

THE PALIVERSE PROJECT

The Universe of Buddha's Wisdom

Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā)

3. The Canon of Higher Teaching - Commentaries
(3. Abhidhamma Piṭaka - Aṭṭhakathā)
2. Commentary on the Book of Analysis (2. Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā)
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PaliVerse

2. Commentary on the Book of Analysis

2. Analysis of Sense Bases

1. Commentary on the Suttanta Classification

154. Now, showing first the Suttanta classification in the exposition of the analysis of sense bases that follows next, he said beginning with "the twelve sense bases - the eye sense base, the visible form sense base." Therein, first by the method independent of the canonical text -

By meaning, characteristic, extent, sequence, brief and detailed treatment;
And likewise by how they should be viewed, the determination should be understood.

Therein, specifically first, it sees (cakkhati), thus it is the eye (cakkhu); the meaning is that it relishes visible form and makes it clear. It makes manifest (rūpayati), thus it is visible form (rūpaṃ); the meaning is that undergoing change of colour, it reveals the state of being pleasing to the heart. "It hears" (suṇāti) - thus it is the ear (sota). It falls forth (sappati), thus it is sound (saddo); the meaning is that it is uttered. "It smells" (ghāyati) - thus it is the nose (ghāṇa). It makes known its scent (gandhayati), thus it is odour (gandho); the meaning is that it indicates its own source. It invites life (jīvitaṃ avhāyati), thus it is the tongue (jihvā). Beings relish (rasanti) it, thus it is flavour (raso); the meaning is that they savour it. The body is the origin of contemptible phenomena with mental corruptions. "Origin" means the place of arising. It is touched (phusīyati), thus it is the tangible object (phoṭṭhabbaṃ). It cognises (manati), thus it is the mind (mano). They bear (dhārayanti) their own characteristics, thus they are mental phenomena (dhammā).

In a general sense, however, sense base (āyatana) should be understood as being from the sense base (āyatanato), from the extending (tanānato) of what has come (āyānaṃ), and from the leading (nayanato) of what is extended (āyatassa). For in the case of the eye, visible form, and so on, the mental and mental-concomitant states that have their respective doors and objects exert themselves (āyatanti), arise, strive, and endeavour through their respective functions such as experiencing - this is what is meant. And furthermore, these extend and spread out the states that have come into being - this is what is meant. And they lead on, they keep going, the suffering of the round of existence that has occurred in the beginningless cycle of existence, which is exceedingly extended, as long as it does not cease - this is what is meant. Thus all these states are called "sense base, sense base" because of being a sense base (āyatanato), because of extending what has come (āyānaṃ tanānato), and because of leading on what is extended (āyatassa nayanato).

Furthermore, a sense base should be understood in the meaning of dwelling place, in the meaning of a mine, in the meaning of a meeting place, in the meaning of a place of origin, and in the meaning of a cause. For thus in the world, in such expressions as "the lord's domain" and "Vāsudeva's domain" and so on, a dwelling place is called a

"sense base." In such expressions as "a gold mine" and "a silver mine" and so on, it means a mine. But in the teaching, in such passages as "Birds frequent that delightful place," it means a meeting place. In such expressions as "the southern route is the sense base of cattle" and so on, it means a place of origin. In such expressions as "in each and every case he attains the ability to witness, when there is a basis for mindfulness" and so on, it means a cause.

And in the eye, visible form, etc., the respective mental and mental-concomitant phenomena dwell, since their occurrence is dependent upon them - thus the eye and so on are their dwelling place. And in the eye and so on, they are found in abundance, since they depend upon them and since they take them as objects - thus the eye and so on are their mine. And the eye and so on are their meeting place, since they converge there in each case by way of base, door, and object. And the eye and so on are their birthplace; since they arise right there by way of depending upon them and by way of taking them as objects. And the eye and so on are their cause, since in the absence of those, they are absent. Thus, in the sense of dwelling place, in the sense of mine, in the sense of meeting place, in the sense of birthplace, and in the sense of cause - for these reasons these phenomena are called 'sense base, sense base.' Therefore, in the meaning as stated, it is the eye and it is a sense base, thus 'eye sense base' etc. they are mental phenomena and they are a sense base, thus 'mind-object sense base' - in this way the determination should be understood here 'by meaning.'

'By characteristic' - the determination should be understood here also by the characteristics of the eye and so on. And those characteristics of theirs should be understood in the same manner as stated below in the exposition of the materiality section.

