

COMPENDIUM OF MATTER

(*Rūpasanḅavibhāga*)

Essence and references to page-numbers of “A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma”,
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p 234 ff The Pali word for **matter**, *rūpa*, is explained by derivation from the verb *rūppati*, which means, to be deformed, disturbed, knocked about, oppressed, broken. The commentators maintain that, matter is so called because it undergoes and imposes alteration owing to adverse physical conditions such as cold and heat.

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Enumeration of Material Phenomena (*rūpasamuddesa*)

The Abhidhamma enumerates twenty-eight types of material phenomena, which are briefly comprised in two general categories. **The four great essentials (*mahābhūta*)** are the primary material elements – earth, water, fire, and air. These are the fundamental constituents of matter which are inseparable and which, in their various combinations, enter into the composition of all material substances, from the most minute particle to the most massive mountain.

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The great essentials are called **elements (*dhātu*)** in the sense that they bear their own intrinsic natures (*attano sabhāvam dhārenti*). **Derived material phenomena (*upādāya rūpa*)** are material phenomena derived from, or dependent upon, the four great essentials. These are twenty-four in number. The great essentials may be compared to the earth, the derivative phenomena to trees and shrubs that grow in dependence on the earth.

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All these twenty-eight types of material phenomena are distributed into eleven general classes. Seven of these are called **concretely produced matter (*nipphannarūpa*)**, since they possess intrinsic natures and are thus suitable for contemplation and comprehension by insight. The other four classes are called **non-concretely produced matter (*anipphannarūpa*)**.

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Concretely produced matter

(1) The **earth element (*paṭhavīdhātu*)**: The earth element is so called because, like the earth, it serves as a support of foundation for the coexisting material phenomena. The word *paṭhavī* comes from a root meaning to expand or spread out, and thus the earth element represents the principle of extension. The earth element has the characteristic of hardness, the function of acting as a foundation for the other primary elements and derived matter, and manifestation as receiving. Its proximate cause is the other three great essentials. Both hardness and softness are modes in which the earth element is experienced by the sense.

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The **water element (*āpodhātu*)**, or fluidity, is the material factor that makes different particles of matter cohere, thereby preventing them from being scattered about. Its characteristic is trickling or oozing, its function is to intensify the coexisting material states, and it is manifested as the holding together or cohesion of material phenomena. Its proximate cause is the other three great essentials. Unlike the other three great essentials, the water element cannot be physically sensed but must be known inferentially from the cohesion of observed matter.

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The **fire element (*tejodhātu*)** has the characteristic of heat, its function is to mature or ripen other material phenomena, and it is manifested as a continuous supply of softness. Both heat and cold are modes in which the fire element is experienced.

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The **air element (*vāyodhātu*)** is the principle of motion and pressure. Its characteristic is distension (*vitthambana*), its function is to cause motion in the other material phenomena, and it is manifested as conveyance to other places. Its proximate cause is the other three great essentials. It is experienced as tangible pressure.

The four great essentials are founded upon the earth element, held together by the water element, maintained by the fire element, and distended by the air element.

