

Go With The Flow

Flow charts and explanations of *Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā* with regards to the objects used as the practice develops

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Venerable Sujiva is a renowned *Vipassanā* Meditation teacher in Malaysia, Europe and other parts of the world. For several decades now, he has conducted countless meditation retreats for the benefit of truth seekers and his discerning skills and deep understanding of the Buddhist teachings make him a much sought-after teacher and guide.

Introduction

These flow charts came about when I was in Burma pondering why the masters who although did not tell us why we should pay attention to this object rather than another. It occurred to me that they had good reasons and I first came up with the idea of priority of objects. Later it turned out into a more diagrammatic form of flow charts. The original form was mainly on body mindfulness and feeling mindfulness but later with my own practice and observations included those on Consciousness.

Recently a yogi noted that a small booklet explaining these flow charts with some explanations would be useful to practitioners. I agreed and so this is what you have here.

These flow charts point out the choice of objects to follow and observe when one practices *Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā* Meditation. Unlike the practice of pure tranquility meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*), whose object is adhered to as it is being developed from the preliminary image (*parikamma nimmitta*) to the mirror image (*paṭibhāga nimmitta*), in *Vipassanā* it is otherwise. This is because in *Vipassanā* the object is a process of an ultimate reality that is non-conceptual, although it still has its conceptual connections at the start. It is later more precisely directed to its transcendental nature described as the three universal characteristics, i.e. impermanence, suffering and non-self. And so, to be an object of insight meditation, it would have to be a process, a quality or characteristic that changes moment to moment naturally, otherwise it is best dismissed as unsuitable. This and other conditions too many to mention here implies a choice of the objects suitable to the occasion and to the point of development.

This flow charts do not by all means indicate they are the only way as things might go, but in most cases with most people practicing insight meditation according to the method expounded by the most venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw of Burma would apply.

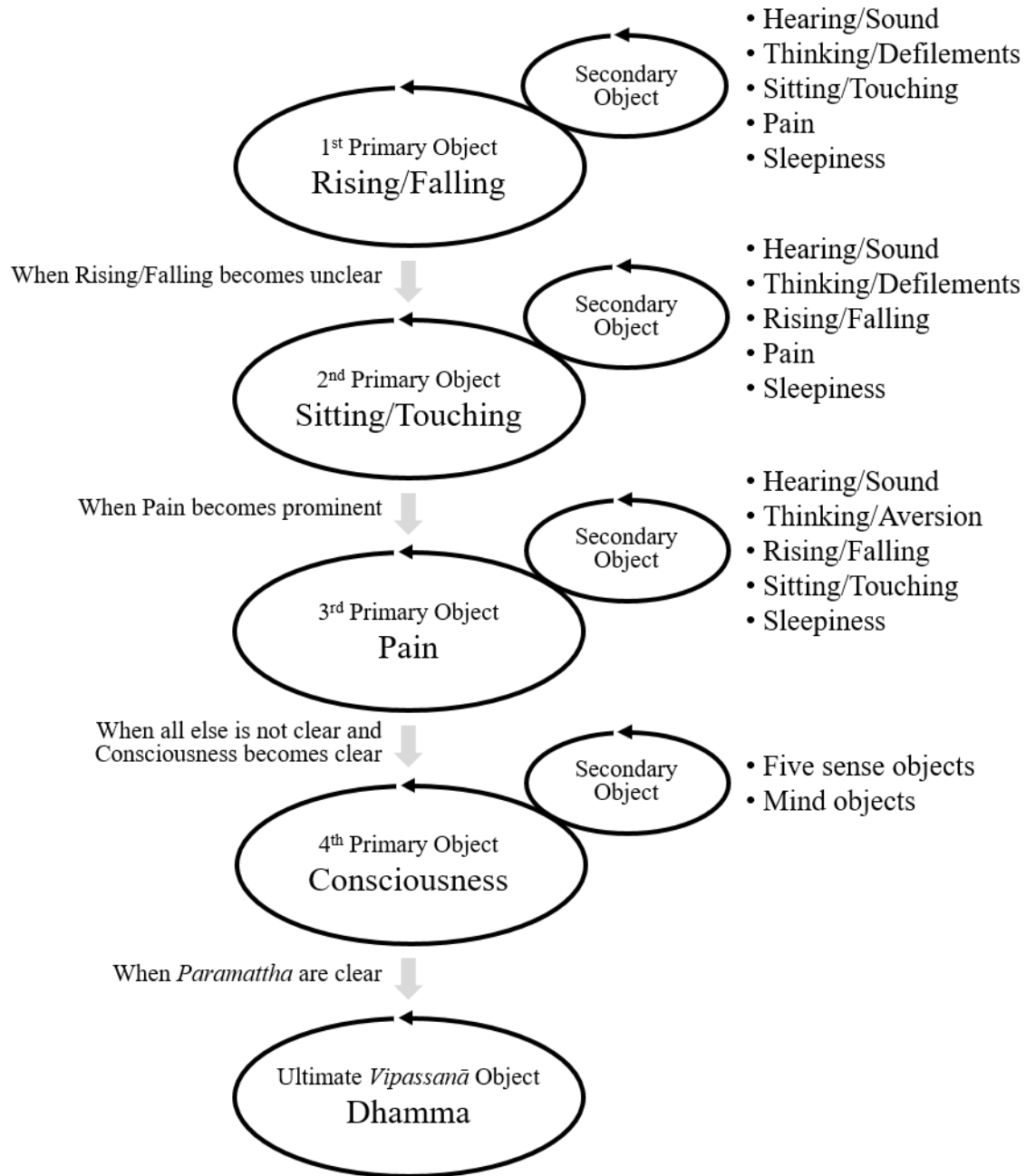
Again the reader must bear in mind that one should not adhere dogmatically to what one reads. One has to be flexible. The guideline here is mindfulness and better still *Vipassanā* Mindfulness. The object is nevertheless important like the road that leads to its destination. Still, the critical factor is the driver. This is because that if one has true *Vipassanā* Mindfulness, the object would naturally be a *Vipassanā* object although it may not be the ideal one for the occasion.

