The Aggregates

skandha · phung po

The five aggregates that constitute a person — form, sensation, perception, formation, and consciousness — and the non-current formations that accompany them.

ཕུང་པོ

01 Form — PHYSICAL

གཟུགས

rūpa · gzugs · Defined as physical forms.

FOUR PRIMARY ELEMENTS

Earth *pṛthivī* · Water *āpas* · Fire *tejas* · Wind *vāyu*

ELEVEN RESULTANT FORMS

Five sense-faculty dhātus Eye faculty · Ear faculty · Nose faculty · Tongue faculty · Body faculty

Five sense-object dhātus Visual form · Sound · Smell · Taste · Texture

Imperceptible Imperceptible form

ASAṄGA'S FIVE-FORM CLASSIFICATION

Deduced form — *inferred from other phenomena*

Spatial form — *the form of space itself*

Imperceptible form — *arising from a vow*

Imagined form — *conceived in mental imagery*

Form mastered through meditation — *arisen by power of samādhi*

THREE TYPES OF IMPERCEPTIBLE FORM

1. Form entailed by a vow one has undertaken.
2. Form tied to factors present within the ongoing mental continuum.
3. Form ascribed to selected physical or verbal actions (not open to ordinary sense perception).

02 Sensation — MENTAL · 18 INSTANCES

ཚོར་བ

vedanā · tshor ba · Defined as impressions.

	Eye	Ear	Nose	Tongue	Body	Mind
Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6
Painful	7	8	9	10	11	12
Neutral	13	14	15	16	17	18

The root text divides feeling in four further ways.

Five feelings: Pleasure · Mental joy · Pain · Mental unhappiness · Neutral feeling

Bodily and mental feeling: Bodily feeling · Mental feeling

Feeling with and without craving: Feeling with craving · Feeling without craving

Feeling resting on attachment or on renunciation: Feeling resting on attachment · Feeling resting on renunciation

03 Perceptions — MENTAL

འདུ་ཤེས

saṃjñā · 'du shes · Grasping at distinguishing features.

1. Perceptions with characteristics (with three exceptions)
2. Perceptions without characteristics (those three exceptions) — Unskilled in conventional designations · Signless expanse · Absorbed at the Peak of Existence
3. Lesser perceptions (desire realm)
4. Vast perceptions (form realm)
5. Immeasurable perceptions — Infinite space · Infinite consciousness
6. Perception of nothing whatsoever

04 Formations — MENTAL · 51 CONCURRENT · 24 NON-CURRENT

འདུ་བྱེད

saṃskāra · 'du byed · The act of thoroughly creating.

CONCURRENT FORMATIONS (51 MENTAL STATES)

Five Ever-Present Mental States 5

Attraction · Sensation (Aggregate of Sensation above) · Perception (Aggregate of Perceptions above) · Attention · Contact

Five Object-Determining Mental States 5

Intention · Interest · Recollection · Concentration · Discrimination

Eleven Virtuous Mental States 11

Faith · Conscientiousness · Pliancy · Equanimity · Conscience · Shame · Non-attachment · Non-aggression · Non-delusion · Non-violence · Diligence

Six Root Disturbing Emotions 6

Ignorance · Attachment · Anger · Arrogance · Doubt · Belief

Belief has 5 types: Belief in transitory collection · Belief of holding extremes · Perverted belief · Holding a belief to be paramount · Holding a discipline or ritual

Twenty Subsidiary Disturbing Emotions 20

Fury · Resentment · Spite · Hostility · Envy · Hypocrisy · Pretense · Lack of engagement · Shamelessness · Concealment · Stinginess · Self-infatuation · Lack of faith · Laziness · Heedlessness · Forgetfulness · Non-alertness · Lethargy · Excitement · Distraction

Four Variables 4

Sleep · Regret · Conception · Discernment

05 Consciousness — MENTAL

རྣམ་ཤེས

vijñāna · rnam shes · That which individually cognizes the object-identity of all phenomena.

Presented as seven categories: the mind element plus six consciousness elements.