- p 238 (2) **Sensitive material phenomena (*pasādarūpa*)** are five types of matter located in each of the five sense organs. The eye-sensitivity (*cakkhu-pasāda*) is the sensitive substance in the retina that registers light and colour and serves as a physical base and door for eye-consciousness. Its function is to pick up a visible datum as object.
Each of the other sensitive material phenomena – the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body – should be similarly understood.
- p 238 f (3) **Objective material phenomena (*gocararūpa*)** are the five sense fields which serve as the objective supports for the corresponding types of sense consciousness. Objective material phenomena have the characteristic of impinging on the sense bases. Their function is to be the objects of sense consciousness.
It should be noted that the tangible object is constituted by three of the great essentials: The water element, being the principle of cohesion, is not included in the tangible datum.
- p 239 (4) **Material phenomena of sex (*bhāvarūpa*)** are the two faculties of femininity and masculinity. These faculties have, respectively, the characteristic of the female sex and of the male sex. Their function is to show femininity and masculinity.
- p 239 (5) **Material phenomenon of the heart (*hadayarūpa*)**: The heart-base has the characteristic of being the material support for the mind element and the mind-consciousness element. Its function is to uphold them.
- p 239 (6) The **life faculty (*jīvitindriya*)** is the material counterpart of the mental life faculty, one of the seven universal *cetasikas*. Life, or vitality is called a faculty because it has a dominating influence over its adjuncts. The life faculty has the characteristic of maintaining the coexistent kinds of matter. Its function is to make them occur.
- p 239 f (7) **Edible food (*kabaḷīkhārāhāra*)** has the characteristic of nutritive essence (*ojā*), that is, the nutritional substance contained in gross edible food. Its function is to sustain the physical body.

p 240 **Non-Concretely Produced Matter**

The types of matter in groups (8) – (11) are designated non-concretely produced because they do not arise directly from the four main causes of matter but exist as modalities or attributes of concretely produced matter. Thus they are not included among the ultimate realities (*paramattha dhamma*).

- p 241 (8) **Space (*ākāśadhātu*)** is not bare geometric extension but the void region that delimits and separates objects and groups of material phenomena, enabling them to be perceived as distinct. The space element has the characteristic of delimiting matter. Its function is to display the boundaries of matter.
- p 241 (9) **Intimating material phenomena (*viññatirūpa*)**: *Viññatti*, **intimation**, is that by means of which one communicates one's ideas, feelings, and attitudes to another. There are two means of intimation, **bodily and vocal**.
The former is a special modification in the consciousness-originated air element which causes the body to move in ways that reveal one's intentions. The latter is a special modification in the consciousness-originated earth element which issues in speech one's intentions. Both have the function of displaying intention.
- p 241 (10) **Mutable material phenomena (*vikārarūpa*)**: This category comprises special modes or manifestations of concretely produced matter. It includes the two types of intimation and three other material phenomena: lightness, malleability, and wieldiness.
Lightness (*lahutā*) has the characteristic of non-sluggishness. Its function is to dispel heaviness in matter. **Malleability (*mudutā*)** has the characteristic of non-rigidity. Its function is to dispel rigidity in matter. **Wieldiness (*kammaññatā*)** has the characteristic of wieldiness that is favourable to bodily action. Its function is to dispel unwieldiness.

- p 241 (11) **Characteristics of material phenomena (*lakkhaṇarūpa*)**: This category includes four types of material phenomena.
Of these, **production (*upacaya*)** and **continuity (*santati*)** are both terms for the genesis, arising, or birth (*jāti*) of matter. **Decay (*jaratā*)** has the characteristic of the maturing or aging of material phenomena. **Impermanence (*aniccatā*)** has the characteristic of the complete breaking up of material phenomena.

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Classification of Matter (*rūpavibhāga*)

Matter is **singlefold**:

- All matter is **rootless (*ahetuka*)** because it does not associate with either the wholesome, unwholesome, or indeterminate roots, association with roots being restricted to mental phenomena.
- All matter is with **conditions (*sappaccaya*)** because it arises dependent on the four causes.
- (p 246) • It is **subject to taints (*sāsava*)** because it can be made object of the four taints (*āsava*).
- (p 265) • It is all **conditioned (*sankhata*)** and **mundane (*lokiya*)** because there is no matter that transcends the world of the five clinging aggregates.
- All matter is of the **sense sphere (*kāmāvacara*)**: though matter exists in the fine-material plane, it pertains by its nature to the sense sphere because it is the object of sensual craving.
- Matter is **objectless (*anārammaṇa*)** because, unlike mental phenomena, it cannot know an object;
- and it is **not to be abandoned (*appahāta*)** because it cannot be abandoned, like the defilements, by the four supramundane paths.