There is however something missing in this booklet, that is, a flow chart for the fourth foundation – Mindfulness of Natural Phenomena (*Dhammānupassanā*). That would have to wait for a later date to find it written.

Sujiva

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Sitting Meditation



Sitting Meditation

The **Primary Object** is the object that the yogi uses as the main object to develop mindfulness and concentration.

The **Primary Object**, first used in the Satipaṭṭhāna-vipassanā Meditation taught by the Most Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, is usually the **Rising/Falling** of the abdomen. Sometimes the In/Out of the breath at the nose is used instead, when the **Rising/Falling** object is not suitable. Both are natural bodily processes, which are part of the Contemplation of the Body (*kāyānupassanā*) and they correspond to the “grosser materiality” (*oḷārikarūpa*): 5 sensitive organs (sensitive part of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and 7 sense data (visible-object, sound, smell, taste, hardness, temperature, and pressure/movement).

The **Secondary Object** is used instead of the **Primary Object** when:

1. The **Primary Object** is insignificant, difficult to perceive or absent
2. The **Secondary Object** is stronger and more dominating. If this occurs for an extended period of time, then it becomes the **Primary Object**.

Secondary Objects usually do not last in the presence of **Primary Objects**; they either disappear or fade to the background. When this happens, the **Secondary Object** can be ignored. Defilements/hindrances are unwholesome and should not be taken as **Secondary Objects**. If defilements/hindrances continue to increase, this indicates the absence or weakness of mindfulness and so firm action should be taken.

When the **Primary Object** and **Secondary Object** are of equal strength, the **Primary Object** is followed chiefly while keeping an eye on the **Secondary Object**. As long as the **Primary Object** can be followed satisfactorily, it is still held onto, even if it may be weaker than the **Secondary Object**. It is only when the **Secondary Object** draws attention too strong and too often.

Sitting/Touching refers to bodily sensations used in mindful observation. **Sitting** refers to internal sensations such as tension in the spine and limbs that maintain the posture. **Sitting** is alternated with **Touching**, which refers to sensations at the body surface such as when the hands touch each other or when the buttocks touch the floor. Different teachers promote different approaches to **Sitting/Touching**.

