

## Consciousness and Luminosity in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism

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The Buddhist teachings on the nature of existence largely concentrate on the taxonomical analysis and exposition of the inner character and propensities of the human mind.<sup>1</sup> The unsatisfactory state of phenomenal existence (*samsāra*), and the perfected state of emancipation (*nirvāna*), essentially reflect and correspond to the two aspects of the mind in its defiled and purified conditions. In this context, the mind constitutes the primary factor that generates and perpetuates the defiled process and conditions of phenomenal existence, and it is also the primary vehicle and expedient in the process of emancipation from karma and phenomenal existence. As such the mind is asserted to be pure or luminous by nature, but sometime it is contaminated by defilements, and sometime it is purified from them. This paper explores the Buddhist interpretations of the natural or innate condition of the mind. However, it also takes into account the mind's ethical qualities and some other aspects, which meaningfully contribute to the understanding of its innate propensities. We begin with some of the Buddha's seminal statements that cast an intellectual scenario and mystic vision for the Buddhist interpretations of consciousness.

The world is led by the mind, and is navigated by the mind. All phenomena (*dharma*) submit to the power of this single phenomenon, the mind.<sup>2</sup>

Monks, the mind is luminous (*pabhassara*), but sometime it is defiled by adventitious defilements (*āgantuka-upakkilesa*), and sometime it is cleansed from adventitious defilements.<sup>3</sup>

Phenomena are forerun by the mind, have the mind as the best, and are constructed by the mind.

If one speaks or acts with corrupted mind, suffering follows one as the wheel follows the footsteps (of the drawing animal).

If one speaks or acts with virtuous mind, happiness follows one like one's shadow that does not dwindle away.<sup>4</sup>

The living beings are defiled through the contamination of the mind (*cittasaṃkleśa*), and they are purified through the purification of the mind (*cittavyavadāna*).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. In Buddhism there are three principal Sanskrit (and Pāli) terms that are employed to denote what in the west is called mind or consciousness: *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna* (Pāli *viññāna*). In western publications these terms are mostly rendered as mind or consciousness, mind, and consciousness. In the Abhidharma sources they are considered to be synonymous. In this paper they are often retained in Sanskrit or Pāli for the sake of clarity and precision, and whenever translated they are rendered as mind or consciousness.

<sup>2</sup>. Saṃyutta I, 39; Aṅguttara, II.177; *Kośavyākhyā*, 95.

<sup>3</sup>. Aṅguttara I, 10.

<sup>4</sup>. *Dhammapada*, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>. Saṃyutta III, 151; *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, 174; *Siddhi*, 214.

Avoid all evil (*pāpa*),  
Accomplish good deeds (*kusala*),  
Purify the mind (*citta*),  
Such is the teaching of the Buddhas.<sup>6</sup>

The first of the above quotations establishes the centrality and supremacy of the mind over all other phenomena. The second quotation asserts the mind's luminosity, and implicitly indicates that the adventitious defilements do not appertain to the nature of the mind. The third quotations propounds that it is the mind that produces bad and good actions or karma, which respectively generate suffering and happiness. The next quotation is indicative of the two distinct processes that evolve within the mind, the process of contamination and the process of purification. The last quotation stresses the necessity of purifying the mind. Broadly speaking, the Abhidharma and later interpretations of consciousness are largely inspired and rooted in the above statements of the Buddha. Now we proceed to explore specific issues, which are pertinent to the understanding of the nature and condition of the innate mind.

### ***Identity of consciousness as luminosity***

The majority of the Abhidharma and later schools do not treat the Buddha's statement on the mind's luminosity as a metaphor or simile, but they interpret it as the mind's innate state and as a category of mystical light. Furthermore, as discussed later, in the Mahāyāna sources the luminous mind is identified with the ultimate reality understood as emptiness, and with the buddha-nature and qualities.

Since in the Buddhist sources the mind is differentiated into different categories, it is pertinent to identify the specific type or layer of the mind that abides as luminosity. As already insinuated above, the Buddhist sources differentiate the stream or flux of consciousness into two intertwined levels or series. In the Theravāda tradition, the flow of consciousness is differentiated into the cognitive series (*vīthiccitta*) and subliminal series (*vīthimuttacitta*). The Sautrāntikas distinguish two levels of consciousness, which they call the subliminal or subtle consciousness (*sūkṣmacitta*) and the evolving consciousness (*vijñāna*).<sup>7</sup> The Yogācāra school divides the flow of consciousness into the store or subliminal consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) and the cognitive consciousness (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*).<sup>8</sup> In the context of the above differentiations of consciousness into two series or forms, it is the subliminal consciousness that is identified with the mind's luminosity.

### ***Luminosity of consciousness in the Abhidharma schools***

The Pāli Abhidhamma sources primarily provide detailed expositions of the mind's processes of contamination and purification. Thus the overall aim and scope of these sources is to explain how the mind is defiled, and then to demonstrate how it is purified and liberated from its mundane or *kammic* entanglement. The Pāli sources do affirm the mind's luminosity (*cittapabhassara*), but their interpretation of luminosity is rather restricted in scope. Out of a limited number of references to the mind's luminosity, we discuss here four passages, which are indicative of the Theravāda position and interpretation of the mind's luminosity.

In his explanation of the heart as one of the thirty-two parts of the body, Buddhaghosa describes it as being similar to a red lotus bud turned upside down. In the case of those endowed with wisdom this lotus bud is slightly expanded, and in the case of

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<sup>6</sup> *Dhammapada*, 183.

<sup>7</sup> *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, 31, 59. E. Lamotte, 1988, 608.

<sup>8</sup> *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II, 12-26.

those with sluggish understanding, it remains merely as a bud. Inside the heart there is a small chamber containing a drop of blood. It is this drop of blood that serves as the support in which the mind-element (*manodhātu*) and mind-consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*) arise and occur. In the people of greedy temperament this drop of blood is red. It is black in those of hateful temperament, murky in those of deluded temperament, and like lentil soup in those of speculative temperament. Finally, in those of wisdom temperament it is bright and pure, and appears brilliant like a washed gem.<sup>9</sup> Thus the inner chamber of the heart, which serves as the physical support of the mind-element and mind-consciousness, is bright and pure in those of wisdom temperament.

In one passage of his commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgani*, Buddhaghosa refers to the Buddha's statement on the mind's luminosity, and explains that the mind is pure and clear (*pañḍara*) with reference to the subliminal life-continuum (*bhavaṅga*). Even when the mind is unwholesome (*akusala*), it is called clear, because it arises from the subliminal life-continuum, just as a tributary of the Ganges is like the Ganges, and a tributary of the Godhāvārī is like the Godhāvārī.<sup>10</sup> Thus in this passage the mind's luminosity is clearly identified with its subliminal life-continuum which is asserted to be undefiled.

In the third passage located in the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa explains that in the fourth absorption (*jhāna*), the mind is made pure by the purity of mindfulness and equanimity. The term purity means that the mind is utterly cleansed in the sense of being luminous (*pabhassara*).<sup>11</sup> In this passage Buddhaghosa does not explicitly assert the mind's natural luminosity, but only states that once the mind is purified, its purity is to be understood as being luminous. Then again, in another passage of the same work, he says, "the stain of avarice is one of the dark phenomena (*dhamma*) that corrupt the mind's luminous condition (*cittapabhassara*)."<sup>12</sup> In this passage he reaffirms the mind's luminosity and indicates that it is contaminated by negative phenomena, namely defilements.

The Mahāsāṅghikas maintain that the mind's nature (*cittasvabhāva*) is fundamentally pure (*mūlavissuddha*), but it can be contaminated by adventitious defilements. They further maintained that the proclivities (*anuśaya*) are not the mind or the mental concomitants (*caitta*), and are not associated with the mind (*cittaviprayukta*). On the other hand the defilements called ensnarements (*paryavasthāna*) are associated with the mind (*cittasamprayukta*).<sup>13</sup> Since this school asserts the mind's fundamental purity, it seems that they postulate that initially or primordially the mind is pure, but it becomes contaminated by adventitious defilements.