'By extent' means by the state of being just so much. This is what is meant - for the eye and so on are indeed just phenomena. That being so, if it is asked: why are twelve sense bases stated instead of simply saying 'mind-object sense base'? Because of the determination of the doors and objects for the arising of the six groups of consciousness. Here, because of the determination of the six groups of consciousness by way of door and by way of object, this itself is their division - thus twelve are stated. For the group of consciousness included in the eye-consciousness cognitive process has the eye sense base itself as its door of arising, and the visible form sense base itself as its object. Likewise the others for the remaining ones. But for the sixth, only a portion of the mind sense base, reckoned as the life-continuum mind, is the door of arising, and the mind-object sense base, which is not shared, is the object. Thus, because of the determination of the doors and objects for the arising of the six groups of consciousness, twelve are stated. In this way the determination should be understood here 'by extent.'

'By order' - here too, among the orders of arising and so on stated previously, only the order of teaching is fitting. For among the internal sense bases, the eye sense base was taught first as being prominent, since its domain is visible and impingeable. Then the ear sense base and so on, whose domains are invisible but impingeable. Or alternatively, among the internal sense bases, the eye sense base and the ear sense base were taught first because of being of great benefit as the cause for the supreme seeing and the supreme hearing. Then the three beginning with the nose sense base.

And the mind sense base at the end, since it has the domain of all five as its range. And among the external sense bases, the visible form sense base and so on come immediately after each respective one of the eye and so on, since they are their respective domains. Furthermore, this same order of theirs should be understood also from the determination of the causes for the arising of consciousness. For this has been said: "Dependent on the eye and visible forms, eye-consciousness arises" etc. "Dependent on the mind and mental phenomena, mind-consciousness arises." In this way the determination should be understood here 'by order' as well.

"In brief and in detail": in brief, since the mind sense base and a portion of the mind-object sense base are included under mentality, and the remaining sense bases are included under materiality, all twelve sense bases are merely mentality-materiality.

In detail, however, among the internal sense bases, firstly, the eye sense base, by way of species, is merely eye-sensitivity, but by way of the distinction of conditions, destinies, groups, and individuals, it has infinite divisions. Likewise the four beginning with the ear sense base. The mind sense base has eighty-one divisions by way of the distinction into wholesome, unwholesome, resultant, and functional consciousness of the three planes, but by way of the distinction of basis, practice, and so on, it has infinite divisions. The visible form, odour, and flavour sense bases have four divisions each by way of the distinction of origination, and the sound sense base has two divisions. But by way of the distinction into similar and dissimilar, all of them have infinite divisions. The tangible-object sense base has three divisions by way of the earth element, fire element, and wind element, four divisions by way of origination, and manifold divisions by way of similar and dissimilar. The mind-object sense base has manifold divisions by way of mental objects of the three planes. Thus the determination should be understood in brief and in detail.

"As to how they should be regarded": here, however, all these sense bases should be regarded as not coming and not going. For they do not come from anywhere before their arising, nor do they go anywhere after their dissolution; rather, before arising they have not obtained their own nature, after dissolution their own nature is broken up, and in between the past and future extremes they occur without mastery, their existence being dependent on conditions. Therefore they should be regarded as not coming and not going. Likewise as without effort and without activity. For the eye, visible forms, and so on do not have such a thought: "Oh, may consciousness arise through our combination!" Nor do they strive by way of being a door, a basis, or an object for the purpose of producing consciousness, nor do they engage in activity; rather, it is just the nature of things that through the combination of the eye, visible forms, and so on, eye-consciousness and so on come into being. Therefore they should be regarded as without effort and without activity. Furthermore, the internal sense bases should be regarded as like an empty village, because they are devoid of permanence, beauty, happiness, and selfhood; the external sense bases should be regarded as like village-raiding bandits, because they assail the internal ones. For this was said: "The eye, monks, is struck by agreeable and disagreeable visible forms" etc. in detail. Furthermore, the internal sense bases should be regarded as like six creatures, and the external ones as like their respective feeding grounds. Thus the determination should be understood here "as to how they should be regarded."

Now, in order to show the mode in which they should be contemplated with insight,

the passage beginning with "the eye is impermanent" etc. has been commenced. Therein, firstly, the eye should be understood as impermanent in the sense of having come to be and then ceasing to exist. It is also impermanent for four further reasons: because it possesses arising and dissolution, because of change, because it is temporary, and because it is the negation of permanence.

That same eye is suffering in the sense of oppression. Or because, having arisen, it reaches a state of presence, while present it is afflicted by ageing, and having reached ageing it inevitably breaks up; therefore it is suffering for these four reasons: because of constant oppression, because it is the basis of suffering, because it is the foundation of suffering, and because it is the negation of happiness.

