

Summary and Key Points of what is the difference between Awareness and Consciousness

Summary

This document is a transcript of a Dhamma talk given by Bro. Teoh Kian Koon on July 11, 2019, exploring the crucial distinction between **Awareness (Sati)** and **Consciousness (Viññāṇa)**. The talk emphasizes that while consciousness involves the functioning of the six sense doors (seeing, hearing, etc.), true awareness is a deeper, innate quality of the mind—a pure, non-reactive knowing that exists before conceptual labelling and mental stirring. Bro. Teoh explains the difference using concepts from both Theravada and Mahayana traditions, detailing the nine types of consciousness and relating them to the five aggregates. He provides a comprehensive framework for practice, centering on the **Avijjā Sutta's 10 steps to liberation**, which begins with noble friendship (Kalyāṇamittatā) and culminates in enlightenment. The talk concludes with a personal account of the "collapse of the mundane mind," where the supramundane nature (the unconditioned) shines forth.

Key Points

1. Core Distinction: Awareness vs. Consciousness

- **Consciousness (Viññāṇa):**
 - Related to being awake and functioning through the six sense doors (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind).
 - It involves the processing of sense data and can occur without true awareness (e.g., being lost in thought, in a dreamy state, or heedless).
 - In the context of the *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (Dependent Origination), Viññāṇa is the third link—the pure consciousness *before* content is added.
- **Awareness (Sati):**
 - Equivalent to *Sati* (mindfulness) in its deepest sense: pure awareness *before* the knowing.
 - It is an inner, non-reactive knowing that can be present even during sleep or unconsciousness for advanced meditators.
 - **Two stages/modes of Awareness:**
 1. **Specific Phenomena Awareness:** Awareness and the phenomenon move as one. The meditator is aware of thoughts, feelings, bodily movements, and mental states.

2. **Spacious Awareness:** A silent, centerless awareness that has merged with nature, leading to a sense of oneness.

2. Understanding the Three Pali Terms for Mind

Bro. Teoh clarifies the subtle differences between:

- **Mano:** The mundane, thinking mind (e.g., used in Dhammapada verses 1 & 2: "Mind is the forerunner..").
- **Citta:** Refers to the thought (consciousness *with its* mental content); as used in *Cittānupassanā* (mindfulness of the content of consciousness).
- **Viññāṇa:** Pure consciousness without content; the third link in Dependent Origination.

3. The Nine Consciousnesses (Mahayana Context) Explained via Theravada

Bro. Teoh bridges the two traditions by explaining the nine consciousnesses as manifestations of the five aggregates:

- **1st–5th:** Basic sense-door consciousnesses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile).
- **6th (Manovijñāna or mind consciousness / 第六识):** *Saññā* (perception)—the aggregate that brings external sense data or form into the mind.
- **7th (Kliṣṭamanas or kelisa manas / 第七识):** The egoic, discriminative mind (part of the *Saṅkhāra* aggregate). It creates likes/dislikes, mental hindrances, and karma.
- **8th (Ālaya / 第八识):** The "storehouse consciousness" where karmic accumulations reside. It is the result of the 7th consciousness.
- **9th:** The unconditioned—Nibbāna, Buddha Nature, or True Nature. **This is not a consciousness**, but a term used for the supramundane.

4. The Avijjā Sutta: 10 Steps to Liberation

A major framework for practice is outlined:

Step 1. Noble Friendship (Kalyāṇamittā): Having spiritual friends who walk the path of dhamma, who can guide, counsel, motivate and show the way.

Step 2. Listening to the True Dhamma: Regularly hearing authentic teachings.

Step 3. Faith (Saddhā): Faith in the Buddha and his teachings.

Step 4. Yonisomanasikāra (Wise Attention): The initial wisdom born of constant reflection and contemplation.

Step 5. Sati-Sampajañña (Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension): Stable daily mindfulness with clear comprehension.

Step 6. Sense Restraint (Indriyasamvara): Naturally arising from stable mindfulness and wisdom.

Step 7. Three Ways of Right Conduct: Right speech, right action, and right livelihood become consistent.

Step 8. Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna): Cultivated with ease after the previous steps.

Step 9. Seven Factors of Enlightenment (Satta Bojjhaṅga): Arise spontaneously when practicing correctly.

Step 10. Enlightenment in the Here and Now: The final goal.

5. Key Practices and Insights

- **The 5 Daily Contemplations:** Reflecting daily on aging, sickness, death, separation from loved ones, and the ownership of one's kamma. These help prepare the mind to accept the realities of this body and life without suffering.
- **Three Right Views (Niyamas):**
 1. **Kamma Niyāma:** The law of moral causation.
 2. **Citta Niyāma:** The nature's order of mind (how the mind functions, e.g., Dependent Origination).
 3. **Dhamma Niyāma:** The universal truth of Dhamma (e.g., the three universal characteristics, the essential dhamma of the Buddha).
- **Overcoming Mental Hindrances:** The talk emphasizes the "meditative way" (the third of five ways) to handle mental hindrances: simply silence the mind and maintain awareness. Like muddy water settling, the hindrances, being conditionally arisen and non-intrinsic, will cease on their own when not fed by further mental thinking and stirring.

6. The Goal: Collapse of the Mundane Mind and Nature Shining Forth

- When wisdom and mindfulness become extremely stable and refined, the "mundane mind" (the gross, egoic, discriminative mind) collapses.
- This collapse is described as a layer of gross consciousness dropping off, allowing the **supramundane mind** or **true nature** to shine forth.

- This is the "mind that has no dwelling" (無住) as taught by the 6th Patriarch, Hui Neng. At this stage, mindfulness becomes automatic, and the three universal characteristics (anicca, dukkha, anattā) are seen clearly at all times.

7. Practical Advice

- **Acting According to Wisdom vs. Memory:** Unenlightened beings act according to memories, views, opinions, conditioning and belief system etc. With Dhamma understanding, one must learn to act according to wisdom and right view.
- **Heedfulness (Appamāda):** Emphasized as the path to the deathless (Dhammapada 21). It combines constantly meditative and ever mindful state of mindfulness in daily life.
- **Sati-Sampajañña:** Crucial for realizing step 5 (Avijja sutta); it is the foundation upon which sense restraint, right conduct, and deeper meditation are built.

In summary, the document presents a detailed and practical map of the mind, contrasting the conditioned, reactive nature of ordinary consciousness with the unconditioned, liberating quality of true pure awareness. It provides a clear path (the 10 steps of the Avijjā Sutta) for cultivation, bridging theoretical understanding with direct meditative experience.