The Sarvāstivāda Vaibhāṣikas maintain that the mind is not naturally luminous, but it is initially or originally contaminated by defilements, and must be purified by abandoning defilements. For them a primordially luminous mind cannot be contaminated by adventitious defilements. If such a mind were contaminated by adventitious defilements, then these naturally impure defilements would become pure once they become associated with the naturally luminous mind. On the other hand, if adventitious defilements remained to be impure, then a naturally luminous mind would not become defiled by their presence. For them the constantly evolving mind is in possession of defilements. In the first instance, it is necessary to eradicate the final bonds with defilements. Once defilements are eradicated, there arises the liberated mind of an arhat (*aśaikṣa*).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, VIII.111-12.

<sup>10</sup>. *Atthasālinī*, 140.

<sup>11</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XII.14.

<sup>12</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, VII.110.

<sup>13</sup>. Vasumitra, 244-46; A. Bareau, 1955, 67-68; E. Lamotte, 1962, 53.

<sup>14</sup>. E. Lamotte, 1962, 53-54; *Kośa*, VI, *kārikās* 75-77 and the commentary.

The above-discussed schools basically agree that the purified mind is luminous. However, there is some salient controversy as to whether the mind is primordially or naturally luminous and subsequently becomes defiled and purified, or whether it is initially defiled and then becomes purified. The Vaibhāsikas controversially assert that the mind is not originally in the state of purity or luminosity, but it is in possession of defilements, and subsequently becomes purified. The other schools reaffirm the Buddha's statement that the mind is luminous. The Mahāsāṅghika assertion that the mind is fundamentally pure does implicitly postulate that it is primordially luminous. The Theravāda statement that the mind is pure and clear even when it is unwholesome can be interpreted in the sense that this tradition also considers the mind to be naturally pure.

The Mahāyāna sources refute the perceptions of the mind in terms of contamination and purification as being misconceptions, and firmly assert the mind's primordial luminosity. They refer to the mind as being *prakṛti-prabhāsvara*, which clearly means that the mind is primordially or naturally luminous. However, prior to a full discussion of the Mahāyāna position on the mind's luminosity, we briefly ascertain the Abhidharma exposition of the mind's ethical qualities.

### ***Ethical qualities of consciousness in Pāli sources***

In the Abhidharma sources, the ethical qualities of consciousness are not established with reference to consciousness as such or on its own, but rather in the context of its relation to the wholesome (*kuśala*) or unwholesome roots (*akuśala-mūla*). As discussed above the mind is luminous, but its existential qualities are acquired in cooperation with its concomitants and through interaction with the empirical world.

The Pāli Abhidhamma sources identify eighty-one conditioned *dhammas* and one unconditioned *dhamma*, which are divided into four groups or categories: matter (*rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), mental concomitants (*cetasika*), and *nibbāna*. In this configuration consciousness is classed as a single *dhamma*, and all other sentient or mental states are classed as concomitants numbering fifty-two. Thus, we have here altogether fifty-three *dhammas* that encompass all conscious or mental states.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of their inner relationship, the consciousness and its concomitants always arise and cease together and have the same object. The overall function of the concomitants is to assist the consciousness in their respective capacities. Some concomitants such as contact, sensation, perception and volition assist it in the process of cognition and in the interaction with the cognized objects. Through contact and sensation the consciousness encounters and experiences the object. Perception perceives and interprets it, and volition denotes the intentional aspect of consciousness, and its function is to accumulate *kamma*. The above four concomitants can be ethically good or bad, depending whether they arise in conjunction with wholesome or unwholesome *cittas*. Among all the concomitants, twelve are classed as unwholesome and twenty-five as wholesome. The unwholesome concomitants endow the consciousness with ethically negative qualities, and they include greed, hatred, delusion, wrong views, and conceit. In contrast the wholesome concomitants endow it with ethically positive qualities, and they include non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion, faith and mindfulness.<sup>16</sup>

Having sketched the inner content of the mental complex, we now proceed to consider the ethical qualities of consciousness itself.

Although the Abhidhamma sources classify the *citta* as one single *dhamma*, they distinguish a variety of *cittas* in relation to the three existential spheres (*tedhātuka*), and to the wholesome and unwholesome concomitants.

<sup>15</sup> *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 23, 76.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed exposition of the fifty-two *cetasikas* see *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, chapter two.

In terms of its occurrence or non-occurrence in the three existential spheres, the Pāli sources distinguish four grades or levels (*bhūmi*) of consciousness: three mundane and one supramundane. Three types of consciousness that occur in one of the three existential spheres are classed as mundane consciousness (*lokiya-citta*). They are classed in this way because they are ethically qualified in the sense of being existentially conditioned. The fourth type of consciousness that does not appertain to any of the three existential spheres is classed as supramundane (*lokuttara-citta*).<sup>17</sup> This consciousness does not appertain to any of the three mundane spheres, because it is linked with the supramundane path, as discussed below.

Taking into account its ethical qualities (*jāti*) acquired under the influence of its concomitants, the consciousness is also classified into four categories: unwholesome (*akusala*), wholesome (*kusala*), undetermined (*avyākata*), and supramundane (*lokuttara*).<sup>18</sup> Consciousness is classed as unwholesome when it arises in association with the three unwholesome roots (*akusalamūla*): greed, hatred, and delusion. This type of consciousness is described as mentally sound, ethically defiled, and productive of negative results. In contrast when it is associated with the three wholesome roots (*kusalamūla*): non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion, it is classed as wholesome, and is ethically blameless and productive of positive results. In relation to the existential spheres, the unwholesome consciousness is classed as mundane, and it arises only in the Kāmāvacara. The wholesome types of consciousness are classed as mundane or supramundane. The *kammically* wholesome consciousness is mundane, and it can occur in all three existential spheres. The wholesome consciousness that is refined and purified from defilements and *kamma*, is classed as supramundane because it does not appertain to any of the three existential spheres.<sup>19</sup>

The undetermined category of consciousness is subdivided into resultant (*vipākacitta*) and functional (*kriyācitta*) types. The resultant types of consciousness are classed as undetermined in order to distinguish them from their causes, which are either wholesome or unwholesome. When they arise in the existential spheres as the results of the mundane types of consciousness, they are classed as mundane, and when they arise as the fruition of the four transcendental paths, they are classed as supramundane. The functional types of consciousness are classed as undetermined, because they are merely mental activities without any *kamma* potency. These functional types of consciousness denote the mental activities of liberated people such as *arhats* during their lifetime, and they may occur in all three existential spheres.

The Pāli Abhidhamma sources identify twelve types of unwholesome consciousness, which occur when consciousness is associated in different configurations with one of the unwholesome roots, accompanied by sensation of either mental joy or equanimity, associated with or dissociated from wrong views, and prompted by spontaneous or instigated volition.<sup>20</sup> These twelve types of unwholesome consciousness yield seven resultant types of unwholesome consciousness.<sup>21</sup> During the lifetime, these seven types of consciousness occur in the cognitive process as the five kinds of sense consciousness, the mind-element, and the mind-consciousness.<sup>22</sup> At the time of conception, they occur as the rebirth-linking consciousness in one of the unhappy destinies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 29-31.

<sup>18</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.82, 88; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 29.

<sup>19</sup>. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 31.

<sup>20</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.89-93; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 32-39.

<sup>21</sup>. *akusala-vipāka-citta*.

<sup>22</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.101, XVII.127.

<sup>23</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XVII.180.

