

THE JOURNAL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A. K. Narain
University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

EDITORS

Heinz Bechert
Universität Göttingen, FRG

Lewis Lancaster
University of California, Berkeley, USA

B. J. Stavisky
WCNILKR, Moscow, USSR

Leon Hurvitz
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

A. W. MacDonala
Université de Paris X, Nanterre, France

Alex Wayman
Columbia University, New York, USA

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Stephen Beyer
University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

Volume 1

Number 2

1979

c/o Department of South Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison,
Wisconsin 53706

CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. Is the Buddhist Notion of "Cause Necessitates Effect"
(*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) Scientific? by *A.D.P. Kalansuriya* 7
2. Chou Yung vs. Chang Jung (on *Śūnyatā*): the *Pen-mo*
Yu-wu Controversy in Fifth-Century China, by
Whalen Lai 23

II. SHORT PAPERS

1. Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra* and his Own Commentary on
the Same, by *P. V. Bapat* 47
2. *Keci*, "Some," in a Pali Commentary, by *I. B. Horner* 52
3. Comments on Zen, by *M. Kiyota* 57
4. The Freudian Unconscious and *Bhavaṅga*, by *O. H. de A.*
Wijesekera 63

III. BOOK REVIEWS

1. Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective: Collected Ar-
ticles, by *H. V. Guenther* 67
2. Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, by *Geshe*
Lhundup Sopa and *J. Hopkins* 69
3. Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice, by *M. Kiyota* 72
4. Choix de Documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque
Nationale, complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India
Office et du British Museum; présentés par *Ariane*
Macdonald et *Yoshiro Imaeda* 76

IV. NOTES AND NEWS

- | | |
|--|----|
| 1. Presidential Address by Professor Gadjin M. Nagao | 79 |
| 2. Report on the Proceedings of the First Conference of the
I.A.B.S., Columbia University, New York, September
15-17, 1978 | 85 |
| 3. List of Members of I.A.B.S. | 92 |

V. OBITUARY

- | | |
|---|-----|
| Yamaguchi Susumu, by <i>Sakurabe Hajime</i> | 104 |
|---|-----|

The Freudian Unconscious and *Bhavaṅga*

by O.H. de A. Wijesekera

Although several thinkers before him had observed the existence of unconscious processes in the workings of the mind, the 'scientific' concept of the *Unconscious* must be attributed to the undoubted genius of Sigmund Freud. According to him mental life is the function of an apparatus made up of several portions, which he compared to a telescope or microscope. To the oldest of these he gave the name of *id*, which he believed contains everything that is inherited, above all, the biological instincts which according to him originate in the somatic organization. For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to lay stress on Freud's concept of the *id* as a reservoir of the psychical forces which maintain the dynamism of all the conscious and the unconscious factors of the human psyche. Next he posited a later-developed region of mental life, giving it the name of *ego*. This according to Freud is a part of the *id* which has undergone a special development under the influence of the external world. This is the agency which is in control of voluntary activity arising in consequence of the relation between sensory perception and muscular action. Such, practically in Freud's own phraseology,¹ is a description of the most important aspect of the human psyche. What is important to note is that the *id*, as Freud himself points out, is intimately connected to the Unconscious, with the implication that the *ego* is closely associated with the (waking) consciousness.

Several writers on Buddhist psychology who have discussed the Theravada concept of *bhavaṅga* have taken it as referring to some sort of subconsciousness or subliminal consciousness or unconsciousness. Mrs Rhys Davids, who was the first to point it out in her very first work² on Buddhism, published soon after 1911, made this observation: "The Pali word *bhavaṅga* expresses both (a) the objective aspect of vital functioning and (b) the subjective

aspect of our sub-consciousness, or mental state, when we are not attending to anything . . ." In her last work³ on the subject she had this to say of *bhavaṅga*: "It was wanted for vital continuance when the act of waking advertence, which we now call attention, is absent. The vital continuum with its potentiality of attention-in-perception was ever proceeding (becoming) . . ." In the same work she understood by *bhavaṅga* "the stream of unconscious life" (p. 407), which she also called "the flow of organic life" (p. 398). Mrs Rhys Davids did not clearly identify *bhavaṅga* with the Unconscious of Freud, but generally took it as some sort of sub-consciousness as was posited by philosophical writers of the period. In his work *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* Saratchandra translated the term *bhavaṅga* as *the unconscious* (p. 75), but nowhere discussed the relevant theory of Freud in relation to it, although he attempted a comparison of Freud's theory of dreams with that of later Buddhist works. My intention in this paper is to attempt a little more detailed comparison of the Buddhist notion of *bhavaṅga* with the Freudian concept of the Unconscious.

