

Citta–Kicca — Functions of the Mind

In Abhidhamma, the workings of mind (*mano*) can be analyzed from various viewpoints either as a type of consciousness (*viññāna*) determined by its object (*ārammana*) or as a state of mind (*citta*) determined by its function (*kicca*).

Here the functions of mind are treated as the process of cognition (*citta-vīthi*) occurring in time dimension, and as various realms of experience in their structural perspective that is process-free (*vīthi-mutta*).

The structural approach discerns 31 worlds that belong to the plane of suffering (*apāya-bhūmi*), the sensuous blissful plane (*kāma-sugati-bhūmi*), the plane of sublime forms (*rūpa-avacara-bhūmi*) and the formless plane (*arūpa-avacara-bhūmi*). All these planes are experientially accessible to a human being. Painful experiences and mental illnesses put him in the lower worlds of suffering, performances of rituals and meditation methods open up access to higher realms of sensual and supra-sensual happiness.

There are usually ten stages of the cognitive process repeatedly arising in a rapid sequence. This is though the case only while we cognize a clearly distinctive object of mind (*vibhūtam ālambanam*) and assuming to it a definitive attitude. While perceiving an object of one of the five senses, there may be up to sixteen stages of cognitive process, in case that the perceived object is gross (*mahantam ālambanam*). When the object is limited (*parittam ālambanam*), there might be only seven or even less cognitive stages. An object, which has a very slight impact (*atiparittam ālambanam*), would cause only a quivering within the continuous stream of becoming (*bhavanga-sota*) of the presently running process of experiencing. For the advanced practice of meditation, it is important to understand these differences in order to learn how to control the cognitive process.

The *Diagram 1* shows how links of becoming go on in time till a consciousness of an object impinges on the continuity of becoming (*bhavanga*) and causes it to quiver (*bhavanga-calana*) and — when the object is distinctive (*vibhūtam*) — to stop (*bhavanga-upaccheda*). Thereupon the stage of adverting (*āvajjana*) follows, which opens the mind-door for the object present at the outer base (*bahiddhā-āyatana*). Then comes the stage of seven times repeated influencing (*javana*), in which either wholesome or unwholesome mind-action (*kusala-, akusala-kamma*) takes place. If the whole cognitive process is clear enough, then the object-registration (*tad-ārammana*) comes twice.