p 243 Matter is **manifold**:

- The sensitive material phenomena are **internal (*ajjhattika*)**; the rest are external. Here, the term ‘internal’ is used in relation to matter in a technical sense applicable only to the five types of sensitive materiality which serves as the doors for the mental phenomena.
- The sensitive organs and the heart are material phenomena that are **bases (*vatthu*)**; the rest are not bases.
- p 245 • The sensitive organs and the two media of intimation are material phenomena that are **doors (*dvāra*)**; the rest are not doors.
- p 245 • The sensitive organs, sex states and life are material phenomena that are **faculties (*indriya*)**; the rest are not faculties. The sensitivities are so called because they exercise a controlling power (*indra*) in their respective spheres. Each of these controls the coexistent material phenomena in exercising its specific function, such as seeing, hearing, etc. The sex faculty controls the manifestation of masculine or feminine features and traits. The life faculty controls the coexistent types of matter, as a pilot controls a ship.
- p 245 • The five sensitive organs and seven sense objects are **gross (*oḷārika*)**, **proximate (*santika*)**, and **impinging (*sappatigha*)** material phenomena; the rest are subtle, distant, and non-impinging. These three terms are used here in a technical sense which should not be confused with their ordinary connotations. The terms imply nothing about the relative size or nearness of the object.
- p 245 • Material phenomena born of kamma are ‘**clung-to**’ (*upādinna*); the others are ‘not clung-to’. The eighteen kinds of matter born of kamma are known as ‘clung-to’, because they have been acquired as the fruits of kamma motivated by craving and wrong view. Matter produced by causes other than kamma is known as ‘not clung-to’.
- p 245 • Eye and ear, as not **reaching their object (*gocaraggāhika*)**, and nose, tongue and body, as reaching (their object), are five kinds of material phenomena that take objects; the others are material phenomena that do not take objects.
- p 246 • The four great essentials and four derivatives – colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence – are known as **inseparable matter (*avinibbhogarūpa*)** because they are always bound together and are present in all material objects from the simplest to the most complex. The other types of material phenomena may be present or not, and are thus regarded as separable.

p 262 Table 6.3: Comprehensive Chart on Matter

Origination of matter (*rūpasamuṭṭhāna*)

p 247 **Kamma as a mode of origin:** Kamma here refers to volition (*cetanā*) in past wholesome and unwholesome states of consciousness. The twenty-five kinds of kamma that produce material phenomena are the volitions of the twelve unwholesome *cittas*, the eight great wholesome *cittas*, and the five fine-material wholesome *cittas*.

Kamma produces material phenomena at each sub-moment among the three sub-moments of consciousness – arising, presence, and dissolution – starting with the arising sub-moment of the rebirth-linking consciousness; it continues to do so throughout the course of existence.

p 247 **Consciousness as a mode of origin:** The seventy-five types of consciousness, excluding the immaterial-sphere resultants and the two sets of fivefold sense consciousness, produce material phenomena originating from consciousness beginning with the first moment of the life-continuum, but they do so only at the moment of arising. Mental phenomena are strongest at the moment of arising.

p 250 **Temperature as a mode of origin:** Beginning from the stage of presence at the moment of rebirth-linking, the internal fire element found in the material groups born of kamma combines with the external fire element and starts producing organic material phenomena originating from temperature.

p 250 **Nutriments as a mode of origin:** The internal nutritive essence, supported by the external, produces material phenomena at the moment of presence starting from the time it is swallowed.

p 252 f The Grouping of Material Phenomena (*kalāpayojana*)

Material phenomena do not occur singly, but in combinations or groups known as *rupakalāpas*, of which twenty-one are enumerated. All the material phenomena in a group arise together and cease together. They have a common base, namely, the conascent great essentials (*mahābhūta*), which are the proximate cause for the derivative phenomena as well as for each other. And they all occur together from their arising to their cessation.

