

Four Kinds of Ultimate Truth



Citta

There are four kinds of ultimate truths accepted in Abhidhamma. The first is Citta. Citta is translated as consciousness. What is Citta? Citta is the pure awareness of the object. Here awareness means just pure awareness, not the awareness we use in meditation. In meditation we use the word 'awareness'. Awareness in meditation is actually mindfulness. In defining the word 'Citta', awareness means just the bare awareness. It

is knowing that something is there. It is something like that. That pure or bare awareness of the object is what is called 'Citta' in Abhidhamma. The word 'consciousness' is not an adequate word for the Pāli word 'Citta'. There is no better word for it, so we have to accept it as the translation for the word 'Citta'. Whenever we use the word 'consciousness', please understand in the Abhidhamma sense and not in the sense known by common people.

Consciousness is the pure or bare awareness of the object. It is like water which is clear. Citta is never without an object. According to Abhidhamma, we cannot block our minds from objects even though we are fast asleep. We still have this flow of consciousness going on. And so long as there is consciousness, there is the object of that consciousness. That object is obscure. So we are not aware of that object. Actually there is an object. That object serves as something for the consciousness to hold on to. Even when we are fast asleep, even when we have fainted or even when we are under anesthesia, there is consciousness going. Consciousness is never without an object. It is always with us. Whether we are asleep or awake, or whatever we are doing, there is always consciousness. In our life there is not a single moment when we are without consciousness. Conventionally we say he is unconscious. That means he has lost consciousness. In an ordinary sense that is true. According to Abhidhamma, he still has consciousness. There is still awareness of an object. In that case it is awareness of an obscure object. Citta is never without an object. And Citta is always with us. We Buddhists accept rebirth. Citta always goes on and on, not that it is permanent. This flow of Citta, this continuity of Citta goes on and on. Cittas are always with us.

There are synonyms for the word 'Citta'. The first one is Viññāṇa. In the formula for Dependent Origination the word 'Viññāṇa' is used. Saṅkhāra-paccayā Viññāṇaṃ. 'Viññāṇa' means Citta. Sometimes 'Mana' is used. Sometimes 'Ceta' is also used. The next ultimate reality is Cetasika. There you have Ceta. 'Ceta' means mind. Then sometimes mind or Citta is called Manasa. Sometimes it is even called Hadaya. 'Hadaya' means the heart. Both in English and in Pāli and perhaps in other languages as well, the heart and the mind are connected. The word 'heart' is a synonym for Citta or consciousness or the mind. We say, "He has a good heart" or something like that. That does not mean the physical heart. It means he has a good frame of mind. These words

are the synonyms of the word 'Citta'. Sometimes especially when something is written in verses, writers may use these words to conform to the meter of the verse. Sometimes you need only two syllables. Other times you need three syllables. When you need three syllables, you will use Viññāṇa. When you need only two syllables, you may use Citta or Mana. These are the synonyms of Citta.

There are 89 or 121 types of Cittas or consciousness recognized in Abhidhamma or taught in Abhidhamma. In the first chapter we will study the different types of consciousness in detail.

Cetasika

The second ultimate reality is Cetasika. You find the word 'Ceta' there. It is translated as mental factors, mental concomitants or maybe by some other names also. The definition is these which are yoked on Citta or those which are yoked with Citta. That means those which arise together with Citta depending on it. That is why they are called Cetasika.

Ceta is synonymous with Citta. Those that depend on Ceta for their arising are called Cetasika. Cetasikas are those that arise together or at the same time with Citta. Only when Citta arises can they arise. If there is no Citta arising, they cannot arise. Citta and Cetasikas arise at the same moment, at the same time, but if there is no Citta, there can be no Cetasikas.

Citta is bare awareness of the object, that is like a connection between yourself and the object. Without that connection how can one experience the object? How can there be feeling for that object? How can there be understanding of that object? How can there be remembering of that object? How can there be attachment to that object? In order for these mental states to arise there needs to be Citta. Citta is something like the connection between you and the object.

