

Mindstream

Mindstream is an English translation of a Buddhist philosophical technical term for the moment-to-moment 'continuity' (Sanskrit: *saṃtāna*) of awareness. There are many different orthographical representations and the play of the semantic field of the translated cognates into English is considerable like most technical Buddhist terms. There are a number of terms in the Buddhist literature that may appropriately be rendered Mindstream, for these refer to the Nomenclature, Orthography and Etymology section.

The mindstream doctrine, like most Buddhist doctrines, is not homogeneous and shows historical development (as is evident through the exploration of this article), different applications according to context and varied definitions employed by different Buddhist traditions and yana.

Rhys Davids (1903: pp. 587–588) critiques de La Vallée-Poussin's work on the "saṃtāna":

Professor de la Vallee Poussin finds a very positive evolution of vijñana-theory in certain Sanskrit-Buddhist texts. The term *saṃtāna* is joined to or substituted for it--a term which seems to approximate to our own neopsychological concept of mind as a 'continuum' or flux. And he infers from certain contexts that this *vijñana-saṃtāna* was regarded, not as one permanent, unchanging, transmigrating entity, as the soul was in the *ātman*-theory, but as an "essential series of individual and momentary consciousnesses," forming a "procession vivace et autonome." By autonomous he means independent of physical processes. According to this view the upspringing of a new *vijñana* at conception, as the effect of the preceding last *vijñana* of some expiring person, represents no change in kind, but only, to put it so, of degree. The *vijñana* is but a recurring series, not a transferred entity or principle. Hence it is more correct, if less convenient, to speak, not of *vijñana*, but of the *saṃtāna* of *pravṛtti-vijñānāni*.^[1]

Detailed Exegesis

In Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism) it may be understood as an *upāya* (Sanskrit) doctrine of the nonlocal, atemporal^[2] metaphorical stream of moments^[3] (Tibetan: *bkod pa thig le*^[4]) or 'quanta of consciousness' (Tibetan: *thig le*; Sanskrit: *Bindu*)^[5] proceeding endlessly in a lifetime, between lifetimes (Tibetan: *Bardo*), from lifetime to lifetime, prior to engagement in the Bhavacakra of Samsara and beyond as an inclusive 'continuum' (Tibetan: *rgyud*) rather than an individuated, separate, or discrete perceptual, cognitive, or experiential entity, as in the conception of the *Ātman*. Waldron (undated) states:

Indian Buddhists see the 'evolution' of mind i[n] terms of the continuity of individual mind-streams from one lifetime to the next, with karma as the basic causal mechanism whereby transformations are transmitted from one life to the next.^[6]

Günther (1959, 1986: p. 27) defines "rgyud" (Tibetan) & "saṃtāna" (Sanskrit) as:

An individual, which in other systems is imagined as a combination of matter and a permanent mental principle (*ātman*), is in reality a continuously changing stream of that which from one viewpoint is believed to be matter and from another a mind. However, what we call the mental and the material occurs in a unity of organization. Organization is something dynamic.^[7]

Dzogchen (2007: p. 82-83) establishing the processive reciprocity of the training of the mindstream and the Buddhadharmā, holds that:

The Buddhadharmā is a process, one through which we train and tame our own mindstreams. One approach is to go to the root of what we mean by "I", our sense of self or individual self-identity.^[8]

Thanissaro (1996: unpaginated) in contextualizing and redressing what he believes to be the general misconception of *anātman* (rendered as "no self") and *ātman* (rendered as "self"), in relation to the view he holds of the intention of

Shakyamuni, states:

...the Buddha was asked point-blank whether or not there was a self, he refused to answer. When later asked why, he said that to hold either that there is a self or that there is no self is to fall into extreme forms of wrong view that make the path of Buddhist practice impossible.^[9]

This clear evocation of what later became canonized in Buddhist discourse as *Madhyamika* or "middle way", is key to tender a description of the ineffable *Mysterium Magnum* of the "Great Continuum" that is rendered in English as "Mindstream": the nondual interpenetration of *ātman* and *anātman*. This 'interpenetration' or 'coalescence' (Wylie: zung 'jug; Sanskrit: yuganaddha) is just a conceptual formation and technically, the "mindstream" is subject to the Shakyamuni Buddha's 'Fourfold Reasoning' developed by Nargajuna and known as the *Catuskoti* though the mindstream secures its nomenclature from the fourth pada "neither one nor many" (Wylie: gcig du 'bral ba'i gtan tshigs), as this historically is the preferred subtle reification, but reification nonetheless.

