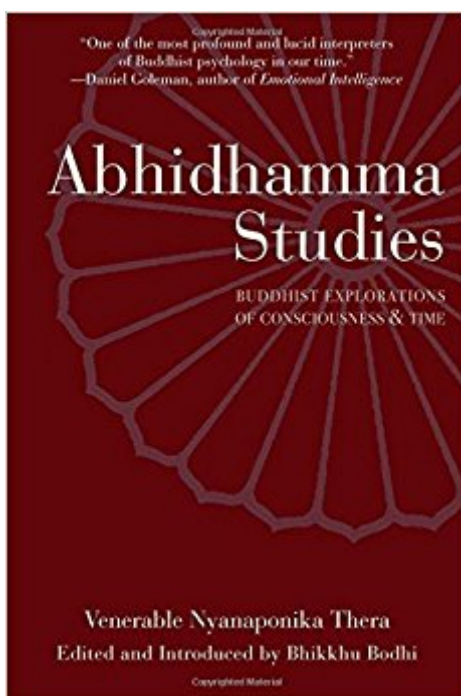


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# Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations Of Consciousness And Time



## Synopsis

The Abhidhamma, the third great division of early Buddhist teaching, expounds a revolutionary system of philosophical psychology rooted in the twin Buddhist insights of selflessness and dependent origination. In keeping with the liberative thrust of early Buddhism, this system organizes the entire spectrum of human consciousness around the two poles of Buddhist doctrine - bondage and liberation, Samsara and Nirvana - the starting point and the final goal. It thereby maps out, with remarkable rigour and precision, the inner landscape of the mind to be crossed through the practical work of Buddhist meditation. In this book of groundbreaking essays, Venerable Nyanaponika Thera, one of our age's foremost exponents of Theravada Buddhism, attempts to penetrate beneath the formidable face of the Abhidhamma and to make its principles intelligible to the thoughtful reader of today. His point of focus is the Consciousness Chapter of the Dhammasangani, the first treatise of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. Basing his interpretation on the detailed list of mental factors that the Abhidhamma uses as a guide to psychological analysis, he launches into bold explorations in the multiple dimensions of conditionality, the nature of consciousness, the temporality of experience, and the psychological springs of spiritual transformation. Innovative and rich in insights, this book does not merely open up new avenues in the academic study of early Buddhism. By treating the Abhidhamma as a fountainhead of inspiration for philosophical and psychological inquiry, it demonstrates the continuing relevance of Buddhist thought to our most astute contemporary efforts to understand the elusive yet so intimate nature of the mind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A learned and carefully reasoned inquiry into the workings of the mind from a Buddhist perspective... a challenging yet important work." (Religious Studies Review)"Abhidhamma is a systemization of reality as it concerns the final goal the Buddha's teaching, 'liberation from suffering.' Abhidhamma Studies rigorously maps out the inner landscape of the mind to be crossed through Buddhist meditation." (Research News and Opportunities in Science and Theology)"I am greatly honored to welcome this new English edition of Nyanaponika Thera's brilliant work, rendered even more valuable by the addition of an instructive and lucid introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi." (Prof. P.S. Jaini, UC Berkeley, Buddhist Studies)"Delightful and thought-provoking... Essential reading for any serious student of Buddhism. Additionally, it will appeal to those interested in a wide variety of phenomenological and ontological issues... I heartily recommend reading it from cover to cover." (Douglas W, Shrader, SUNY Oneonta, in his review in Philosophy East & West)"Students of Buddhism will find this an important guide." (The Bookwatch)"Groundbreaking...innovative and rich in insights...valued and informative contribution to Buddhist studies." (Wisconsin Bookwatch)"Interesting and important ideas..." (Journal of Buddhist Ethics)

Nyanaponika Thera, a German-born Buddhist monk, was a scholar, translator, and founder of The Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka. Thera died in 1994 at the age of 93. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi is an American Buddhist monk from New York City, born in 1944. He obtained a BA in philosophy from Brooklyn College and a PhD in philosophy from Claremont Graduate School. After completing his university studies he traveled to Sri Lanka, where he received novice ordination in 1972 and full ordination in 1973, both under the leading Sri Lankan scholar-monk, Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (1896-1998). From 1984 to 2002 he was the editor for the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, where he lived for ten years with the senior German monk, Ven. Nyanaponika Thera (1901-1994), at the Forest Hermitage. He returned to the U.S. in 2002. He currently lives and teaches at Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel, New York. Ven. Bodhi has many important publications to his credit, either as author, translator, or editor. These include The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikaya, 1995), The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya, 2000), and The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya, 2012). In 2008, together with several of his students, Ven. Bodhi founded Buddhist Global Relief, a nonprofit supporting hunger relief, sustainable agriculture, and education in countries suffering from chronic poverty and malnutrition.

Great teachings!!!

The book flies very high on the contents of the third basket of the Canon by only focusing on the description and categorization of the main mental dhammas but still presents many obstacles to anyone just familiar with the plain discourses of the Buddha. Still there is something very fascinating on finding oneself dull while reading of one's own mind! Someone might also find interesting the heavy effort put by the author to ground the contents of the Abhidhamma to the other parts of the Canon to prove its authenticity but, probably, non-scholars would have liked the effort to be spent better otherwise.