Cetasikas are those that depend on Citta for their arising. They arise together with Citta. There are four characteristics of Cetasikas.

1. They must arise together with Citta at the same moment, at the same time.
2. They must perish or disappear with Citta. So they arise and disappear together with Citta.
3. They must have the same object as Citta. If the Citta takes visible object as object, then the Cetasikas also take visible object as object. There is no such thing as Citta taking one object and Cetasikas taking another object. That is impossible. They must have the same object. They must take the same object as Citta takes.
4. They must have a common base. Common base means — for example, seeing consciousness depends on the eye. If you have no eyes, you do not see. There will be no seeing consciousness. Seeing consciousness is said to depend on the eye. Hearing consciousness depends on the ear. Smelling consciousness depends on the nose. Tasting consciousness depends on the tongue. Touching consciousness depends on the body. Knowing consciousness depends on the mind. They must have a common base. If Citta depends on the eye, then Cetasikas must also depend on the eye. These are the four characteristics. If any phenomenon answers to these four characteristics, that phenomenon is called a Cetasika.

There are some material properties that arise with Citta and perish together with Citta. But they do not take an object. They do not have a common base. So they are not called Cetasikas.

These are the four characteristics of Cetasikas. In order to know if something is a Cetasika, we can check with these four characteristics. If they have four characteristics, then we can say they are Cetasikas. They must arise simultaneously with Citta. They must disappear simultaneously with Citta. They must have the same object with Citta. They must have a common base or depend on the same base with Citta. How many Cetasikas are there? There are 52 Cetasikas. 52 Cetasikas are recognized in Abhidhamma.

Rūpa

The third reality is called Rūpa. The Pāḷi word is Rūpa. The English translation is matter. What is Rūpa? Rūpa is that which changes when coming into contact with adverse conditions such as cold, heat, etc., especially the Rūpa in your body. When you go in the sun and it is hot, there is one continuity of material properties. Then you go into the shade and there is another continuity of material properties. If you take a shower, there is another kind and so on. That which changes with cold, heat, hunger, thirst, bite of insects is called Rūpa or matter. Change here means obvious or discernable change. Mind changes more quickly than matter, but mind is not called Rūpa. The change of mind is not so evident, it is not so obvious, as the change of Rūpa. Only the change which is obvious, which is easy to see, which is easily discernable is meant by change here. That which changes with these adverse conditions is called Rūpa, matter. Rūpa exists in living beings as well as outside things.

There is Rūpa in our bodies. There is Rūpa in the house, in the trees and so on. Rūpa is both internal and external. Rūpa is both in living beings and outside things. Cittas and Cetasikas arise only in living beings. Rūpa has no ability to cognize. It doesn't know. You can hit the desk and it will not say, "Oh, this is painful." or something like that. Rūpa has no ability to cognize. It does not know. It does not take objects because it is the object itself.

There are 28 types of matter or material properties recognized in Abhidhamma. In Abhidhamma 28 material properties are taught. Although there may be different kinds of matter in our bodies, if we break them down to the ultimate realities, we get 28 kinds of matter. The material properties are comparable to the elements in chemistry. Is anyone familiar with the periodic table in chemistry? Here there are 28 material properties. They are put together in different ways like the chemical elements. They are comparable to the chemical elements, but not exactly the same as the chemical elements.

Nibbāna

The fourth ultimate reality is Nibbāna. This is the highest aim of Buddhists. What is 'Summum Bonum'? Is it the best, the highest? Nibbāna is defined as the extinction of desire, ill will and delusion. Actually it is the extinction of all mental defilements. It is like health or peace. Many people don't like the negative words to describe Nibbāna. But I think we cannot avoid using negative terms. We do not mean that Nibbāna is a negative state simply because we use negative terms to describe it. Let us take health as an example. What is health? No disease. Freedom from disease or having no disease is called health. So health is a positive state, but it is described as absence of disease, absence of illness. Peace is also like that. Nibbāna is the extinction of desire, ill will and delusion. Actually that means Nibbāna is the extinction of all mental defilements.