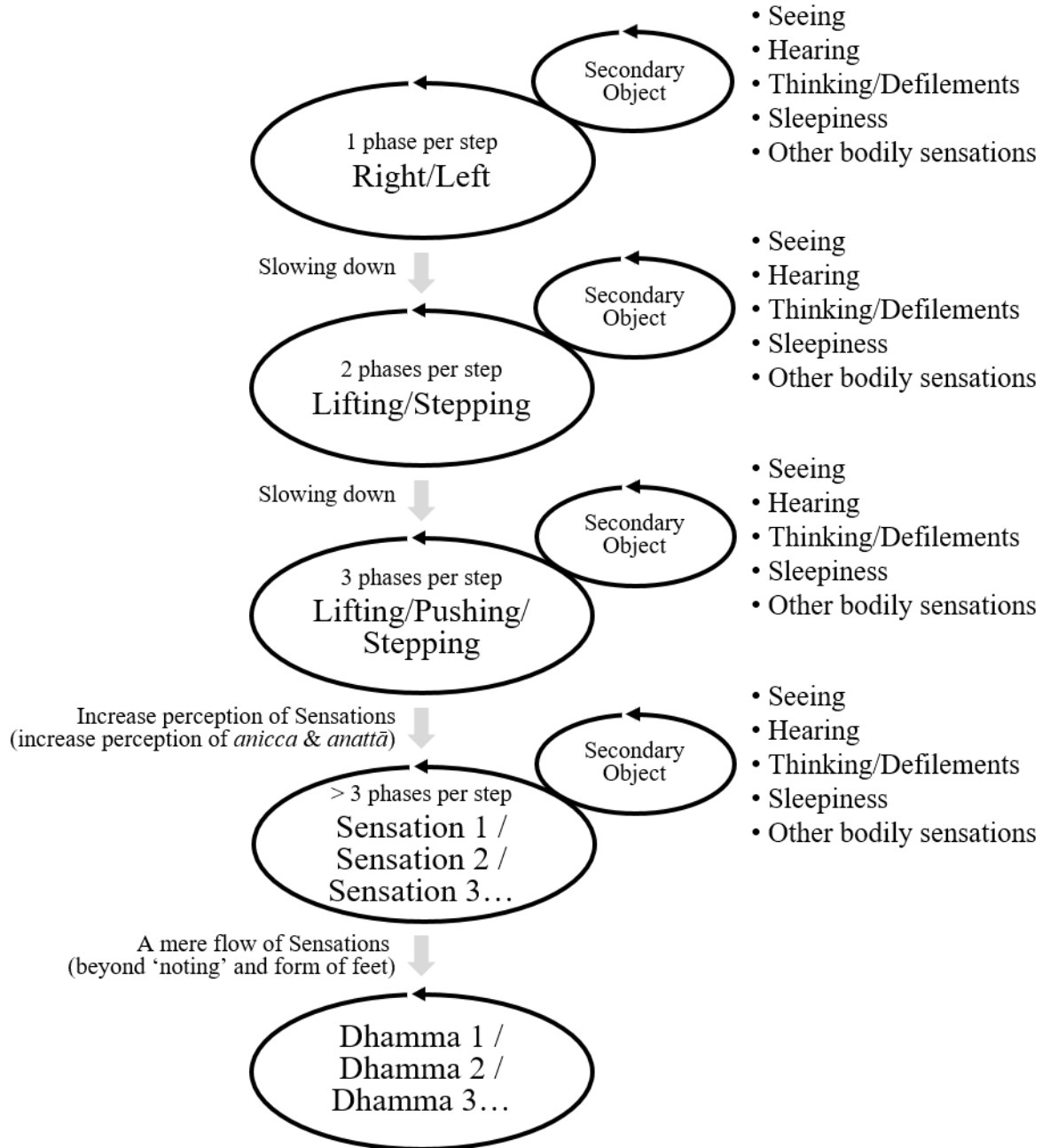
Pain becomes the **Primary Object** when it becomes strong and persistent and so it has to be attended to. You should watch **Pain** as long as you can maintain mindfulness satisfactorily. When mindfulness is weak or absent, it is better to change posture to continue being mindful.

Consciousness becomes the **Primary Object** when all other objects become insignificant or unclear.

Paramattha are “ultimate realities” that exist because of their own intrinsic nature. These phenomena are experienced directly as specific characteristics/qualities by one whose mindfulness is sharp, discerning and non-conceptual.

Dhamma is used as the **Primary Object** when you use a phenomenon other than body, feelings, or consciousness. **Dhamma** is used as the **Primary Object** when you have advanced to the first insight knowledge of *anattā* and beyond.