SEVEN CATEGORIES

1. Mind Element
2. Eye Consciousness Element
3. Ear Consciousness Element
4. Nose Consciousness Element
5. Tongue Consciousness Element
6. Body Consciousness Element
7. Mind Consciousness Element

EIGHT COLLECTIONS (MIND ONLY)

The Mind Only sutras and treatises add the afflicted mind and the all-ground consciousness to the six.

1–6 Eye consciousness · Ear consciousness · Nose consciousness · Tongue consciousness · Body consciousness · Mental consciousness

7 Afflicted mind — Ever-deluded, it fixes on the all-ground as "I", together with view of self, "I am" pride, self-attachment, and ignorance. It accompanies every virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral mind, ceasing only in the manifest noble path, the absorption of cessation, and the level of no more learning.

8 All-ground consciousness — The ground of mind: unbroken clear awareness that holds every seed the aggregates, elements, and sources have imprinted.

NON-CURRENT FORMATIONS

Fourteen Non-Current Formations According to the Abhidharma Kosha

Acquisition · Dispossession · Same status · Non-perception · Serenity of cessation · Ongoing all-ground not blocked by the state of non-perception · Life faculty

Characteristics indicative of a conditioned thing: Birth · Subsistence · Ageing · Impermanence

Category of names · Category of words · Category of syllables

Additional Non-Current Formations According to the Abhidharma Samuccaya

Ordinary person · Regular sequence · Definitive distinctiveness · Connected link · Speed · Sequence · Time · Location · Number · Gathering

The Elements *dhātu · khams*

The eighteen dhātus organising experience as faculty, object, and consciousness — cause, potential, or seed. The faculty elements have the potential to apprehend, the object elements to be apprehended, and the consciousness elements to actually apprehend; with the six elements that compose the body and the classifications that overlap them.

THE EIGHTEEN ELEMENTS

and which of the eleven classifications each belongs to

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
FACULTY ELEMENTS											
Eye Element *mig gi khams*	●	●		●	●					●	●
Ear Element *rna ba'i khams*	●	●		●	●					●	●
Nose Element *sna'i khams*	●	●		●						●	●
Tongue Element *lce'i khams*	●	●		●						●	●
Body Element *lus kyi khams*	●	●		●	●					●	●
○ Mind Element *yid kyi khams*			●	●	●	●		●	●		
OBJECT ELEMENTS											
Visual Form Element *gzugs kyi khams*	●	●		●	●		●				●
Sound Element *sgra'i khams*	●	●		●	●		●				●
Smell Element *dri'i khams*	●	●		●			●			●	●
Taste Element *ro'i khams*	●	●		●			●			●	●
Texture Element *reg bya'i khams*	●	●		●	●		●			●	●
Mental Object Element *chos kyi khams*	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
CONSCIOUSNESS ELEMENTS											
○ Eye Consciousness Element *mig gi rnam shes kyi khams*				●	●			●			●
○ Ear Consciousness Element *rna ba'i rnam shes kyi khams*				●	●			●			●
○ Nose Consciousness Element *sna'i rnam shes kyi khams*				●	●			●			●
○ Tongue Consciousness Element *lce'i rnam shes kyi khams*				●	●			●			●
○ Body Consciousness Element *lus kyi rnam shes kyi khams*				●	●			●			●
○ Mind Consciousness Element *yid kyi rnam shes kyi khams*			●	●	●	●		●	●		

○ The seven mental elements — *The mind element, and the six from the eye consciousness element through the mind consciousness element. Together with the ten elements taken from the aggregate of forms and the mental object element, these seven are the eighteen.*

UNCONDITIONED THINGS

How many unconditioned things there are depends on the system.