It is non-self in the sense of being not subject to control. Or because in these three instances - "let what has arisen not reach persistence, let what has reached persistence not decay, let what has reached decay not break up" - there is no state of exercising control for anyone, it is void of that mode of exercising control; therefore it is non-self for these four reasons: because of being void, because of having no owner, because of being not subject to one's wishes, and because of rejecting self.

It is subject to change because of going towards destruction, because of passing from one existence to another in terms of before and after, and because of abandoning its natural state. This is merely a synonym for impermanent. The same method applies also in the case of "visible forms are impermanent" etc. Moreover, here, setting aside the eye, the three-plane phenomena are impermanent, not the eye. But the eye is both the eye and impermanent. Likewise, the remaining phenomena are suffering, not the eye. But the eye is both the eye and suffering. The remaining phenomena are non-self, not the eye. But the eye is both the eye and non-self. The same method applies also to forms and so on.

But what has been shown by the Truth-finder in this Suttanta classification? The characteristic of non-self of the twelve sense bases. For the Perfectly Enlightened One, when showing the characteristic of non-self, shows it either by means of impermanence, or by means of suffering, or by means of impermanence and suffering. Therein, "whoever would say 'the eye is self,' that is not tenable. Both the arising and the passing away of the eye is evident. For one whose arising and passing away are discerned, it would follow thus: 'my self arises and passes away.' Therefore that does not arise - whoever would say the eye is self; thus the eye is non-self." In this sutta, the characteristic of non-self was shown by means of impermanence. "Materiality, monks, is non-self. If, monks, form were self, then form would not lead to affliction; and it would be possible with regard to materiality - 'let my form be thus, let my form not be thus.' But because, monks, form is non-self, therefore form leads to affliction; and it is not possible with regard to form: 'let my form be thus, let my form not be thus.'" In this sutta, the characteristic of non-self was shown by means of suffering. In such passages as "Form, monks, is impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering; what is suffering is non-self; what is non-self - that is not mine, I am not that, that is not my self," the characteristic of non-self was shown by means of impermanence and suffering. Why? Because impermanence and suffering are evident.

For when a plate or a cup or anything whatsoever falls from the hand and breaks, they say "Alas, impermanent!" Thus impermanence is well known. But when boils, abscesses and the like arise in one's body, or when one is pierced by stumps, thorns and the like, they say "Alas, suffering!" Thus suffering is well known. The characteristic of non-self is not well known, obscure, not manifest, difficult to penetrate, difficult to illuminate, difficult to make known. The characteristics of impermanence and suffering are discernible whether or not Truth-finders arise. The characteristic of non-self is not discernible without the arising of Buddhas; it is discernible only with the arising of Buddhas. For even ascetics and wandering ascetics of great psychic power and great might, such as the teachers Sarabhaṅga and others, are able to say "impermanent" and "suffering," but are unable to say "non-self." For if they were able to say "non-self" to an assembled congregation, there would be penetration of the path and fruit for that assembled congregation. For the making known of the characteristic of non-self is not the domain of anyone else; it is the domain only of omniscient Buddhas. Thus this characteristic of non-self is not well known. Therefore the Teacher, when showing the characteristic of non-self, showed it either by means of impermanence, or by means of suffering, or by means of impermanence and suffering. Here, however, it should be understood that he showed it by means of impermanence and suffering.

But due to the non-attention to what, due to the non-penetration of what, and due to being concealed by what, do these characteristics not become manifest? The characteristic of impermanence does not become manifest due to non-attention to arising and passing away, due to non-penetration thereof, and due to being concealed by continuity. The characteristic of suffering does not become manifest due to non-attention to constant oppression, due to non-penetration thereof, and due to being concealed by the postures. The characteristic of non-self does not become manifest due to non-attention to the resolution into the various elements, due to non-penetration thereof, and due to being concealed by compactness. But when arising and passing away have been discerned and continuity has been disrupted, the characteristic of impermanence becomes manifest in its true nature. When constant oppression has been attended to and the postures have been exposed, the characteristic of suffering becomes manifest in its true nature. When the various elements have been resolved and the resolution of compactness has been accomplished, the characteristic of non-self becomes manifest in its true nature.