Walking Meditation



Walking Meditation

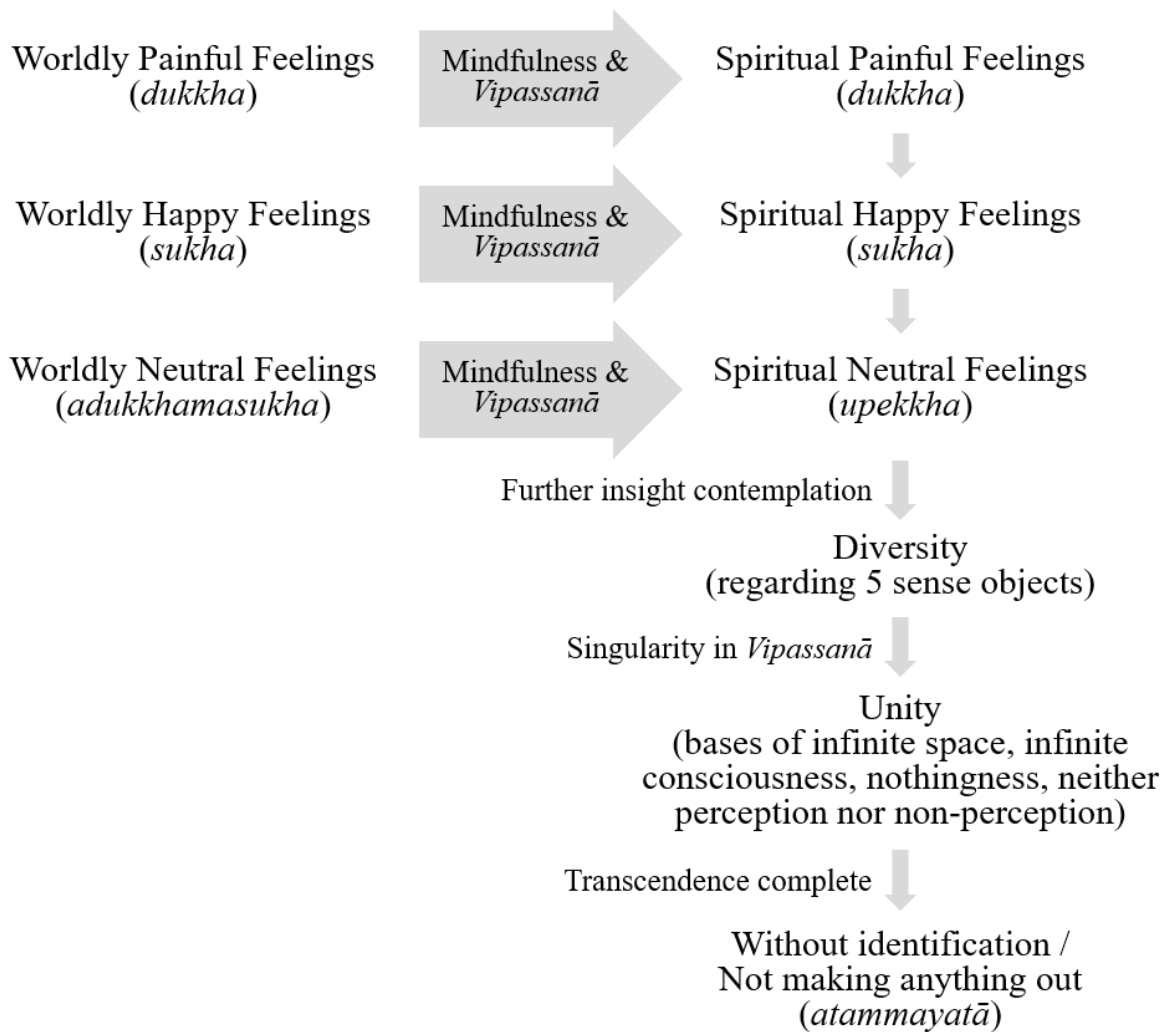
During walking meditation, the **Primary Objects** are the experiences of the foot. You should follow one foot at a time, focusing on the moving leg, even when the stationary foot produces sensations which are nevertheless noticed by mindfulness.