3 Three unconditioned things *The Abhidharmakośa's count.*
Cessation due to discrimination · Cessation not due to discrimination · Space

4 Four unconditioned things *Mind Only: the three, with suchness added.*
+ Suchness

8 Eight unconditioned things *The Abhidharma Samuccaya's count: the three, three suchnesses, and two states of blocked mind.*
+ Suchness of virtue · Suchness of non virtue · Suchness of neutral · Occasion of blocked cognition at the time of serenity of non perception · Occasion of blocked cognition at the time of serenity of cessation

THE ELEVEN CLASSIFICATIONS

1. Elements with Physical Form — the ten that have materiality — five sense faculties and five sense objects — plus mental object element insofar as it includes imperceptible form.
2. Mutually Obstructive Elements — the ten elements whose materiality means they occupy space and can block one another — the five sense faculties and their five corresponding objects.
3. Undefiling Elements — those that cannot serve as a basis for the arising of defilements — mind element, mental object element, and mind consciousness element, together with the unconditioned things.
4. Desire Realm Elements — the complete set of eighteen, since beings in the desire realm possess all six faculties, encounter all six objects, and generate all six consciousnesses.
5. Form Realm Elements — a reduced set, since beings born there lack the nose and tongue faculties and their corresponding objects, though all six consciousnesses still arise.
6. Formless Realm Elements — only mind element, mental object element, and mind consciousness element remain, since beings in the formless realm are entirely without physical form.
7. Outer Elements — the six object elements — visual form, sound, smell, taste, texture, and mental object — classified as outer because they are what is apprehended rather than what apprehends.
8. Elements with Focus — those that take an intentional object — the six consciousness elements together with mind element and mental object element.
9. Elements with Concepts — those that operate through conceptual thought — mind element, mental object element, and mind consciousness element.
10. Nine Elements Embraced by Personal Sensation — the five sense faculties (eye through body) together with smell, taste, texture, and mental object element — these nine are directly felt in personal experience.
11. Elements Abandoned by Meditation — the ten form-having elements and the five sense consciousnesses. In the last three — mind, mental object, and mind consciousness — there are factors abandoned by seeing, by meditation, and not to be abandoned.

THE MENTAL OBJECT ELEMENT AND SOURCE

The Element of Mental Objects (Dhatu) and Mental Object Source (Ayatana) are comprised of:

THREE AGGREGATES

1. Sensation *tshor ba*
2. Perceptions *'du shes*
3. Formations *'du byed*

FIVE IMPERCEPTIBLE FORMS (FIVE TYPES OF FORMS THAT ARE MENTAL OBJECTS)

1. Deduced form *bsdus pa las gyur pa*
2. Spatial forms *mngon par skabs yod pa*
3. Imperceptible forms (from taking a vow) *rnam par rig byed min pa'i gzugs*
4. Imagined forms *kun btags pa'i gzugs*
5. Mastered forms through meditation *dbang 'byor ba'i gzugs*

SIX ELEMENTS OF A PERSON

Earth *sa* · Water *chu* · Fire *me* · Wind *rlung* · Space *nam mkha'* · Consciousness *rnam shes*

The Sense Sources

āyatana · skye mched

Twelve sources — six inner faculties and six outer fields — through which perception arises; mapped onto the eighteen elements and the five base knowables.