A readable bridge to those of us who could never quite put into words those doubts.

This is not an easy read; it takes good focus and a pot of strong green tea to take in. Given that, however, one cannot help but be struck by how insightful Nyanaponika Thera is and how logical and clear-headed his approach, his arguments, and conclusions about the Abhidhamma. Although I've owned the Abhidhammattha Sangaha for several years, the few times I've opened it I have shied away within minutes from its meticulous and intricate approach to the mind and its phenomena. In fact, I would venture to say that without such a primer as Nyanaponika Thera's excellent work, my copy of the Comprehensive manual would probably remain forever unread. I am not saying that it is now at the top of my reading list, but what I am saying is that Nyanaponika Thera's introduction and heartfelt apology for the Abhidhamma has made me view it as much more than simply a curiosity for the intellectually overstimulated. Nyanaponika details his reason why the Abhidhamma in fact is, and why rightly so, an important part of the Pali Canon, and he does this admirably. His language is clear and precise and it is hard to fault his reasoning. If you have wondered about the Abhidhamma but, like me, felt a bit intimidated by it, I highly recommend this book.

In Abhidhamma Studies, the Ven. Nyanaponika Thera has done something truly unique. For many of those who have a cursory acquaintance with its contents, the Abhidhamma is an impenetrable thicket of terms and tables. It is seen either as the dense high philosophy of monks who succeeded the Buddha, or the loftiest teachings of the Buddha, meant for gods and enlightened monks. In this book, Nyanaponika Thera brings the Abhidhamma down to Earth and gives us just a glimpse of the

insights it yet waits to unfold. In his introduction, Nyanaponika Thera argues that the Abhidhamma is only relevant as an organic, growing discipline engaging the minds of courageous and insightful souls. This work is not a dry summary of the contents of the seven books of the Abhidhamma, but an introduction to the method of the Abhidhamma. The book begins with a brief contextualization of the Abhidhamma. The Abhidhamma is the third "basket" of the Pali Canon, the canonical scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. It consists of seven books, and these seven books are largely composed of lists of terms, definitions, and classification schemata. The origin of these books, however, is a subject of dispute. One of Nyanaponika Thera's primary aims in this book is to show the profundity of these books. The degree of rigor, consistency, depth, breadth, and purpose one finds in the Abhidhamma cannot help but suggest the presence of a sublime mind. As the author unpacks a small fragment of this teaching, one becomes mesmerized by the subtlety of this system. More importantly, the practical application of the system becomes readily apparent. The purpose of the Abhidhamma is not to systematize and classify all of reality as an intellectual curiosity. Its true aim is to systematize the reality experienced by the mind relative to the goal of liberation. Without this focal point, the system of Abhidhamma would be left chasing its own tail, attempting to prove its own suppositions. However, because liberation provides both the ground and the aim of this system, many of the questions which plague metaphysical systems become moot. For instance, the question "what is a phenomenon?" is replaced by the question, "what are the characteristics of phenomena?" In the view of liberation, it is very important to realize that phenomena are impermanent, impersonal, and unsatisfactory. Beyond this, it is not relevant to attempt to define phenomena in terms of something else. The Abhidhamma is a great boon for anyone attempting to understand causality at a deeper level. Nyanaponika Thera gives a beautiful exposition of the system's two-fold method of analysis and synthesis. Through analysis, the Abhidhamma dissolves the solidified reality of "I" and personality into a multitude of mental factors. Through synthesis, the Abhidhamma shows the relations which exist between these factors, and how they challenge or support one another. Nyanaponika Thera's insights will mirror the experience of all those who have taken some time to witness the mechanics of their own mind. More importantly, his writing offers a tool to refine our own observations. A critical insight offered by the author is that the way we observe can affect the course of what we are observing. For instance, we might find that our mind is see-sawing between agitation and tranquility. If we focus unwisely on the agitation, we may very well increase the agitation to the point where tranquility leaves the scene altogether. Similarly, if we focus wisely on the tranquility, the agitation may very well subside. The author offers many examples of how mental factors engage and balance one another, and for those who are devoted to

maintaining continuous mindfulness, these observations are invaluable. Abhidhamma Studies succeeds on multiple levels. As an introduction to the system and method of Abhidhamma, it reveals this branch of the Pali Canon to be a perennial philosophy, a body of thought which not only provides timeless philosophical, psychological, and ethical insights, but also opens myriad channels of exploration and exposition. As applied Abhidhamma, it demonstrates the power of both the system and the method, delivering practical insights for anyone engaged in serious meditation. Most importantly, this work demonstrates the value of a clear and focused mind directed toward understanding the subtlest mechanics of reality. It invites us to establish a continuous awareness of the causal mechanics of our mind, destabilizing the ego and paving the way to wisdom. For those with a philosophical inclination, this book is a nourishing gourmet meal. Enjoy!

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