And here this distinction should be understood: the impermanent is one thing, the characteristic of impermanence another; suffering is one thing, the characteristic of suffering another; non-self is one thing, the characteristic of non-self another. Therein, "impermanent" means the five aggregates. Why? Because of the nature of arising, passing away and change of condition, or because of non-existence after having been; arising, passing away and change of condition is the characteristic of impermanence, or the mode of change reckoned as non-existence after having been. But according to the statement "What is impermanent, that is suffering," that same fivefold group of aggregates is suffering. Why? Because of constant oppression; the mode of constant oppression is the characteristic of suffering. But according to the statement "What is suffering, that is non-self," that same fivefold group of aggregates is non-self. Why? Because of not being subject to control; the mode of not being subject to control is the characteristic of non-self. Thus the impermanent, suffering

and non-self are one thing, and the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self are another. For the five aggregates, the twelve sense bases and the eighteen elements - all of this is called impermanent, suffering and non-self. The modes of change of the kind stated are the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self.

In brief, herein ten sense bases belong to the sense-sphere, and two belong to the three planes. It should be understood that the method of comprehension has been stated with regard to all of them.

Commentary on the Suttanta Classification.

2. Commentary on the Abhidhamma Classification

155. In the Abhidhamma Classification, unlike below where the sense bases were stated in pairs as "the eye sense base, the visible form sense base" for the purpose of assisting insight meditators, without stating them in that way, for the purpose of seeing the intrinsic nature of the internal and external in every aspect, they were stated as "the eye sense base, the ear sense base" and so on, by the method of determining the internal and external.

156. In the section of their exposition, the passages beginning with "Therein, what is the eye sense base?" should be understood in the same manner as stated above.

167. Now, as to what was stated in the exposition of the mind-object sense base: "Therein, what is the unconditioned element? The elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion" - herein the meaning is as follows: "The unconditioned element" means nibbāna, which has an unconditioned nature. But since, by arriving at this, lust and the rest are eliminated, therefore it was stated "the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion." This is the agreed-upon commentary of the teachers on this matter.

But a sophist says - "There is no such thing as a separate nibbāna; the destruction of defilements alone is nibbāna." And when told "Bring a sutta," he brought this Jambukhādaka Sutta: "Friend Sāriputta, it is said 'nibbāna, nibbāna'; what, friend, is nibbāna? That which, friend, is the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion - this is called nibbāna." Having brought this Jambukhādaka Sutta, he said: "By this sutta it should be understood that there is no such thing as a separate nibbāna; the destruction of defilements alone is nibbāna." He should be told - "But is the meaning exactly as this sutta states?" He will certainly say: "Yes, there is no meaning apart from the sutta." Thereupon he should be told - "This sutta has been brought by you; bring the immediately following sutta." The immediately following sutta is: "Friend Sāriputta, it is said 'arahantship, arahantship'; what, friend, is arahantship? That which, friend, is the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion - this is called arahantship." This is the sutta brought immediately following that one.

But when this was brought, they said: "Nibbāna is a dhamma included in the mind-object sense base; arahantship is the four aggregates. The Marshal of the Dhamma, dwelling having realised nibbāna, whether asked about nibbāna or asked about arahantship, spoke only of the destruction of defilements. But are nibbāna and

arahantship the same or different?" "Let them be the same or different. What is the point of you making so much fuss about this?" "You do not know whether they are the same or different. Is it not good when something is known?" Thus, being asked again and again and unable to evade, he said: "Because arahantship arises when lust and the rest are eliminated, it is said 'arahantship is the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion.'" Then they said to her - "A great deed has been done by you. Even one paying a bribe to make you speak would have you say just this. And just as this has been explained by you through analysis, so consider this too: Since by arriving at nibbāna, lust and the rest are eliminated, it was stated 'nibbāna is the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion.' For all three of these are indeed designations of nibbāna itself."

If, when this is said, he comes to agreement, that is good; if not, he should be refuted by the multiplicity of nibbānas. How? He should first be asked thus - "Is the elimination of lust the elimination of lust only, or of hate and delusion as well? Is the elimination of hate the elimination of hate only, or of lust and delusion as well? Is the elimination of delusion the elimination of delusion only, or of lust and hate as well?" He will certainly say: "The elimination of lust is the elimination of lust only, the elimination of hate is the elimination of hate only, the elimination of delusion is the elimination of delusion only."

Thereupon he should be told - "According to your thesis, the elimination of lust is one nibbāna, the elimination of hate is one, the elimination of delusion is one; with the elimination of the three unwholesome roots there are three nibbānas, with the elimination of the four kinds of clinging there are four, with the elimination of the five hindrances there are five, with the elimination of the six groups of craving there are six, with the elimination of the seven underlying tendencies there are seven, with the elimination of the eight wrong states there are eight, with the elimination of the nine states rooted in craving there are nine, with the elimination of the ten fetters there are ten, with the elimination of the one thousand five hundred defilements there is a separate nibbāna for each - thus there are many nibbānas. There is then no measure of your nibbānas." But without holding thus, since the defilements of lust and so on are eliminated by arriving at nibbāna, the one nibbāna alone is called the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion. For all three of these are designations of nibbāna itself - accept this.