THE TWELVE SOURCES

six inner faculties · six outer fields

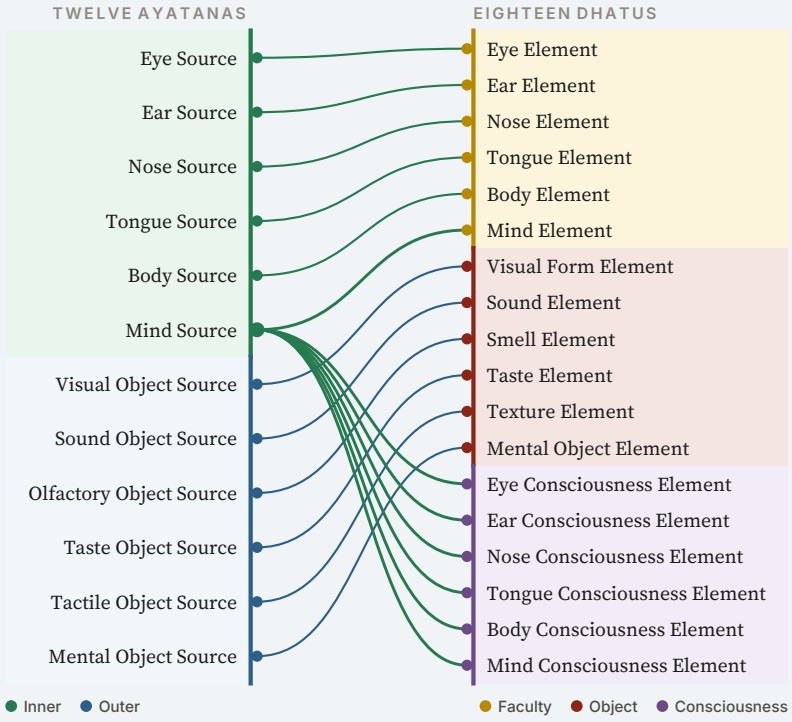
INNER SOURCES

1. Eye Source — *mig gi skye mched*
2. Ear Source — *rna ba'i skye mched*
3. Nose Source — *sna'i skye mched*
4. Tongue Source — *lce'i skye mched*
5. Body Source — *lus kyi skye mched*
6. Mind Source — *yid kyi skye mched*

OUTER SOURCES

7. Visual Object Source — *gzugs kyi skye mched*
8. Sound Object Source — *sgra'i skye mched*
9. Olfactory Object Source — *dri'i skye mched*
10. Taste Object Source — *ro'i skye mched*
11. Tactile Object Source — *reg bya'i skye mched*
12. Mental Object Source — *chos kyi skye mched*

THE TWELVE SOURCES ARE THE EIGHTEEN ELEMENTS



MIND SOURCE AND MENTAL OBJECT SOURCE

Mind cognizes the objects of the five senses and coordinates their cognitions. It is a continuous, self-knowing stream of cognition that can apprehend both the sense consciousnesses and itself. Through conceptual cognition it names and understands both outer and inner phenomena. Because it directs engagement with and disengagement from objects, and influences the character of the other cognitions, mind is the chief factor preceding all phenomena.

Cognition

- Five senses: nonconceptual
- Mental cognition: conceptual (general and specific) and nonconceptual
- Knowables: things and non-things
- Things: mind, matter, noncurrent formations
- Nonconceptual cognition: perception by appearances
- Conceptual cognition: other-exclusion (specific and mental) and opposition (e.g. composite and noncomposite)

Four Types of Object

- Apparent object
- Determined object
- Engaged object
- Apprehended object

Four types of subjective cognition

- Lack of understanding
  - *direct perception without ascertainment*
  - *inference without proof*
- Misunderstanding
- Doubting
- Correct understanding
  - *direct perception*
  - *inference*

Two types of opposition

- Non-coexistent opposition
  - *mental*
  - *factual*
- Mutually exclusive opposition

Two types of relationship

- Same entity
- Resultant

Conceptual systems

- Definition, defined, basis for defining
- Basis of specific attributes (dharma possessor) and specific attributes (dharmas)
- Described and describer

Names

- Apprehending sound + sound image → description
- Apprehending object + object image → described
- Names are known (mind), described (speech), enacted (body)
- Names come from: direct perception, hearing, examination, self-knowing
- Ways of establishing: establishing/refuting, establishing as an identity of presence, refuting as an identity of absence

THE FIVE BASE KNOWABLES

1. Form base of appearance — *the form aggregate*
2. Chief mind base — *six or eight collections of consciousness (Śrāvakayāna systems enumerate six; Yogācāra / Mind Only, eight)*
3. Accompanying base of mental states — *all mental states (fifty-one)*
4. Non-current formations
5. Base of unconditioned things — *the mental object elements*

Dependent Origination

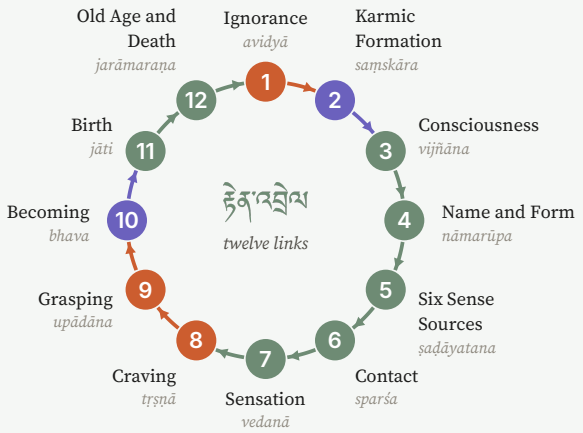
pratītyasamutpāda · rten ’brel

Causes, conditions, and the twelve links — first set out, then condensed into four, three, and finally the chain of cause-and-result reversed and re-traced.