The increase of phases per step comes together with mindful noting and it serves to draw your attention closer to the process. When the phases are increased, the pace of walking naturally slows down. The phases can be increased from one to six, depending on the conditions that warrant it. Six phases would include: 1. Raising (heel), 2. Lifting (leg), 3. Pushing, 4. Dropping, 5. Treading (foot), and 6. Pressing. What is important is the progress of mindfulness, not the speed or number of phases.

All other objects are treated as **Secondary Objects**. When you are mindful of the foot, the **Secondary Objects** are simply noted. **Secondary Objects** are considered to have been automatically taken note of mindfully. You do need not specially note them unless it becomes obvious that you need to (for example, someone comes to speak to you, a strong vision or sound distracts you, etc.).

Eventually, the sensations and their flow are noticed mindfully. When this happens, the form of the foot is left out. This may happen either unintentionally or intentionally. The types of Dhammas (**Dhamma 1** / **Dhamma 2** / **Dhamma 3** ...) experienced include the “ultimate realities” (consciousness, mental factors, matter, and even *Nibbāna*).

Contemplation of Feelings



Contemplation of Feelings

The flowchart is based on the *Saḷāyatanaṅga Sutta* (Analysis of the Six Sense Bases) of the Majjhima Nikāya (MN 137).

The first part is the transformation/conversion of worldly feelings into spiritual feelings:

Worldly painful → **Spiritually painful**

Worldly pleasurable → **Spiritually happy**

Worldly indifferent → **Spiritually equanimous**

Then a further transformation from

Spiritually painful → **Spiritually happy** → **Spiritually equanimous**

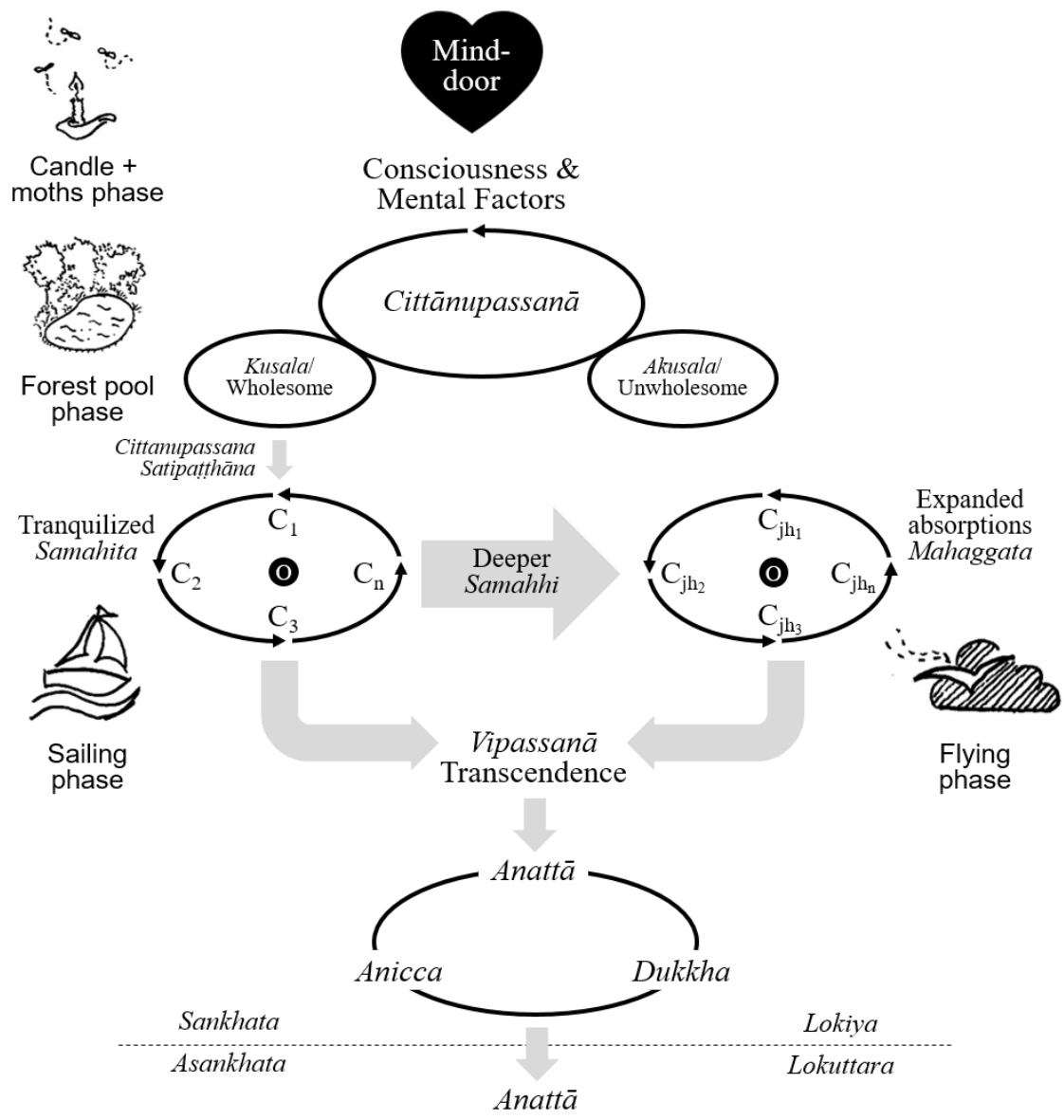
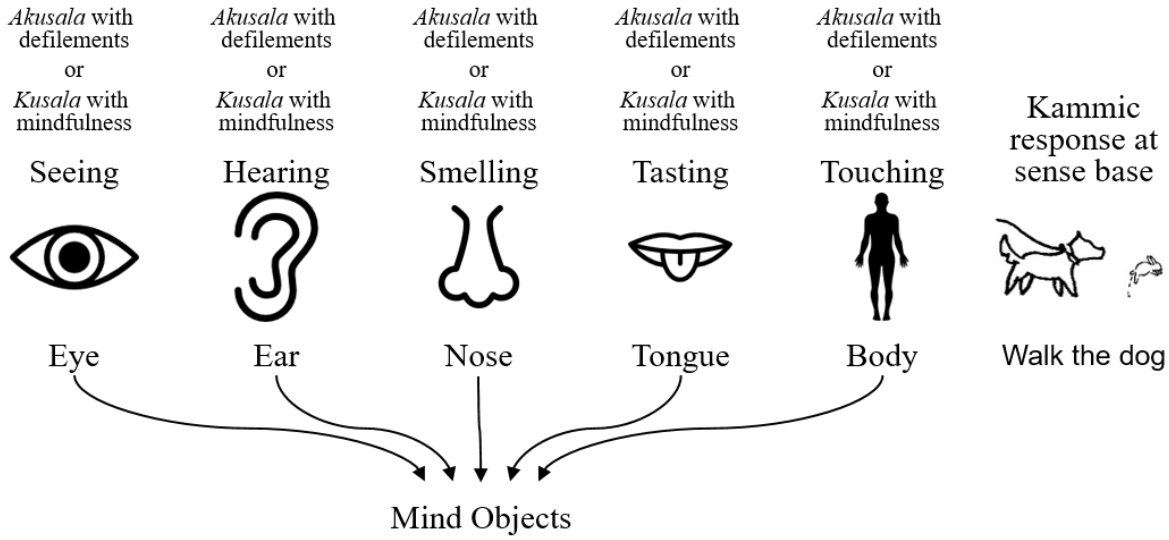
Worldly feelings are those that one comes across in one's daily life. Spiritual (or "unworldly") feelings are those that one comes across only during meditation.

The mindfulness of each type of feeling as it arises and passes away serves to transform them accordingly. The final culmination will be spiritually equanimous feeling.

This is then further refined from **Diversity** (coming with many sense objects) to **Unity** (coming with a single object).

The final term, "*atammayatā*", is difficult to translate precisely. Sometimes it is translated as non-constructed, non-identified, etc. In short, it refers to an unconditioned state that is indescribable, supramundane.

Cittānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna (1)



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At this point **Consciousness** (*Citta*) becomes the object of mindfulness. It has to be differentiated from Mental States (*Cetasika*) in the way that water is to waves. Consciousness (water) and Mental States (waves) are related by way of association (*sampayutta paccaya*) whereby they are inseparable in a thought moment, but may be analyzed separately.

In the “**Walk the dog**” phase, **Consciousness** is like a dog that is constantly chasing after whatever attracts its interest. The six types of **Consciousness** arise when the six types of objects impinge on it, resulting in different responses. **Consciousness** is noted mindfully as it runs to the six sense doors. The various processes of **Consciousness** are also mindfully noted. The “**Walk the dog**” phase infuses the mind with habitual mindfulness as the mind learns about its own nature.