But if even when this is said he does not discern, he should be refuted by the coarseness argument. How? "For blind fools such as goats, leopards, deer, monkeys and the like, overcome by defilements, engage in sexual intercourse. Then at the end of their indulgence, the defilement subsides. According to your thesis, goats, leopards, deer, monkeys and the like would be attainers of nibbāna. Coarse indeed is your nibbāna, gross - it cannot be worn on the ears!" But without holding thus, since the defilements of lust and so on are eliminated by arriving at nibbāna, the one nibbāna alone is called the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion. For all three of these are designations of nibbāna itself - accept this.

But if even when this is said he does not discern, he should be refuted by the change-of-lineage argument as well. How? He should first be asked thus - "Do you assert that there is such a thing as change-of-lineage?" "Yes, I assert so." "At the moment of change-of-lineage, are the defilements eliminated, being eliminated, or will be

eliminated?" They are not eliminated, they are not being eliminated; however, they will be eliminated. "But what does the change-of-lineage take as its object?" "Nibbāna." "At your moment of change-of-lineage, the defilements are not eliminated, they are not being eliminated; however, they will be eliminated. You designate nibbāna as the elimination of defilements while the defilements are not yet eliminated, you designate nibbāna as the abandoning of underlying tendencies while the underlying tendencies are not yet abandoned. That does not accord with your position. But without holding thus, since the defilements of lust and so on are eliminated by arriving at nibbāna, the one nibbāna alone is called the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion. For all three of these are designations of nibbāna itself - accept this.

But if even when spoken to thus he does not discern, he should be dealt with by means of the path. How? He should first be asked thus - "Do you assert that there is such a thing as the path?" "Yes, I do assert so." "At the moment of the path, are the defilements eliminated, are being eliminated, or will be eliminated?" Knowing, he will say - "It is not fitting to say 'eliminated' or 'will be eliminated'; it is fitting to say 'are being eliminated.'" "If so, which nibbāna as the elimination of defilements belongs to the path? Which are the defilements being eliminated by the path? Having made which nibbāna as the elimination of defilements its object, which defilements does the path eliminate? Therefore do not hold thus. Rather, it is on account of nibbāna that lust and the rest are eliminated; thus the one nibbāna alone is called the elimination of lust, the elimination of hate, the elimination of delusion. For all three of these are designations of nibbāna itself."

When spoken to thus, he said - "Do you assert 'on account of, on account of'?" "Yes, I do assert so." "From where did you obtain this term 'on account of'?" "It was obtained from the suttas." "Bring forth the sutta." "Thus ignorance and craving, on account of that, are eliminated therein, are destroyed therein, and nothing whatsoever at any time." When spoken to thus, the opponent fell silent.

Here too, ten sense bases are of the sense-sphere; but two are of the four planes, and should be understood as a mixture of mundane and supramundane.

Commentary on the Abhidhamma Classification.

3. Commentary on the Questions Section

168. Here too, in the question-asking section, having asked all that is obtainable and that which is not obtainable, the answer has been stated only in terms of what is obtainable; and not only here, but in all question-asking sections the same method applies. Here, however, the indeterminate nature of the ten sense bases should be understood as being in the nature of materiality. The wholesome and other states of the two sense bases should be understood as for the four aggregates in the Analysis of Aggregates. For the four aggregates are entirely only with conditions and only conditioned, but regarding the mind-object sense base, it has come down that "it may be without conditions, it may be unconditioned." And in the object triads, the mind-object sense base that is without an object, reckoned as subtle materiality, falls into the not-stateable category. And that, because of being without an object, is not stateable in terms of limited and so forth, because of having a not-stateable dhamma

as object - this is the distinction here. The remainder is exactly the same. For here too, just as with the four aggregates, the two sense bases are of limited object with reference to one who has lust, one who has aversion, one who is deluded, one who restrains, one who directly knows, and one who reviews, regarding the fifty-five sense-sphere dhammas - all is just as stated regarding the aggregates.

In the Sammohavinodanī, the Commentary on the Vibhaṅga,

the Commentary on the Analysis of Sense Bases is finished.



ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

This translation is part of the PaliVerse Project - the first complete, unified English translation of the Pāli Canon together with its Commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā) and Subcommentaries (Tīkā), accompanied by interactive study tools. PaliVerse is an ongoing project. The AI translations are continuously improved through experts' revisions and feedback. This text is the latest translation as of the date of download.

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