Also it is described as liberation or freedom from suffering. We can say it is the extinction of all suffering. It is unconditioned. Please note this. About two years ago someone gave me an article on Paṭicca-samuppāda. In that article the author said, "Nibbāna is conditioned". I was very surprised. She said, "Nibbāna is uncompounded, but it is conditioned". That is not correct. She did not understand the Pāḷi word 'Sankhata' correctly. Nibbāna is described as Asankhata. 'A' means not, so not Sankhata. Sankhata is translated as compounded by many authors. She took that as a correct rendering. So she accepted that Nibbāna is uncompounded. Nibbāna is not a compound of anything, but she said Nibbāna is not unconditioned. When the Buddha described Nibbāna, He used the word 'not made'. Not made and unconditioned are the same. Along with the word 'Asankhata' another word used is 'Akata'. 'Akata' means not made. Nibbāna is definitely unconditioned. There is no condition for Nibbāna. We cannot say Nibbāna exists because if we say Nibbāna exists we are saying it has a beginning and it must have an end. It is said that Nibbāna has no beginning and no end. Nibbāna is unconditioned and Nibbāna is not composed of any component parts. Nibbāna cannot be adequately described in everyday terms. Do you know the simile of the fish and the tortoise? A tortoise goes about on the land. He walks about on the land. Then he went into the water and talked to the fish. The fish asked him what he had been doing? The tortoise replied, "I walked on the land and saw trees" or something like that. The fish could not understand what that was because he had never been on the land. We have

never seen Nibbāna and so we cannot really understand. And also Nibbāna cannot be described adequately in everyday terms. It is totally out of this world. We always think in terms of this world, in terms of existence. Many people think Nibbāna is a place or some realm to go to or to reach. If we say Nibbāna is the extinction of all suffering and that means the extinction of the five aggregates, you may not want to go to Nibbāna. You may not want to realize Nibbāna because we all think in terms of existence. If we are going to go out of existence and not become anything again, would it be acceptable to you? So it cannot be described in everyday terms.

The Four Noble Truths Belong to Ultimate Truths

You may want to know how the Four Noble Truths relate to the four ultimate truths. The Noble Truth of Suffering means Cittas, Cetasikas and Rūpas. Supramundane Cittas are outside of the Four Noble Truths, strictly speaking according to Abhidhamma. The Supra-mundane Cittas do not belong to any of the Four Noble Truths. The Noble Truth of the Origination of Suffering, what is that? It is craving. Craving is one of the 52 mental factors or Cetasikas. The Second Noble Truth is a Cetasika which is craving or attachment. The Third Noble Truth is the cessation of suffering which is Nibbāna. The Third Noble Truth is the fourth ultimate truth. The Fourth Noble Truth, the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering or simply the Noble Eightfold Path — where does it belong? The Noble Eightfold Path is just a combination of eight Cetasikas, eight mental factors. The Fourth Noble Truth belongs to the second ultimate truth. The Four Noble Truths are included in the four ultimate truths. It is not one on one. The First Noble Truth belongs to the first ultimate truth, the second ultimate truth and third ultimate truth because it consists of Cittas, Cetasikas and Rūpas. The Second Noble Truth belongs to the second ultimate truth. The Third Noble Truth belongs to the fourth ultimate truth and the Fourth Noble Truth belongs to the second ultimate truth, Cetasikas. So the Four Noble Truths are included in the four ultimate truths.

When Buddha taught, He taught in different ways because His aim is for His listeners to understand and to realize the truth. Therefore, He taught with different methods for different people. That is why we have so many teachings, but actually they meet at some place and are the same. Buddha may use the word 'aggregates' for one group. To

another group He may use the word 'elements' or 'sense-bases'. Actually they mean the same thing. He taught the Four Noble Truths in His first sermon — the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Origination of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering — but in Abhidhamma He taught the four ultimate truths. Actually they are the same.