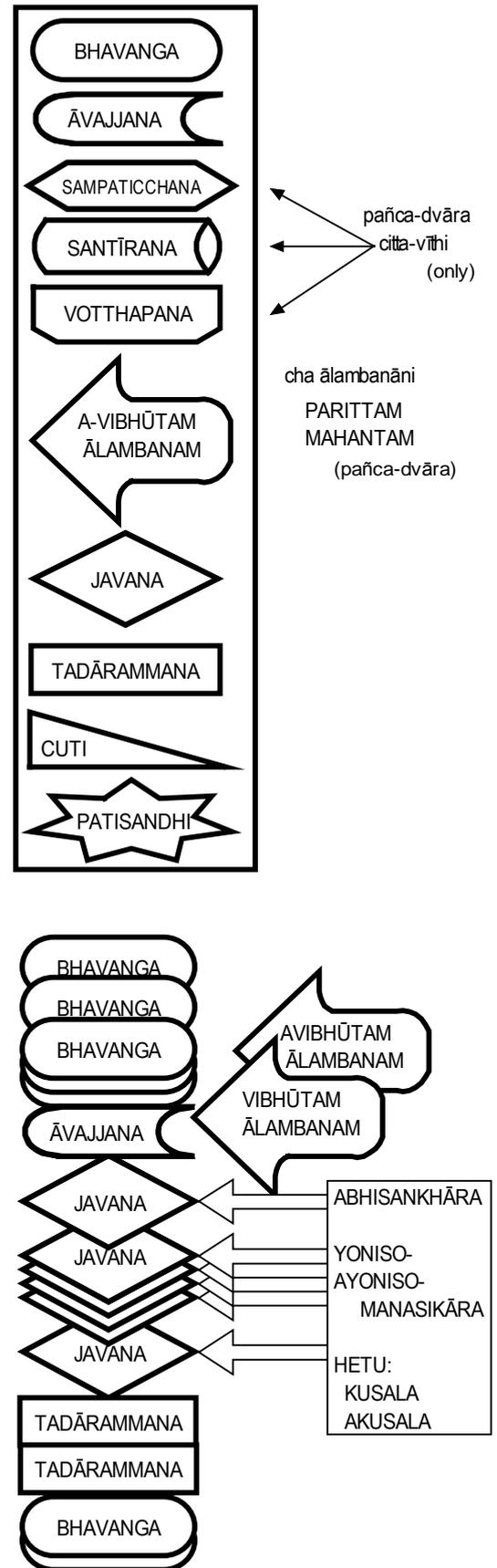
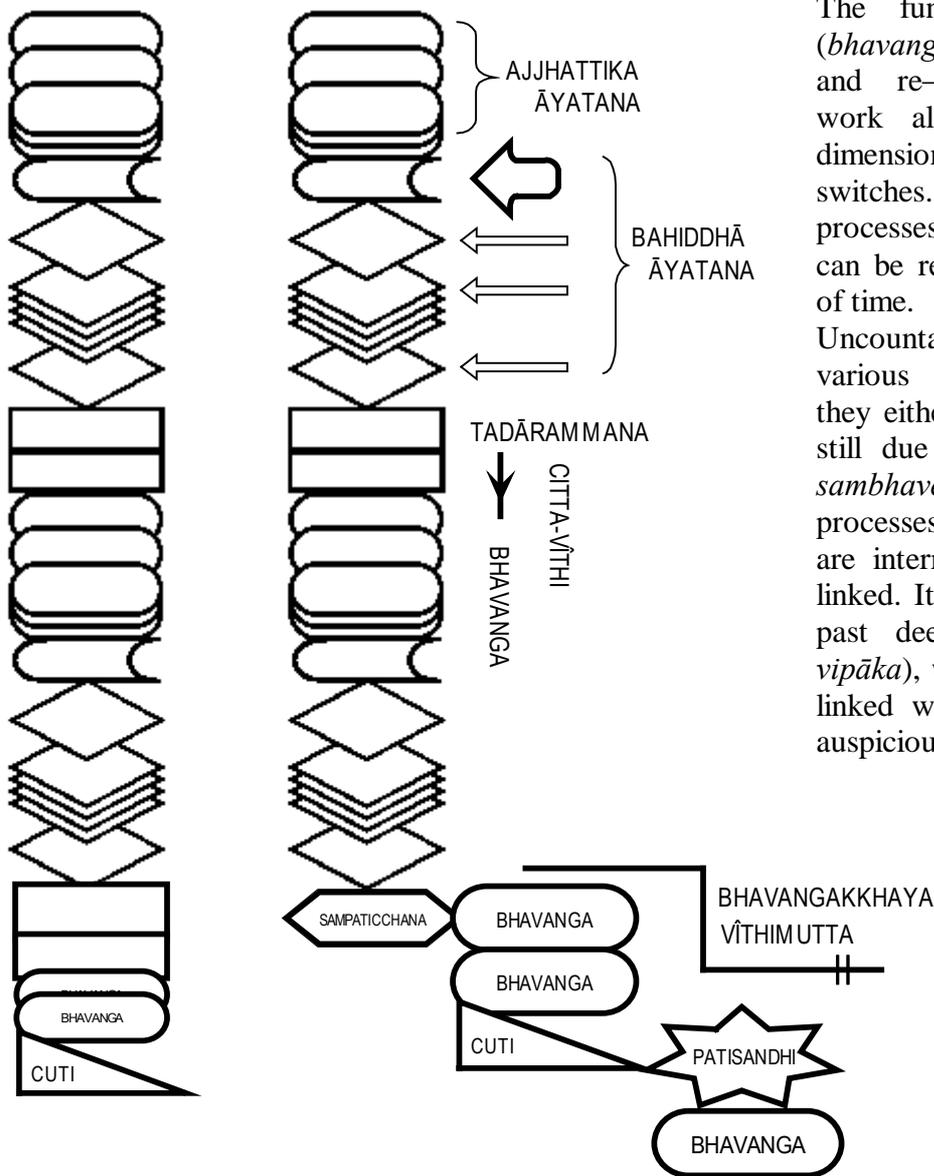


Diagram 1: The Stages of Cognition



The functions of becoming (*bhavanga*), interrupting (*cuti*), and re-linking (*pati-sandhi*) work also outside the time dimension as the structural switches. Those cognitive processes that are interrupted can be resumed after any lapse of time.

Uncountable beings exist in all various realms of existence; they either have become or are still due to become (*būtā vā sambhavesī vā*). Uncountable processes of becoming go on or are interrupted, due to be re-linked. It is just the question of past deeds' results (*kamma-vipāka*), what is going to be re-linked when the situation gets auspicious for it.

The *Diagram 2* shows interrupted processes — one cut without re-linking, the other at first getting less distinctive and ending in the stage of receiving (*sampaticchana*), thereafter cut off and, in no time, re-linked.

Diagram 2: Interrupted Cognitive Processes

As already mentioned, uncountable processes of becoming go on all the time and, in the mind that is scattered (*asamāhitam*), there is rapid switching between them. This opens up possibilities for various types of re-linking. Nevertheless, there is also switching between the *bhavangas* in a well functioning mind. The stage of influencing (*javana*) is borne by a cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) that arises from a past becoming (*atīta-bhavanga*) that became shattered by the impinging object. The new one is a visiting becoming (*āgantuka-bhavanga*). When there are two processes running parallel, one cognizing a gross (*mahanta*) sense object in a regular course of perception and the other one is naming it (*vitakkana*), then there is a root becoming (*mūla-bhavanga*) and a surface becoming (*pittha-bhavanga*). Each of the becomings is a continuity of consciousness defined by one and the same object (*ārammana*). There is no one *bhavanga* that would function in a person all his life as an unchangeable entity, as say some scholars who in this way subscribe to the belief in a lasting self (*atta-ditthi*).

All the discernments between the stages of cognition and switching between the experiential realms do serve the practical purpose of mind development (*bhāvanā*). To study them only theoretically would not do; one has to learn to mindfully see them — at best during the walking meditation (*cankamana*) and during the mindful everyday life mastering (*āyu-kusala*).