In the Kāmāvacara there arise eight types of wholesome consciousness. These types of consciousness are associated with one of the three wholesome roots, accompanied by sensation of either mental joy or equanimity, associated with or dissociated from correct knowledge, and assisted by spontaneous or instigated volition. These types of wholesome consciousness are also called meritorious (*puṇya*), because they produce good results and inhibit the force of defilements. They arise in good ordinary people, and in the three lower grades of trainees or noble persons.<sup>24</sup> They do not arise in *arhats* and Buddhas, because they have transcended the cycle of *kamma* and future rebirths. The above eight types of wholesome consciousness yield eight resultant types of consciousness, which occur in the cognitive series during the lifetime, and in the latent series at the time of conception as the rebirth-linking consciousness in the happy places of the Kāmāvacara.<sup>25</sup> These eight types of resultant consciousness do not arise in *arhats* and Buddhas. Instead, in their case there arise eight types of corresponding consciousness, which are classed as functional, because they perform their respective functions, but do not generate any *kammic* deposits.<sup>26</sup>

In the two higher existential spheres there arise nine types of wholesome consciousness, five in the Rūpāvacara and four in the Arūpāvacara. The Rūpāvacara types of consciousness occur in one of the five absorptions,<sup>27</sup> and they are associated in different configurations with the five meditational factors: initial application, sustained application, zest, happiness, and one-pointedness.<sup>28</sup> The Arūpāvacara types of consciousness respectively take as their object the plane of the infinite space and the three higher planes. The above nine types of consciousness occur in the beings reborn in these existential spheres, and in accomplished meditators who are capable of gaining the absorptions and the formless attainments (*samāpatti*).<sup>29</sup> The wholesome types of consciousness in these two spheres yield their respective types of resultant consciousness, which occur in the beings reborn in these spheres. In the course of an existence they occur as the rebirth-linking, *bhavaṅga* and death types of consciousness.<sup>30</sup> The resultant types of consciousness of these two spheres are classed as functional for the same reason as the resultant consciousness in the Kāmāvacara, as explained above.<sup>31</sup>

The supramundane consciousness is classified into eight types: four wholesome and four resultant. These types of consciousness appertain to the process of emancipation from *samsāra*, and to the attainment of *nibbāna*. All eight types are expressive of the four stages of spiritual attainment: stream-entry, once-return, non-return, and arhatship. The four types of wholesome consciousness constitute the four transcendental paths called the path-consciousness (*magga-citta*), and the four resultant types of consciousness constitute their fruition called the fruition-consciousness (*phala-citta*). The object of these eight types of consciousness is the same, namely *nibbāna*, but their functions are different. The function of the wholesome types of consciousness is to eradicate specific defilements and impure mental states, and the four types of fruition-consciousness perform the function of experiencing the four corresponding degrees of emancipation. The four paths and their fruitions occur in the cognitive series of consciousness, and are gained through the purification from defilements, and through the development of wisdom. The differentiation into these four paths is largely established and determined in relation to the grades or levels

<sup>24</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.83-85; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.95-10, XVII.134. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.106, 107-09. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> While in the Pāli *suttas* there are four basic absorptions (*jhāna*), the *Abhidhamma* texts distinguish five absorptions by dividing the second absorption into two.

<sup>28</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.86; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 52.

<sup>29</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, X.1, 12, 16, 20, 23, 25, 32, 40, 49; XIV.87; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 60-64.

<sup>30</sup> *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 51, 52, 60, 68; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.103, 104.

<sup>31</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.109.

of purification, and also to the degree and intensity of concentration in which the consciousness is purified and refined into these four grades.<sup>32</sup>

In summary, the Pāli Abhidhamma identifies eighty-nine types of consciousness: eighty-one mundane and eight supramundane. The majority of the mundane types of consciousness, fifty-four, occurs in the Kāmāvacara, where the flux of consciousness is highly diffused and diversified. In the two higher spheres in which consciousness is concentrated and refined, there are fewer and only wholesome *cittas*: fifteen in the Rūpāvacara, and twelve in the highest sphere. The eight-supramundane *cittas* are also classed as wholesome, but they are mostly referred to as being supramundane, because they do not appertain to any of the three existential spheres.

### ***Ethical qualities of consciousness in the Sarvāstivāda school***

The Sarvāstivāda school identifies seventy-two conditioned and three unconditioned *dharmas*, which are divided into five groups or categories:<sup>33</sup> matter (*rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), concomitants associated with consciousness (*citta-saṃprayukta* or *caitta*), concomitants dissociated from consciousness (*citta-viprayukta*), and three unconditioned *dharmas*.<sup>34</sup> In this classification the consciousness is also classed as one single *dharma*, and all other mental states are included among the forty-six associated and fourteen dissociated concomitants. In this configuration there are sixty-one *dharmas* that account for all mental states.<sup>35</sup> Although this classification is slightly different from the Pāli classification, basically it comprises the same categories of mental concomitants, which assist the consciousness in the process of cognition and influence its ethical qualities. The fourteen dissociated concomitants are an innovation, and they include such factors as the homogeneity of different types of living beings, the life-force, and the four characteristics of the conditioned *dharmas*: origination, persistence, decay and disappearance.<sup>36</sup>

While the Pāli sources identify eighty-nine types of consciousness, the Sarvāstivāda masters identify only twelve types: four in the Kāmadhātu, three in the Rūpadhātu, three in the Ārūpyadhātu, and two types of pure consciousness.<sup>37</sup> It cannot be explained here in detail but only indicated that although the Sarvāstivāda taxonomic principles differ in several respects from the principles of the Pāli sources, they are broadly similar. It is the flavor and impact of the associated concomitants that determine the ethical quality of consciousness.

In addition to the classification of consciousness in relation to its concomitant, the Sarvāstivāda has another taxonomic principle, which determines how all phenomena (*dharma*) are wholesome or unwholesome.

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<sup>32</sup>. *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.88, 105; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 65-68, 72.

<sup>33</sup>. *Kośa*, II, 180.

<sup>34</sup>. space (*ākāśa*), cessation through knowledge (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*), and cessation without knowledge (*apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*). The disjunction from the impure (*sāsrava*) *dharmas* is called *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* or *nirvāṇa*. The cessation without knowledge essentially consists in the obstruction of the arising (*utpāda*) of *dharmas* in the future. It is not gained through the knowledge of the four noble truths, but it occurs because of the insufficiency of causes of rebirth (*pratyayavaikalya*). *Kośa*, I, 19-22.

<sup>35</sup>. *Kośa*, II, 185, 209.

<sup>36</sup>. For a detailed exposition of the Sarvāstivāda concomitants see *Kośa*, II, 185-95. A convenient listing of the Sarvāstivāda classification of *dharmas* is compiled in Th. Stcherbatsky, 1979, 96-107.

<sup>37</sup>. Kāmadhātu: 1. wholesome (*kuśala*), 2. unwholesome (*akuśala*), 3. tainted-undetermined (*nivṛta-avyākṛta*), 4. untainted-undetermined (*anivṛta-avyākṛta*); Rūpadhātu: 5. wholesome, 6. tainted-undetermined, 7. untainted-undetermined; Ārūpyadhātu: 8. wholesome, 9. tainted-undetermined, 10. untainted-undetermined; pure (*anāsrava*): 11. trainee (*śaikṣa*), 12. arhat (*aśaikṣa*). *Kośa*, II.195, 357. We can only indicate here that these twelve *cittas* are further subdivided into twenty. *Kośa*, II, 362.

According to the *Kośa*, the *dharmas* are wholesome or unwholesome in four different ways: in reality (*paramārtha*), by nature (*svabhāva*), by association (*saṃprayoga*), or by instigation (*utthāna*).