In the “**Candle + moths phase**”, **Consciousness** is watched at the **Mind-door**. **Consciousness** is the **Primary Object** while other objects are **Secondary Objects**. **Consciousness** is like a bright flame and the **Secondary Objects** are like the moths that hover around the flame. Sometimes the moths knock into the flame causing the moths to be destroyed and the flame to waver/vibrate, depending on the size of the moth.

When **Consciousness** is used as a **Primary Object**, it is important that you develop some degree of continuous mindfulness. When unmindfulness arises, the mindful habit naturally arises to be mindful of it as an object. The recognition of the presence of unmindful states is important to develop this practice to deeper levels, where only wholesome states are present. When **Consciousness** is used as a **Primary Object**, you become aware of objects that strike the mind; these objects could be external (five sense objects) or internal (mentally-constructed objects). With internal objects, you need experience to know if you should follow the object or if it is best to keep mindfulness on **Consciousness**, its flows and changes.

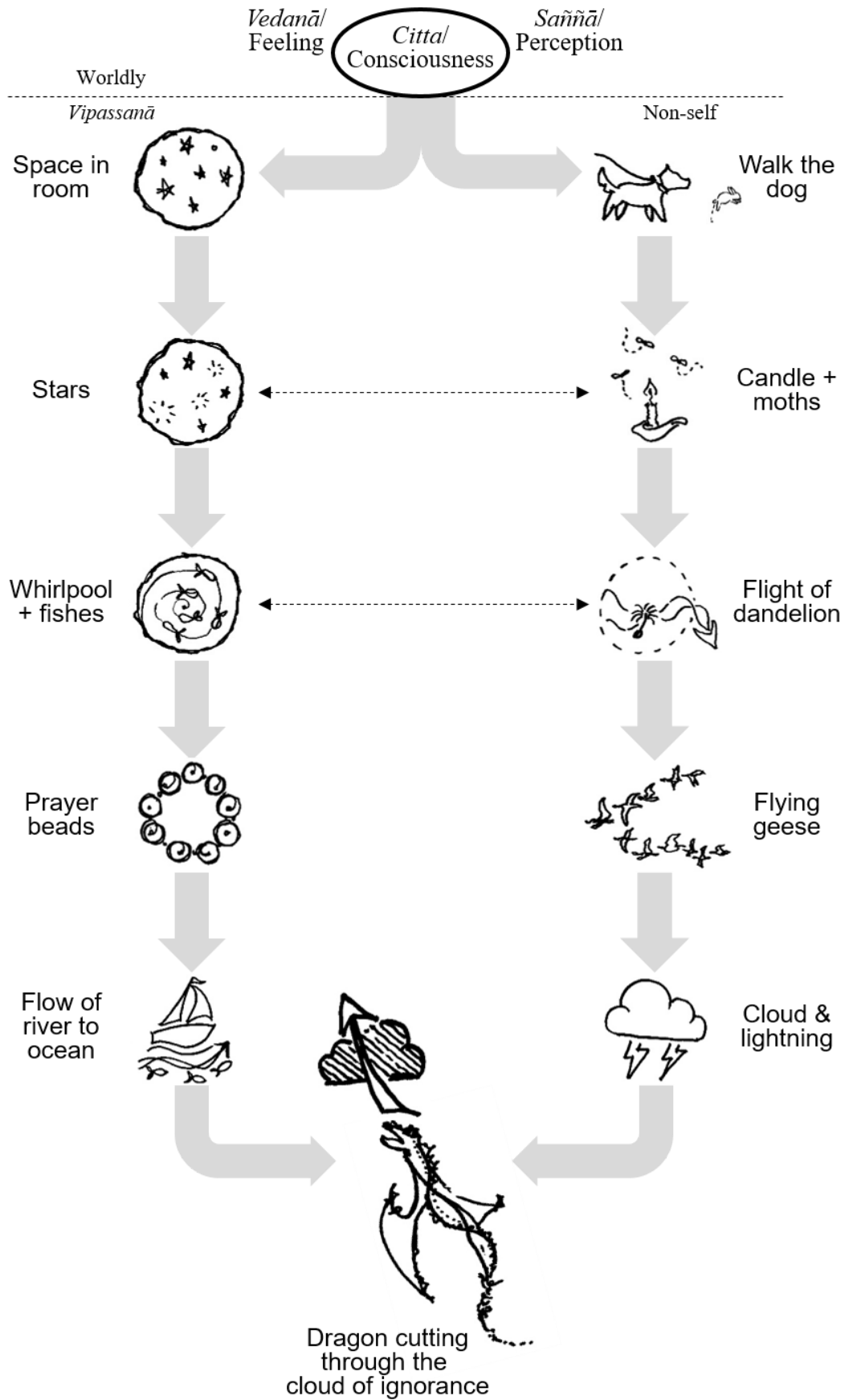
In the “**Forest pool phase**”, **Consciousness** is very still, it is clearly aware of all the wonderful animals that briefly come to the pool to drink (the objects). **Consciousness** is observed at the mind door, and it is calm like a forest pool, sensitive to subtle changes.