In a previous paper⁴ I have made an attempt to define the provenance and the original significance of the term *bhavaṅga*. The conclusion I arrived at was that the concept was not a later product of Abhidhamma thought as believed by the above-mentioned writers, but was already found in the early Canonical period, occurring as it does in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* in a passage which refers to *rūpaṅga*, *vedāṅga*, *saññāṅga*, *bhavaṅga* (II. 79). In agreement with Keith's interpretation⁵ of this passage I pointed out that *bhavaṅga* here obviously stood for the two last factors, namely *saṃkhārā* and *viññāna*, in the well-known list of five *skandhas*. I cited evidence from the Pali canon to justify such an interpretation. Students of Buddhism cannot miss the fact as found in the formula of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppāda*) that *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna* are the conditions *par excellence* for samsaric becoming (*bhava*). They are indeed, with antecedent *avijjā*, the conditions for the arising of individuality (*nāma-rūpa*). It is therefore no cause for surprise if *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna* came to be regarded as *the* factors of existence (*bhava-āṅga*). This interpretation is supported indirectly by the usage of Sarvastivada Abhidharma which applied the term *bhavaṅgāni* to all the twelve factors of becoming in the *pratītya-samutpāda*. As La Vallee Poussin pointed out,⁶ in the Sarvastivada tradition *viññāna* came to be con-

sidered the *bhavaṅga par excellence*, but a closer study of the links (*nidānas*) of the *patīccasamuppāda* series as preserved in the Pali Canon indicates that *saṅkhārā* which are the immediate conditions for *viññāna* are even more important as a factor in the development of individuality. In fact in the Theravada Canon *saṅkhārā* are regarded as the most characteristic condition for becoming (*bhava*). Hence it is that the samsaric being (*satto*) is characterized in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (I. 135) as purely a complex of *saṅkhārā* (*suddha-saṅkhāra-puñja*). Thus it would appear that the Pali Canonical tradition which considers *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna* as equally important factors in samsaric becoming, that is to say as the two most important constituents of *bhavaṅga*, is more legitimate than the later developed doctrine of Sarvastivada which takes only *viññāna* as the *bhavaṅga par excellence*. A study of the meaning of *saṅkhārā* in the Pali Canon clearly supports such an interpretation.

It is necessary at this stage to inquire into the meaning of the terms *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna* as they occur at the beginning of the *patīccasamuppāda* series. A careful study of the relevant contexts will indicate beyond doubt that *saṅkhārā* signify the predispositions or tendencies resulting from previous voluntary action (*cetanā/kamma*). This may be understood as the momentum resulting from previous *kamma*. It finds a parallel usage in the physical sphere when the term (*abhi*)*saṅkhārā* is used to describe the continuing momentum of a wheel set rolling (*Anguttara Nikāya*, I. 112). Hence we may understand *saṅkhārā* in this context as psychical dispositions or tendencies, or generally as psychical forces. Similarly, the term *viññāna* in the same context, although generally translated as consciousness, has a special meaning when it appears as the precondition of *nāma-rūpa*. Now, students of Buddhism are aware that by *nāma* Canonical doctrine refers to *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā* and *viññāna* which are the constituents of empiric individuality. In this latter occurrence there is no doubt that *viññāna* means consciousness. Thus the term *viññāna* as a prior link in the *patīccasamuppāda* series must be understood as *viññāna* in a potential form. In Western terminology this may be described as noetic potential. Such a significance of the term may be understood in the light of the concept of *viññāna-sota* which is said to continue from the past into the present life, and if samsara is not ended, into the future also (see *Dīgha Nikāya*, III. 105). It is obvious that at the non-empirical state *viññāna* is *unconscious* and becomes con-

scious only when confronted by the objective world in the perceptual process, etc. As we showed at the beginning of this paper, Freud's concept of the human psyche consisting of id-forces and the Unconscious may therefore be considered to a large extent parallel to the Buddhist notion of *bhavaṅga* which too, according to our interpretation, is constituted by the *saṅkhāras* or psychical forces combined with *viññāna* which in the empirical state appears as consciousness which Freud attributed to the *ego* or the empirical agent.

NOTES

1. *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1949. See especially Chps. I, IV and VIII.

2. *Buddhism*, Williams and Norgate (Home University Library).

3. *The Birth of Indian Psychology and its Development in Buddhism*, London, Luzac & Co., 1936.

4. 'Canonical References to Bhavaṅga', *Malalasekera Commemoration Volume*, ed. Wijesekera, Colombo, 1976, pp. 348 ff.

5. See his *Buddhist Philosophy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923, p. 194 f.n. 1.

6. *Douze Causes*, 40.