The state of deliverance (*mokṣa*) is said to be wholesome in reality. The state of *nirvāṇa* as the final cessation of suffering is a state of perfect peace, and hence it is wholesome in reality. The remaining categories of the wholesome things are not wholesome in an absolute sense, but only in the following three ways. The wholesome roots are wholesome by nature, regardless of their association or cause. Volition and other concomitants (*caitta*) associated with the wholesome roots are wholesome by association. When they are not associated with these three roots, they are not qualified as wholesome. Finally, bodily and verbal actions are wholesome by instigation when they are prompted by the *dharmas* that are wholesome by nature and by association.

The unwholesome *dharmas* are said to be the opposite of the wholesome *dharmas*, and they are also classified in the same four ways. *Saṃsāra* as the process of all suffering is unwholesome in reality. The unwholesome roots are unwholesome by nature. Volition and other concomitants associated with the unwholesome roots are unwholesome by association. Finally, bodily and verbal actions are unwholesome by instigation when they are prompted by the unwholesome roots and the *dharmas* associated with them.<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion to the expositions of the ethical qualities of consciousness in the Pāli and Sarvāstivāda sources, some general observations may be offered.

The ethical qualities of consciousness are essentially established in its cognitive series, and in relation to its concomitants. When consciousness is associated with wholesome or unwholesome roots, it is respectively classified as wholesome or unwholesome. Similarly, it is classified as wholesome or unwholesome, depending whether it is associated with wholesome or unwholesome concomitants. However, the above studied sources do not say anything concrete about the subliminal consciousness and its relationship to the cognitive consciousness. As we have seen above, consciousness is said to be luminous, and it is understood to be the subliminal consciousness. On the other hand the purification of consciousness is achieved by eradicating defilements in its active or cognitive condition. Once the consciousness is purified, the Pāli sources classify it as supramundane, and the Sarvāstivāda masters referred to it as the arhat's consciousness. However, since ultimately there is only one consciousness, it is not explicitly evident how the consciousness is concurrently luminous and ethically qualified as wholesome or unwholesome, or how the subliminal and cognitive types of consciousness can be coextensive and how they correlate. The Mahāyāna sources spot this ambiguous situation and attempt to resolve it in different ways, as discussed in the sections that now follow.

### ***Luminosity of Consciousness in Mahāyāna sources***

While the Abhidharma sources largely analyzed the character of consciousness in terms of its ethical qualities, the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna pay more attention to the innate propensities of consciousness. In its innermost condition, the consciousness is understood as being pure or luminous irrespective of the ethical qualities that it may acquire. Considered in its innate condition, it is said to abide in a state of non-duality, but when it is defiled, it arises and functions in the form of duality. Its appearance in a dual form is attributed to ignorance (*avidyā*) as the main source of defiled or erroneous misconceptions. The ultimate goal is not just the purification of consciousness from discursive misconceptions, but also the attainment of omniscience by awakening its pristine potentialities. Doctrinally the state of omniscience is largely understood as the elimination

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<sup>38</sup>. *Kośa*, IV, *kārikās* 8-10 and the commentary.



of all conceptual polarities, and as the attainment of the buddha-attributes (*buddhadharma*) in order to benefit all living beings.

We begin our exploration of the innate character of consciousness by quoting once more the Buddha's statement on the luminosity of consciousness, which has profoundly influenced the Mahāyāna interpretations of consciousness. In Mahāyāna sources the term *prabhāsvara* is qualified by the term *prakṛti*, which clearly indicates that consciousness is naturally or primordially luminous.

Monks, this mind is naturally luminous (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara-citta*), but sometimes it is contaminated by the adventitious defilements, and sometimes it is purified from them.

Although this statement of the Buddha is recorded in the canonical sources, as we have seen apart from a number of meaningful comments and clarifications, the Abhidharma sources do not really offer theoretical elaborations on the luminosity of consciousness. By contrast the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna theories of consciousness are largely based on the presupposition of its natural luminosity. Let us see some examples of how the Mahāyāna texts interpret the luminosity of the mind. In the *Pañcaviṃśati* it is interpreted in the following way.

This mind (*citta*) is no-mind (*acitta*), because its natural character is luminous. What is this state of the mind's luminosity (*prabhāsvaratā*)? When the mind is neither associated with nor dissociated from greed, hatred, delusion, proclivities (*anuśaya*), fetters (*saṃyojana*), or false views (*drṣṭi*), then this constitutes its luminosity. Does the mind exist as no-mind? In the state of no-mind (*acittatā*), the states of existence (*astitā*) or non-existence (*nāstitā*) can be neither found nor established... What is this state of no-mind? The state of no-mind, which is immutable (*avikāra*) and undifferentiated (*avikalpa*), constitutes the ultimate reality (*dharmatā*) of all *dharmas*. Such is the state of no-mind. Just as the mind is immutable and undifferentiated, in the same way the five aggregates, the twelve bases, the eighteen elements, the dependent origination, the six perfections, the thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment (*bodhipakṣika*), the attributes of the Buddha (*buddhadharma*), and the supreme and perfect enlightenment are immutable and undifferentiated.<sup>39</sup>

In this quotation, the mind's luminosity is asserted to be the mind in the state of no-mind. Then it is explained that the state of no-mind, being immutable and without mental differentiations, constitutes the ultimate reality of all phenomena. Then again it is asserted that the Buddha qualities and enlightenment are immutable in the same way as the mind, which would suggest that they are the same.

In the *Bhadrapāla-sūtra*, the consciousness is metaphorically compared to the wind element and to the sunrays. This text explains that although formless and imperceptible, the wind element exists and manifests itself when it shakes trees or blows cold or warm air. It carries pleasant and unpleasant fragrances, but as such it remains stainless and formless. Similarly, although it is formless, the element of consciousness (*vijñānadhātu*) accomplishes all forms and penetrates all things. Due to its power there arise sensations and volitions, and through them the realm of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*) classified as

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<sup>39</sup> *Pañcaviṃśati*, 121-122. For insightful comments on this passage, see Haribhadra, 37-40.

wholesome and unwholesome. However, as such consciousness is pure, and although it penetrates all things, it is not clad in them. While it operates through the sense faculties and the five aggregates of clinging, it is perceived as defiled, but as such it remains unaffected by bad *karma*, just as the stainless sunrays remain undefiled by any impurity.<sup>40</sup> This *sūtra* postulates that consciousness generates the realm of phenomena, and that when it is entangled and operates through the defiled aggregates, it is perceived as being defiled. However, as such it is not polluted by defilements, but remains stainless like the wind or the sunrays.

While the *Pañcaviṃśati* provides a philosophical exposition of the mind's luminosity, and while the *Bhadrapāla-sūtra* explains its purity through metaphors, the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* explicitly equates the buddha-nature (*tathāgagarbha*) with the store consciousness. This text says that the buddha-nature is luminous and pure, and that it is endowed with the thirty-two major marks (*lakṣaṇa*). It is however disguised in the body of all beings, like a gem wrapped in a dirty piece of cloth. It is enveloped by the aggregates, and stained with the impurities of greed, hatred, delusion, and false imagination.<sup>41</sup> It holds within itself the cause (*hetu*) of the wholesome and unwholesome things, and it produces all forms of existence (*janmagati*). Since it is covered with the latent permutations (*vāsanā*), it is identified with the store consciousness and its retinue of the seven *vijñānas*.<sup>42</sup>

According to the Yoga Tantra class, Śākyāmuni Buddha as Siddhārtha attained the supreme enlightenment through the visualization of his mind as a lunar disc (*candra*), and through a set of five mystical realizations (*abhisambodhi*).<sup>43</sup> Commenting on Siddhārtha's enlightenment, Indrabhūti provides the following interpretation of the mind as a lunar disc.