In the “**Sailing phase**”, your mindfulness flows and it takes no effort to observe the mind. **Consciousness** is tranquilized (*Samahita*).

The “**Flying phase**” involves more refined and sublime states of deep concentration (*jhāna*). Consciousness is experiencing the expanded absorptions (*Mahaggata*) arising and passing away.

If you are able to practice insight meditation so that insights of impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and non-self (*Anattā*) characteristics develop and deepen, then the transcendence of **Consciousness** occurs. This is the transition from “the formed” (*Sankhata*) and mundane (*Lokiya*) to the “unformed” (*Asankhata*) and supramundane (*Lokuttara*).

Cittānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna (2)



Cittānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna (2)

The difference between worldly mindfulness and *Vipassanā* mindfulness is that *Vipassanā* mindfulness involves the experience of non-self (*anattā*). With *Vipassanā* mindfulness you will have reached the first of the sixteen insight knowledges. This qualifies as both insight development and also insight itself. You may experience similar descriptions without actually arriving at this insight, so you need to exercise caution in gauging your progress. As long as mindfulness is present, *Vipassanā* mindfulness is not too far away. The flowchart represents different ways that *Cittānupassanā* can be developed once *Vipassanā* mindfulness is present.

The “**Walk the dog**” phase and the “**Candle + moths**” phase have been described with the previous flowchart.

Sometimes, rather than the “**Walk the dog**” phase, a “**Space in room**” phase is experienced. In the “**Space in room**” phase, the objects seem to be inside the **Consciousness** and **Consciousness** surrounds and contains the objects. The “**Space in room**” phase can progress to the “**Stars**” phase when the objects quickly arise and pass away, like the twinkling of stars.

In the “**Whirlpool + fishes**” phase, the experience of **Consciousness** changes from moment to moment like a deepening vortex (it is the whirlpool) while the objects are like the fishes caught up in this movement.

In the “**Flight of dandelion**” phase, you are able to be continuously mindful of the present **Consciousness** at one point of the present moment (the dandelion seed) while also being aware of the conditionings of **Consciousness** and other sense objects, acting as an extended frame of reference which changes as the dandelion **Consciousness** flies.

The dotted line linking the “**Stars**” / “**Whirlpool + fishes**” phase and the “**Candle + moths**” / “**Flight of dandelion**” phase indicates that the two parts are different experiences which are around the same level of practice. The phase on the left (“**Stars**” / “**Whirlpool + fishes**”) refers to a mindfulness that is more concentrated while the phase on the right (“**Candle + moths**” / “**Flight of dandelion**”) refers to a mindfulness that is more open to other senses.

In the “**Prayer beads**” phase, the changes become very fast and the **Consciousness** changes extremely quickly, moment to moment, like rapidly running your fingers through beads.

In the “**Flying geese**” phase, concentration is more sublime and **Consciousness** seems to be fluttering high up in the clouds. This corresponds to the “**Flying phase**” from the previous flowchart.

The “**Flow of river to ocean**” phase corresponds to the “**Sailing**” phase of the previous flowchart.

In the “**Whirlpool + fishes**” phase, the “**Flight of dandelion**” phase, and the “**Flow of river to ocean**” phase, there is the experience of a rapid, long flow of the process. In the

“**Cloud & lightning**” phase, the characteristic of suffering of formations (*sankhāradukkha*) becomes apparent.

Finally, **Consciousness** becomes powerful and can be compared to the dragon; the mythical creature that is compared to the transcendental **Consciousness** that flies beyond the clouds of ignorance, delusion and illusions.