A material group (*kalāpa*) that consists solely of the inseparable matter is known as a ‘**pure octad**’ (*suddhatṭhaka*). Life and the ‘pure octad’ together with eye are called the **eye decad**. ‘Pure octad’ together with life, are called the **vital nonad**; together with the material phenomena of the lightness triad, the **un-decad** of the lightness triad; the **dodecad** of bodily intimation and the lightness triad; and the **tridecad** of vocal intimation, sound, and the lightness triad.

p 262 Details see Table 6.3

p 255 f The Occurrence of Material Phenomena (*rūpappavattikkama*)

This section deals with the manner in which the material groups come into being at the moment of conception, during the course of existence, and in different realms.

p 255 In the sensuous world there are four kinds of birth, namely egg-born beings (*aṇḍaja*), womb-born beings (*jalābuja*), moisture-born beings (*saṃsedaja*), and beings having spontaneous birth (*opapātika*).

Thus the continuity of material groups produced in four ways – namely, kamma-born from the time of rebirth-linking, consciousness-born from the second moment of consciousness, temperature-born from the time of the stage of presence, nutriment-born from the time of the diffusion of nutritive essence – uninterruptedly flows on in the sense sphere till the end of life, like the flame of a lamp or the stream of a river.

At the time of death, kamma-born material phenomena cease. Following that, the consciousness-born and nutriment-born material phenomena come to cessation. Thereafter, a continuity of material qualities produced by temperature persists in the form of the corpse.

p 257 In the fine-material world, the decades of nose, tongue, body, sex, and the material groups produced by nutriment are not found. Therefore, to those beings, at the time of rebirth-linking there arise four material groups produced by kamma – the three decades of eye, ear, and heart-base, and the vital nonad. During the course of existence, material phenomena produced by consciousness and by temperature are found.

p 257 Among the non-percipient beings, the eye, ear, heart-base, and sound are also not found. Similarly, no consciousnesses-born material phenomena are found.

p 258 f **Nibbāna**

Nibbāna is the fourth ultimate reality. Etymologically, the word *nibbāna* is derived from a verb *nibbāti* meaning ‘to be blown out’ or ‘to be extinguished’. It thus signifies the extinguishing of the worldly ‘fires’ of greed, hatred, and delusion. But the Pali commentators prefer to treat it as the negation of, or ‘departure from’ (*nikkhantatta*), the entanglement (*vāna*) of craving, the derivation which is offered here. For as long as one is entangled by craving, one remains bound in *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death; but when all craving has been extirpated, one attains *Nibbāna*, deliverance from the cycle of birth and death.

p 259 *Nibbāna* is called **onelfold** as it is a single undifferentiated ultimate reality. It is exclusively supramundane abundance, and has **one intrinsic nature** (*sabhāva*), which is that of being the unconditioned deathless element totally transcendent to the conditioned world.

By reference to a basis for distinction, *Nibbāna* is said to be **twofold**. The basis for distinction is the presence or absence of the five aggregates. The element of *Nibbāna* as experienced by Arahants is called ‘**with the residue remaining**’ (*sa-upādisesa*) because, though the defilements have all been extinguished, the ‘residue’ of aggregates acquired by past clinging remains through the duration of the Arahant’s life. The element of *Nibbāna* attained with the Arahant’s demise is called that ‘**without the residue remaining**’ (*anupādisesa*), because the five aggregates are discarded and are never acquired again.

p 260 It is **threefold** according to its different aspects, namely, **void**, **signless**, and **desireless**. *Nibbāna* is called the void (*suññata*) because it is devoid of greed, hatred, and delusion, and because it is devoid of all that is conditioned. It is called signless (*animitta*) because it is free from the signs of greed, etc., and free from the signs of conditioned things. It is called desireless (*appaṇihita*) because it is free from the hankering of greed, etc., and because it is not desired by craving.