Being luminous by nature, this mind is similar to the moon's disc. The lunar disc epitomises the knowledge (*jñāna*) that is luminous by nature. Just as the waxing moon gradually emerges in its fullness, in the same way the mind-jewel (*cittaratna*), being naturally luminous, also fully emerges in its perfected state. Just as the moon becomes fully visible, once it is freed from the accidental obscurities, in the same way the mind-jewel, being pure by nature (*prakṛti-parisuddha*), once separated from the stains of defilements (*kleśa*), appears as the perfected buddha-qualities (*guṇa*).<sup>44</sup>

In the *tantras* the lunar disc essentially denotes a category of mystical light or luminosity. It is from this light that the yogis summon perfected Buddha images with which they identify themselves, in order to acquire their buddha-qualities and attributes. Thus viewed together, the above texts do not regard the mind's luminosity as merely a metaphor, but they firmly consider it as its innate condition, and equate it with the buddha-nature and qualities.

### ***Consciousness as bodhicitta***

The concept of *bodhicitta* (enlightenment-mind) is central to the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna theory and practice in terms of its paramount importance for the realisation of enlightenment. Fundamentally the *bodhicitta* is the seed of buddhahood, which is brought to its efflorescence during the Bodhisattva career.

<sup>40</sup> *Bhadrapālasreṣṭhiparipṛcchā-sūtra*, T.T.P., vol. 24, 169.5.4-170.4.2.

<sup>41</sup> *Lankāvatāra*, 77-78.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 220-24.

<sup>43</sup> *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Indrabhūti's *Jñānasiddhi*, 82.

In Mahāyāna sources the concept of *bodhicitta* incorporates a pair of complementary factors, such as aspiration for enlightenment and its implementation, emptiness and compassion, wisdom and means, and its conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and absolute (*paramārtha*) forms or aspects.<sup>45</sup>

The above pairs are said to incorporate all the requisites that are necessary to attain the state of buddhahood. Commenting on the first pair, the texts explain that the *bodhicitta* as an aspiration for enlightenment consists of an intense volition (*cetanā*) to become a Buddha and to benefit living beings. Essentially, this aspirational thought (*praṇidhicitta*) encapsulates the seminal cause or potentiality of enlightenment. It is the mind that arouses its pristine energies that are necessary to attain buddhahood. The implementation basically amounts to the gradual maturation of enlightenment during the Bodhisattva career. In connection with this pair the texts identify twenty-two varieties of *bodhicitta*. The twenty-second and final *bodhicitta* is said to be associated with the absolute body (*dharmakāya*), which reveals itself as the manifested body (*nirmāṇakāya*) in order to benefit living beings.<sup>46</sup> Prajñākaramati says that the aspirational *citta* is volition in the form of a wish for buddhahood and the benefit of other beings, and that its implementation is the progress towards buddhahood.<sup>47</sup>

In the next two pairs, the components of emptiness and wisdom denote the perfection of wisdom, and the components of compassion and means incorporate the other five perfections. The texts also speak of the Bodhisattva's accumulation of merit and knowledge (*puṇya-jñāna*). In this configuration the accumulation of merit consists in the practice of the first five perfections, and the accumulation of knowledge focuses on the perfection of wisdom. The conventional and transcendent aspects of *bodhicitta* have variant interpretations, but in terms of the Bodhisattva path, the conventional *bodhicitta* accumulates merit and knowledge, and the transcendent *bodhicitta* denotes the ultimate insight into emptiness as the ultimate reality of all phenomena.<sup>48</sup>

Which type of consciousness occurs at the time of *cittotpāda*? According to Vimuktisena, it is the *manovijñāna* that grasps all pure *dharmas*, and becomes aware of the mind's ultimate realization (*cittādhigama*).<sup>49</sup> Asaṅga says that *cittotpāda* is a volition of mighty enthusiasm, initiative, purpose, outcome, and a double objective (*dvayārtha*): the supreme enlightenment and the benefit of other beings.<sup>50</sup> Commenting on Asaṅga's statement, Haribhadra explains that *cittotpāda* denotes the *citta* grasping a pre-eminent object in association with volition as a concomitant consisting of zest. He further explains that it is the *citta* grounded in an earnest wish characterised by zest for all wholesome *dharmas*.<sup>51</sup>

The above sources firmly stress that *cittotpāda* is the mind unwaveringly set on buddhahood. When one takes into consideration the two components of *bodhicitta*, they seem to broadly correspond to the cognitive and latent aspects of consciousness. Ultimately, emptiness denotes the attainment of enlightenment and *dharmakāya*, and the practice of compassion accumulates the merit for the attainment of a physical buddha-body

<sup>45</sup>. In some texts the *bodhicitta* is said to be fourfold: all the *samayas* are comprised in the *bodhicitta* which is fourfold, namely *bodhicitta*, *anuttara bodhicitta*, Samantabhadra's *bodhicitta*, and *vajrabodhicitta*. Dīpaṅkaraśrījñāna, TTP, vol. 81, 211.3. In another text it is said that the benefit of monastic vows is the attainment arhatship, that of *bodhicitta* is the attainment of buddhahood, and that of the *vidyādhara* vow is the attainment of buddhahood in this very life. Vibhūticandra, TTP, vol. 81, 215.3.6.

<sup>46</sup>. For more details see Haribhadra's *Āloka*, 16-27, and Prajñākaramati's *Pañjikā*, 11-13.

<sup>47</sup>. *Prajñākaramati*, 11-12.

<sup>48</sup>. Aśvaghōṣa A, TTP, vol. 102, 18.3.1-19.1.7; Aśvaghōṣa B, TTP, vol. 102, 19.1.8-19.4.7; Kamalaśīla, TTT, vol. 36, 459.87.2-7; Vimalamitra, TTP, vol. 102, 172.2.8-3.8.

<sup>49</sup>. Vimuktisena, 31.

<sup>50</sup>. *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, IV.1.

<sup>51</sup>. Haribhadra, 24.

(*rūpakāya*). Thus, while the defiled consciousness erroneously perceives the nature of existence and produces *karma*, which in turn produces mundane bodies, the *bodhicitta* abides in wisdom and compassion, and strives to mature them in the form of omniscience and buddha-attributes. It is thus the transcendent merit and knowledge that supplant the workings of mundane *karma* and ignorance.

In the *tantras*, the *bodhicitta* is predominantly interpreted as a mystical experience, which consists in the union or blending (*samyoga*) of wisdom and means. In these texts, the pair of wisdom and means is identified with a number of specifically *tantric* pairs such as *vajra* and bell, or male and female. The *bodhicitta* is also described as the melting of the male and female deities, or it is hypostasized in the form of Vajrasattva as the supreme deity epitomizing the ultimate reality. Consciousness as *bodhicitta* is also identified with the innate forces circulating within the body, such as psychic channels (*nāḍī*) and centers (*cakra*), or as semen (*bindu*). Essentially, the *tantras* emphasise the yogic experience of *bodhicitta* within the body. The ultimate character of *bodhicitta* is described as the inexpressible reality, beginningless and endless, neither existent nor non-existent, non-substantial like emptiness and space, as the essence of the Tathāgatas or Samantabhadra. Since there is the non-substantiality and sameness of all *dharmas*, the *bodhicitta* is unborn, devoid of existence, nondual, *vajra*, luminosity, enlightenment, and Vajrasattva.<sup>52</sup>

The above discussion of *bodhicitta* basically shows how the innate energies and potentialities of consciousness can be aroused and directed towards the attainment of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna forms of enlightenment. These two traditions recognize the need to eradicate defilements and ignorance as mental misconceptions, but otherwise they essentially focus on the arousal and maturation of the pristine propensities of consciousness in the form of perfected enlightenment.