རྟེན་འབྲེལ

INNER DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

RELATED CAUSES · THE TWELVE LINKS



● Affliction 3 ● Karma 2 ● Suffering 7

The chain begins again with ignorance — each link conditioning the next, the cycle continuous.

RELATED CONDITIONS

Ignorance *ma rig pa* · Desire *’dod chags* · Hatred *zhe sdang*

WITHIN A SINGLE MOMENT

an act of killing

● Ignorance	Engaging through lack of understanding
● Karmic Formations	The action (karma) itself
● Consciousness	The cognition at that time
● Name and Form	The name and form at that time
● The Six Sense Sources	The six sense sources present at that time
● Contact	Contact of the weapon piercing the body
● Sensation	Pleasure of oneself; pain of the other
● Craving	Enthusiastic engagement in the act
● Grasping	Grasping of the following part
● Becoming	The aggregates at the time of the act
● Rebirth	Birth of the present and following state
● Old Age and Death	Their change and cessation

OUTER DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

RELATED CAUSES

Seed → Sprout → Stamen → Stalk → Bud → Flower → Fruit

RELATED CONDITIONS

Working alongside the causes, each condition does one thing, in this order, from sprout to fruit.

1. Earth *sa* — Supports. Firm, it holds the base.
2. Water *chu* — Gathers. Moist, it draws together.
3. Fire *me* — Ripens. Warm, it brings to maturity.
4. Wind *rlung* — Increases. Moving, it brings growth.
5. Space *nam mkha’* — Gives room. It obstructs nothing that acts.
6. Time *dus* — Changes in sequence. Stage follows stage.

ACROSS LIFETIMES

THREE LIVES

The twelve links are distributed across three lifetimes: the first two belong to the past life, links three–ten unfold in the present life, and the final two ripen in a future life. Since there is a continual occurrence, one dependent upon the other, the process is called continuous interdependence.

Past	● Ignorance ● Karmic Formations
Present	● Consciousness ● Name and Form ● The Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation ● Craving ● Grasping ● Becoming
Future	● Rebirth ● Old Age and Death

TWO LIVES

Whether the process spans three lifetimes or two, depending on how old age and death evolve, the twelve links are also completed within two lifetimes.

Former Life	● Ignorance ● Craving ● Grasping
Next Life	● Birth ● Karmic Formations ● Consciousness ● Name and Form ● The Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation ● Becoming ● Old Age and Death

CONDENSED INTO FOUR

Propelling Links	● Ignorance ● Karmic Formations ● Consciousness
Propelled Result	● Name and Form ● The Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation
Fully Establishing Links	● Craving ● Grasping ● Becoming
Fully Established Links	● Rebirth ● Old Age and Death

CONDENSED INTO THREE

Affliction of Disturbing Emotions	● Ignorance ● Craving ● Grasping
Affliction of Karma	● Karmic Formations ● Becoming
Affliction of Life (Seven Bases of Suffering)	● Consciousness ● Name and Form ● Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation ● Rebirth ● Old Age and Death

From the three disturbing emotions come the two karmas, and from these seven bases of suffering. These in turn condition the disturbing emotions again.

CAUSES AND RESULTS · REVERSED

Truth of Origin	● Ignorance ● Craving ● Grasping ● Karmic Formations ● Becoming
Truth of Suffering	● Consciousness ● Name and Form ● Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation ● Rebirth ● Old Age and Death
Truth of the Path	● Ignorance ● Craving ● Grasping ● Karmic Formations ● Becoming
Truth of Cessation	● Consciousness ● Name and Form ● Six Sense Sources ● Contact ● Sensation ● Rebirth ● Old Age and Death

FIVE SPECIAL FEATURES OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

1. Impermanence
2. Uninterrupted
3. Not a transformation
4. Small cause can produce great effect
5. Similar basis