the **carrier of the burden**? It should be said: the **person**, this venerable one of such a name and clan. This is called the carrier of the burden.

“And what, bhikkhus, is the **taking up of the burden**? It is this **craving** that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination. This is called the taking up of the burden.

= second noble truth of the origin of suffering

“And what, bhikkhus, is the **laying down of the burden**? It is the remainderless fading away and **cessation of that same craving**, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

This is called the laying down of the burden.”

= third noble truth of the cessation of suffering (= **Nibbāna**)