### ***Consciousness as fourfold luminosity***

Some of the tantric masters in India formulated an ingenious theory, which propounds a fourfold luminosity of consciousness as four kinds of emptiness. This theory is largely based on the Yogācāra exposition of the aggregate of consciousness as being threefold: store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), contaminated mind (*kliṣṭa-manas*), and six kinds of cognitive consciousness (*vijñāna*). Succinctly stated the inner character and propensities of these three categories of consciousness are explained as three characteristics or natures (*svabhāva*): perfected (*pariniṣpanna*), dependent (*paratantra*), and imagined (*parikalpita*). These three aspects are briefly explained in the next section on the nonduality of consciousness.

The above three natures or aspects of consciousness are correlated with three kinds of luminosity and three kinds of emptiness. A fourth category of luminosity and a fourth category of emptiness are added to epitomize the ultimate and nondual character of consciousness. Below we quote a selection of verses from the tantric Nāgārjuna's *Pañcakrama*, which sketch the correlations of the four sets of luminosity and emptiness, and outline the basic process leading to the final realization.

- Emptiness (*śūnya*), extreme emptiness (*atiśūnya*), great emptiness (*mahāśūnya*), these three, and universal emptiness (*sarvaśūnya*) as fourth, are differentiated by cause and effect (*hetu/phala*). (4)
- Through the union (*samāyoga*) of wisdom (*prajñā*) and means (*upāya*) the realisation is attained, and from this attained realization there emerges the luminosity (*prabhāsvara*) of the universal emptiness. (5)

<sup>52</sup>. Anaṅgavajra, chapters II.29 and IV.17. For a set of different descriptions of *bodhicitta* see chapter two of *Guhyasamāja*. See also Indrabhūti's *Jñānasiddhi*, in particular pages 82-84 where he quotes a number of sources.

- The purity of the causal process (*hetukrama*) derives from the application of the three states of consciousness (*viññāna*), and through the union of the three kinds of emptiness there is gained the supreme stage (*anuttarapada*). (6)
- Emptiness is radiance (*āloka*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and the mind (*citta*) in its dependent aspect (*paratantra*). Next I explain the effulgence of its natural state (*prakṛti*). (7)
- The extreme emptiness is explained as the effulgence of radiance (*ālokābhāsa*), as the means (*upāya*), as the imagined (*parikalpita*), and as the mental complex (*caitasika*). (15)
- The Buddhas explained the state of the great emptiness as being both the perception of radiance (*ālokopalabdhi*), as well as what is perceived. It is the perfected (*pariniṣpanna*), and is called nescience (*avidyā*). (23)
- The mind is said to be threefold as radiance (*āloka*), effulgence of radiance (*ālokābhāsa*), and perception of radiance (*ālokopalabdha*), and thus its foundation (*ādhāra*) is established. (29)
- One imagines the self-nature of wisdom (*prajñāsvabhāva*) as a lunar disc (*candra*), and one also perceives the mind itself as having the form of the moon. (45)
- Then focusing on the moon, one should perceive the sign of the *vajra*. This is identified as the means of the yogis who practice the generation of the *vajra* and the rest. (46)
- Through the union of the moon and the *vajra* there results the union of the mind (*citta*) and mental concomitants (*caitta*), and through the union of wisdom (*prajñā*) and means (*upāya*) there arises the form of the deity (*devatā*). (47)
- After executing the four attitudes (*mudrā*), and assuming the pride of the deity, the *mantrin* endowed with the process of generation (*utpattikrama*) should constantly persist. (48)
- Now comes the explanation of the perfected yoga (*pariniṣpannayoga*). It is luminosity (*prabhāsvara*) that constitutes the purity of the first three kinds of emptiness. The stage of the universal emptiness arises through the purity of the three aspects of knowledge (*jñāna*). (50)
- It is the stage of pure knowledge (*jñāna*), the ultimate reality (*tattva*), and supreme omniscience (*sarvajñātva*). It is immutable (*nirvikāra*), unmanifested (*nirābhāsa*), nondual (*nirdvanda*), supreme (*parama*), and peaceful (*śiva*). It is neither is (*asti*) nor is not (*nāsti*), as it is not within the sphere of words (*vākyagocara*). (51)
- It is from this pure luminosity that arise the three aspects of knowledge in the form of one who is endowed with the thirty-two major marks (*lakṣaṇa*) and the eighty minor marks (*vyañjana*). And thus is born the omniscient one (*sarvajña*) endowed with all the perfected attributes (*sarvākāra*). (52)<sup>53</sup>

The above excerpt is somewhat terse, but it does neatly outlines the stages of visualizing and understanding the three aspects of consciousness, and then merging them and bringing consciousness to its ultimate state. It is a particular kind of mental vision, which focuses on the luminous mind as emptiness, and aims to achieve the fusion of mental polarities, which culminates in the attainment of the Buddha attributes.

In Tibet the above fourfold configuration of consciousness as luminosity and emptiness has been adopted to explain the process of dissolution at the time of dying. It is impossible to deal here with the complex history of the teachings on the process of dying, which eventually culminated in the composition of the so-called *Tibetan Book of the*

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<sup>53</sup>. *Pañcakrama*, chapter II.

*Dead*. We limited our discussion to explaining the central stages in the process of dying and dissolution of consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

The relevant texts distinguish four intermediate states of consciousness. In Tibetan these intermediate states are called *bardo*: *bardo* of lifetime, *bardo* of dying, *bardo* of reality, and *bardo* of becoming reborn. We are concerned here mainly with the *bardo* of dying.

The *bardo* of dying denotes the interval between the first moment of dying and the moment when the inner breath is cut off. During this interval there occur two dissolutions, one coarse and one subtle. The coarse dissolution basically consists of the body's physical death, although consciousness still remains in it.

The subtle dissolution consists of four consecutive appearances or visions of white, red, black, and luminous lights. These four light appearances are identified with four categories of emptiness. It is explained that they do not come from anywhere, but are forms of consciousness itself. The retrogression of consciousness through these four appearances is correlated with the movements of the three vital channels and the white and red essences. The three channels are the well-known tantric channels located within the body: central channel (*avadhūtī*), right channel (*rasanā*), and left channel (*lalanā*). The white and red essences constitute the energies of the right and left channels.

Initially all the energy channels within the body dissolve into the right and left channels. Then the white and red essences gather above and below the central channel, and appear in the forms of A and Haṃ.

White appearance. At this moment the white essence descends into the heart, and there arises a white appearance similar to the cloudless sky flooded with moonlight. This is called the experience of appearance, because this appearance is pure brightness. This moment is called the luminosity of emptiness, or emptiness as luminosity. The subtle mind is no longer discursive, but it is still subtly conceptual and dualistic. The coarse objectivity or awareness of the external world is suppressed.

Red appearance. This time the red essence ascends into the heart, and there arises a red appearance, which resembles the sky at sunrise or sunset. As the mind shines with greater intensity, this appearance is called the experience of expanded appearance. This moment is called the luminosity of extreme emptiness. In this experience the coarse subjectivity or the sense of subjective identity is suppressed.

Black appearance. As the white and red essences meet inside the heart, the energy of the life-channel becomes suppressed. This time there arises a black appearance like a pitch-black night, and it is called the experience of the attained appearance in the suppressed consciousness. This moment is called the luminosity of great emptiness. At this point all coarse dualities of consciousness become fully suppressed, and consciousness utterly loses the sense of identity.

Luminosity. In the fourth and final moment, the letters A and Haṃ become dissolved, and there arises luminosity similar to a cloudless sky. This luminosity is boundless and has no center or parameter, and is called the luminosity of universal emptiness. It is also called the luminosity of death, and it constitutes the actual moment of death. As such, this moment is referred to as the luminosity of reality (*dharmatā*), the absolute body (*dharmakāya*), or the great bliss (*mahāsukha*). The texts explain that the luminosity of death is experienced by all beings, as all beings are endowed with the seed or potentiality of enlightenment. If at this moment the consciousness is able to act in conformity with the training and instructions received during the lifetime, it never re-

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<sup>54</sup>. For a doctrinal background and history of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, consult B.J. Cuevas, 2003; and for its comprehensive study, refer to F. Fremantle, 2001.

emerges from this luminous and non-discursive state. It realizes the state of buddhahood, and abides in the ultimate realm (*dharmadhātu*).

