

AYATANAS, SENSORS AND SENSING

By
David Tin Win*

Abstract

The five sensing processes: stimuli, sensors, feeling, perception, and response are examined from Buddhist and Science aspects. Parallels and differences are identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

One important major function of life is sensing - oneself and the environment. The sensing processes generally include stimuli from the environment that impact with the internal sensors producing consciousness and perception, leading to mental, verbal or physical responses. Buddha had explained this in the Ahbidhamma (Buddhist Canon) over 2,500 years ago. Science had generally neglected the mind and had developed along physical or material paths, until relatively recent times.

Mind and matter may belong to either of three major function types:

1. **Space - Time function (Rupakhanda - particles)** detected by the five senses (thought excluded).

2. **Time only function [Namakhanda (Citta, Cetasika) + Rupakhanda - waves (light, sound)],** detected by the five senses and the mind.

3. **Timeless - Spaceless function (Nibbana)** detected by **mind**.

Note: Buddhism identifies Rupa, Nama (Citta and Cetasika) and Nibbana as the four Paramatta truths (ultimate realities). These four items are the only ones that really exist. All others are relative

or Panatti realities.

In observing and acquiring knowledge science uses five senses only and is thus limited to sense-data. Consequently perception is bounded; impression is DISTORTED and understanding is INCORRECT. Science knows only time-space functions and some time only functions such as waves like light and sound. It does not know timeless - spaceless functions. It does not know nibbana. Science truth is changeable and relative (Panatti Truth). It is true at the respective lower consciousness levels. Buddhism calls this **avijja** or ignorance of the ultimate realities.

In addition to the five senses Buddhism uses the mind: mental experiences via dhammayatana, manodvara, manodhatu, and manovinanna. It transcends sense-data. Hence perception is unbounded, true impressions are obtained; understanding is CORRECT. Insight is achieved. Thus Buddhism knows time-space functions, time only functions (Citta, Cetasika - waves) and timeless - spaceless function (nibbana). Buddhist truth is unchangeable and absolute (Paramatta Truth). It is true at the unique ultimate consciousness level. Buddhism calls this vijja.

The methodology of Buddhism and science are closely similar if not identical. The major difference being that Buddhism does a detached

*Professor David Tin Win holds a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from Strathclyde University, Glasgow, U.K. He is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Science and Technology, Assumption University of Thailand. He is the author of several articles on Buddhism and Meditation.