It is said that ordinary people may remain in the state of luminosity for up to four days, and that some accomplished yogis may remain in it for much longer. After that the consciousness leaves the dead body. In the case of the people who fail to recognize the luminosity of universal emptiness, because of the intervention of karmic forces, a slight vibration occurs in the luminosity, and the reverse process of consciousness begins to evolve. Next there follows the *bardo* of reality in which the consciousness has visions of peaceful and wrathful Buddha manifestations. These Buddha manifestations attempt to redirect the consciousness back to the state of luminosity. If the consciousness fails to understand those visions, it progresses to the *bardo* of becoming, and is reborn in a new body.<sup>55</sup>

It is fairly apparent that the above fourfold luminosity of consciousness is a form of mystic light or propensity, which is experienced in meditation or in the process of the subtle dissolution of consciousness at the time of dying. During the life time the luminous mind can be visualized and awakened to its natural purity. This particular type of visualizing the mind as luminosity and emptiness is peculiar to the tantric method of meditation called evocation (*sādhana*). In the course of such evocations, skilled meditators disperse light from their consciousness located in the heart into space conceived as emptiness, evoke from it perfected Buddha manifestations, and then identify themselves with their Buddha attributes and qualities. The theory of dying as the transition through four kinds of luminosity is unique to Tibet, in particular to the Nyima and Kagyu traditions. According to these traditions one can train to re-enact in meditation the process of dying. Then at the time of dying one transfers the consciousness to the realm of luminosity or into one's chosen deity.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Duality and Nonduality of Consciousness***

The Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna concept of nonduality is largely rooted in their doctrinal assumptions, which assert that all discursive differentiations into polarities such as impurity and purity, subject and object, or *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are defective, because they do not correspond to the true state of existence. In the context of consciousness, its duality and nonduality are largely explained with reference to *citta* and *caittas*, or *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna*. In addition to what has been said about the nonduality of consciousness in the previous sections, we present here a more elaborated interpretation based on selected texts from Yogācāra sources.

In chapter one of the *Sandhinirmocana* the Buddha states that all phenomena are without duality: the conditioned phenomena are neither conditioned nor unconditioned, and similarly the unconditioned phenomena are neither conditioned nor unconditioned. The term conditioned is metaphoric and imaginary, and it is an expression of ordinary experiences or mental imaginations, which do not correspond to anything absolute, and hence the conditioned phenomena do not exist. The same is said to hold true for the unconditioned phenomena.

There is however an inexpressible or ineffable nature of phenomena (*anābhilāpya-dharmatā*) about which the noble persons have perfected knowledge. But, in order to teach others about the true reality of phenomena, they forged the term unconditioned. The ordinary people who have no wisdom and no vision of the ineffable nature of phenomena, when they are confronted with conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, they assume

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<sup>55</sup>. For a full exposition of the subtle dissolution of consciousness consult Lati Rinbochay & Jeffrey Hopkins, 1981, 32-48, and F. Fremantle, 2001, 217-47.

<sup>56</sup>. For two brief expositions of the transference of consciousness, see T. Skorupski, 2001, 145-54.

that such phenomena exist. Relying on what they experience or hear, they affirm the phenomena as real or false. By contrast those who have wisdom and vision of the ineffable nature of phenomena, they postulate that the conditioned and unconditioned phenomena do not exist, and that they are mental fabrications labelled as conditioned and unconditioned.

The noble persons know the ultimate reality (*paramārtha*) through intuition, but among the profaners it is the subject of speculations. The ultimate reality is the domain without characteristics (*animittagacora*); it is ineffable and escapes ordinary experiences. By contrast speculations are the domain with characteristics (*nimittagocara*), and appertain to the domain of speech and to the domain of ordinary experiences.

Having explained that the terms conditioned and unconditioned are mental constructs, and having demonstrated the difference between the ultimate reality and speculations, the Buddha proceeds to explain that the identity or distinction between the ultimate reality and the mental formations (*saṃskāra*) is tenuous and inadmissible. In the context of the Buddha's discourse, the ultimate reality clearly denotes the true state of consciousness.

Since its character is profound, the ultimate reality transcends the identity with the mental formations or the difference from them. The arguments for their identity or difference are erroneous, because it is impossible to understand and realize the ultimate reality. If the ultimate reality and the mental formations were identical, then all profaners would perceive the truth and gain *nirvāṇa*, but they do not see the truth and do not gain *nirvāṇa*. If they were different, then the truth seekers would not become separated from the character of mental formations, from the bonds of that character, and from the bonds of negative dispositions (*dauṣṭhulya*). Thus they would not become enlightened, and yet they do discard and eliminate the above bonds, and gain *nirvāṇa* and enlightenment. Then again, if the absolute reality and the mental formations were identical, then the absolute reality would be classed among defilements together with the formations. If they were different, the absolute reality would not constitute the common character of all formations. However, it does constitute their common character, but it is not classed among defilements. Once again, if they were identical, the formations would be classed as undifferentiated, just as the absolute reality is undifferentiated in the formations. Consequently, the absolute reality and the formations are neither identical nor different, and it is erroneous to assert their identity or difference.<sup>57</sup>

In the above discourse the main thrust of argumentation is to demonstrate that the treatment of phenomena in terms of dualities, such as conditioned and unconditioned, is flawed, and that the ultimate reality and mental formations cannot be considered to be identical or different. Their nonduality is implied and demonstrated as the impossibility of determining their relationship in terms of oneness and plurality, because the ultimate reality is not susceptible to dual differentiations. In the Yogācāra treatises, this negatively peculiar strand of the *Sandhinirmocana* thought is recast into positive expositions of the nonduality of consciousness, as discussed below.

In the Yogācāra treatises, the nonduality of consciousness is explained as an integral part of their expositions of deceptive ideation, the three forms or aspects of consciousness, and its three natures. We begin with the treatment of deceptive ideation.

It is said in the consulted sources that in the case of ordinary beings, the deceptive ideation (*abhūta-parikalpa*) is synonymous with the defiled stream of consciousness (*saṃtāna*), and that in the context of the entire existence, it is *saṃsāra*.

In terms of consciousness the deceptive ideation includes *ālayavijñāna*, *manas* and *vijñāna*. The store consciousness constitutes the subliminal aspect of consciousness, and

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<sup>57</sup>. *Sandhinirmocana*, 169-177.



serves as the foundation of all *karmic* potentialities, which give rise to *manas* and *vijñāna*. From the perspective of *karma*, the *manas* is called the stained mind (*kliṣṭamanas*), because it perceives the store consciousness as the *ātman*.<sup>58</sup> From the perspective of perception, it is the mind-element (*manodhātu*), which serves as the support of the six *vijñānas*. The six *vijñānas* essentially cognize the empirical world, and jointly with *manas* produce *karmic* propensities (*vāsanā*).

In terms of its existential permutations, the deceptive ideation is said to encompass the three natures (*trivabhāva*): perfected (*pariniṣpanna*), dependent (*paratantra*), and imagined (*parikalpita*). In this configuration the deceptive ideation corresponds to the dependent nature. The perfected stands for emptiness, *nirvāṇa*, and the *dharmā*-nature of consciousness (*cittadharmatā*). The dependent basically denotes the stained *manas* as a living entity obscured by ignorance and controlled by the law of dependent origination. The imagined denotes the empirical world that is illusory. As for duality, it is the deceptive ideation that appears in the form of subject and object. The dependent is the egocentric subject, and the imagined is its unreal and imaginary object. This apparent duality does not exist, but emptiness exists in the deceptive ideation, and conversely the deceptive ideation exists in emptiness. In some passages it is said that the deceptive ideation corresponds to the defiled process (*saṃkleśa*) and *saṃsāra*, and emptiness to the purification process (*vyavadāna*) and *nirvāṇa*. In some other passages, it is said that the dependent in its conditioned state is the imagined or *saṃsāra*, and in its unconditioned state it is the perfected or *nirvāṇa*.<sup>59</sup>

According to one text, the nonduality of the three natures consists in the expulsion of the imagined from the dependent, and the infusion of the dependent into the perfected. In this text the actual exposition of their noduality is given with reference to the ultimate reality itself (*paramārtha*), which is said to be nondual (*advaya*) in five ways. In terms of existence and non-existence, it is not existent from the perspective of the dependent and the imagined natures, and it is not non-existent from the perspective of the perfected nature. In terms of oneness (*ekatva*) and plurality (*nānātva*), it is not one because there is no oneness of the perfected with the dependent and the imagined, and it is not varied because the perfected is not different from the other two. In terms of production and cessation, it is neither produced nor destroyed, because the absolute realm (*dharmadhātu*) has no characteristic of creativity (*anabhisamskṛtatva*). It is neither increased nor decreased, because it remains as it is amidst the production and cessation of defilement and purification. Finally, it does not become purified, because its nature is naturally stainless (*prakṛty-asamkliṣṭatva*), and yet it is not entirely without purification, because it is released (*vigama*) from the adventitious defilements.<sup>60</sup>

The realization of nonduality is chiefly explained as the transmutation or transformation of the foundation of consciousness (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*), namely of the store consciousness. This transmutation of consciousness occurs in the dependent nature, and essentially it consists of the expulsion of its defiled process (*saṃkleśa*) and the transformation into its purified state (*vyavadāna*).<sup>61</sup> All the conditioned *dharmas* are the dependent nature, and the store consciousness is the foundation or support of both the defiled and undefiled *dharmas*, which respectively correspond to the imagined and perfected natures. The transmutation of the support consists of a double operation: the expulsion of the imagined and the acquisition of the perfected. It is through the assiduous

<sup>58</sup>. *Manas* denotes the sense of selfhood and is associated with four defilements: view of self (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), delusion of self (*ātmanamoha*), pride of self (*ātmanamāna*), and attachment to self (*ātmasneha*). *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II, 16; *Siddhi*, 225.

<sup>59</sup>. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II, 87-125; *Madhyāntavibhāga*, chapter one; *Siddhi*, 90, 225, 514-33.

<sup>60</sup>. *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, VI.1 and the commentary.

<sup>61</sup>. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II, 259-261, 268.

repetition of the non-conceptual knowledge (*nirvikalpaka-jñāna*) that one removes the wickedness (*dauṣṭhulya*) of the two obstacles<sup>62</sup> from the root consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*). Thus it is the non-conceptual knowledge that transmutes the foundation of consciousness through the removal of the imagined which is in the dependent, and through the acquisition of the perfected which is also in the dependent. Through the removal of the obstacles of defilements, one acquires the *mahāparinirvāṇa*, and through the elimination of the obstacles to knowledge, one realises the supreme enlightenment (*mahābodhi*).<sup>63</sup>

The nonduality of consciousness is also reflected and integrated into the exposition of the nonduality as one of the attributes of the absolute body (*dharmakāya*). In this configuration the nonduality of the absolute body is explained in three ways: with reference to existence, conditionality, and diversity. The absolute body is not existent because the *dharmas* do not exist, and it is not non-existent, because the emptiness as the ultimate reality does exist. It is not conditioned because it is not produced by *karma* and defilements, and yet it has the power to manifest itself in the guise of the conditioned *dharmas*. Thirdly, as the support of all the Buddhas, it is undivided (*abhinna*), and yet countless streams of consciousness (*saṃtāna*) gain the state of enlightenment.<sup>64</sup>

In the *tantras* the state of nonduality is gained through the mystic union of wisdom and means, as briefly discussed above in the section on *bodhicitta*. Here we only provide two representative quotations, which aptly encapsulate the spirit of the *tantras*.

One's mind (*svacitta*) is primordially unborn and empty by nature, because due to its sameness with the selflessness of *dharmas*, it is immune from all existences, and divested of the aggregates, bases, elements, subject and object. These existences are not arisen; there are no *dharmas* and no *dharmatā*. Selflessness is similar to space, and this is the unwavering course of enlightenment.<sup>65</sup>

The union of wisdom and means denotes the union of *citta* and *caittas* undifferentiated into internal and external. It is the union of emptiness and compassion, the union of *vajra* and lotus, the union of diffusion (*prapañca*) and fusion (*saṃgraha*), and the union of Heruka and Nairātmyā. It is the undivided reality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and it does not have the dual form of man and woman. It is the unity of the conventional and ultimate realities, and the knowledge that is naturally luminous (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara-jñāna*).<sup>66</sup>

In the *Sandhinirmocana*, as discussed above, the Buddha asserts the nonduality of phenomena, but his argumentation aims to demonstrate that ultimately it is impossible to explain the nature of phenomena in terms of polarities of identity and difference. It is difficult and indeed futile to make dualistic distinctions because as such the ultimate reality is not susceptible to being differentiated. Then again, as the ultimate reality constitutes the common character of all phenomena, the ultimate reality and phenomena are coextensive, but it is difficult to grasp or explain their relationship in terms of identity or difference.

The Yogācāra sources do not dwell on the difficulties voiced by the Buddha. Instead they endeavor to explain the character of consciousness in terms of its composition or duality, and then they demonstrate how the bifurcated strands of consciousness can be transformed or transmuted into the state of nonduality. The Yogācāra exposition of the

<sup>62</sup>. the obstacle of defilements (*kleśāvaraṇa*), and the obstacle to knowledge (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). *Siddhi*, 566-574.

<sup>63</sup>. *Siddhi*, 610-612; 661-667.

<sup>64</sup>. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II, 271-272.

<sup>65</sup>. *Guhyasamāja-tantra*, II.4-5.

<sup>66</sup>. Indrabhūti's *Samputatilakaṭikā*, TTP, vol. 55, 5.2.3-5.

nonduality of consciousness as the expulsion of the imagined from the dependent, and the infusion of the dependent into the perfected, is ingenious and sophisticated. However, it is questionable whether it resolves the difficulties raised by the Buddha.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen the Buddha said that the mind is luminous, but sometime it is contaminated and sometime it is purified from adventitious defilements. In his statement the luminosity of consciousness is firmly established, and further confirmed by the fact that defilements do not appertain to the innate character and condition of consciousness. Since defilements are qualified by the term ‘adventitious’ (*āgantuka*), it follows that their occurrence in the flow of consciousness is accidental, and that they can be removed. The innate purity of consciousness is further confirmed in an implicit manner in the context of the Abhidharma method of establishing its ethical qualities. Since the consciousness acquires its ethical qualities by association with or dissociation from good or bad concomitants, it is reasonable to assume by inference that as such it remains pure, although the Abhidharma sources do not always explicitly say that this is the case. There is some disagreement in the Abhidharma sources as to the initial point in time at which the consciousness becomes contaminated. Some Abhidharma schools affirm the natural luminosity of consciousness, but the Sarvāstivāda school disagrees and postulates that initially it is contaminated and subsequently purified. The Mahāyāna schools admit that from the perspective of mundane conventions, the consciousness is considered as defiled or purified. However, ultimately its innate character is primordially or naturally pure and luminous. Apart from the Abhidharma ‘controversy’ about the initial state of the luminous mind, and apart from some other disagreements discussed in the body of this paper, the Abhidharma and Mahāyāna interpretations of the mind’s nature and luminosity are ingenious and insightful, and provide a magnificent but diversified wealth of information on its innate permutations.

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