In the entwined Dzogchen traditions of *Bönpo* and *Nyingmapa*, the Mindstream is constituted by a continuum of *gankyil* composed of the Five Pure Lights of the Five Wisdoms which unite the *trikaya*. These 'tantric correlations' (or Twilight Language) are evident in the iconographic representation of the *Five Jinas*^[10] and the *saṃpanna-krama* of the *gankyil* and mandala in Dzogchen *sādhana*. The 'supreme siddhi' or 'absolute bodhicitta' of the Dzogchenpa is when the Mindstream of their 'bodymind' (a rendering of *namarupa*) is 'released' (a rendering of Nirvana) as the Rainbow Body.

Capriles (2004: p. 35) defines the 'consciousness of the base-of-all' (Skt., *alayavijñāna*; Tib., *kunzhi namshee*) as congruent with the 'Mindstream' (Skt., *santana*; Tib., *gyü*) and mentions *vasanas*, *bijas*, and *tathata*:

The consciousness of the base-of-all was not conceived as an immutable absolute, which is how the Atman of Hinduism is described; in agreement with the Hinayana idea of a succession of instants of knowledge, it was explained as a continually changing stream of consciousness (Skt., *santana*; Tib., *gyü*), and was said to be the vehicle that carries the karmic imprints (*vasanas* or *bijas*) that go from one life to the next. In turn, from the standpoint of experience, the consciousness of the base-of-all is an ample condition that yogis may find by absorption. Though the consciousness of the base-of-all is of the nature of thatness (Skt., *tathata*; Tib., *dezhinnyia*)—the absolute nature that is the single constituent of all entities—this consciousness is also the root of *samsara*.^[11]

Name

The nomenclature and etymology of the **Mindstream** (Tibetan: *dam pa'i byin rlabs* or *sems-rgyud*; Sanskrit: *citta-santāna*) is convoluted and tied to: the historical context of Buddhism in India; the historical development of Buddhism; the Silk Road transmission of Buddhism, the syncretic and dialogic doctrinal development of Buddhism; and to the secession of Buddhism from, and its persistent entwining relationship with, *Sanatana Dharma* and other Dharmic traditions, Chinese religions and Bön.

Xin xiangxu 心相續 (Chinese)

The Chinese translation of Sanskrit *citta-saṃtāna* and Tibetan *sems kyi rgyud* "mindstream" is *xin xiangxu* (simplified Chinese: 心相续; traditional Chinese: 心相續; pinyin: *xīn xiāngxù*; Wade-Giles: *hsin hsiang-hsü*). This compound combines *xin* 心 "heart; mind; thought; conscience; core" and *xiangxu* "succeed each other", with *xiang* 相 "each other; one another; mutual; reciprocal" and *xu* 續 or 续 "continue; carry on; succeed". Thus it means "thoughts mutually succeeding each other".

According to the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, *xīn xiāngxù* 心相續 "continuance of the mental stream" (from Sanskrit *citta-saṃtāna* or *citta-saṃtati*) contrasts with *wú xiāngxù* 無相續 "no continuity of the mental stream" (from *asaṃtāna* or *asaṃdhi*) and *shì xiāngxù* 識相續 "stream of consciousness" (from *vijñāna-saṃtāna*).

This Chinese Buddhist term *xin xiangxu* 心相續 "mindstream" is pronounced *sim sangsok* in Korean and *shin sōzoku* in Japanese.

***Citta-saṃtāna* (Sanskrit)**

Citta (Sanskrit) holds the semantic field of "that which is conscious", "the act of mental apprehension known as ordinary consciousness", "the conventional and relative mind/heart".^[12] Citta has two aspects: "...Its two aspects are 'attending to,' and, 'collecting' of impressions or traces (Sanskrit: *vāsanā*) cf. *vijñāna*."^[12] Citta is often rendered as "sems" in Tibetan.

Saṃtāna or Santāna (Sanskrit) holds the semantic field of "eternal", "continuum", "a series of momentary events", "life-stream".^[12]

In the Sanskrit language, *citta-santāna* may be parsed as per the analyses of Keown, *et al.* (2003: p. 62) who state:

Literally, "the stream of mind", a general term used to indicate the continuity of the personality of an individual in the absence of the permanently abiding 'self' (*ātman*) that Buddhism denies."^[13]

***dam pa'i byin rlabs* (Tibetan)**

In the Tibetan language, *dam pa'i byin rlabs* may be parsed into *dam pa'i* which contains the semantic field of "flow", "stream"; whilst the semantic field of *byin rlabs* (Tibetan; Sanskrit: *adhiṣṭhāna*) holds "blessing", "sacred", "empowerment", "inspiration" thus entwined constitute the "empowering flow from the sacred" which are transmitted in the mindstream as well as synonymous with *bodhichitta* and enlightened mind and the mindstream in its ever-refining purity.

***Sems-rgyud* or *sems kyi rgyud* (Tibetan)**

The Tibetan term *rgyud* holds the semantic field of "continuum", "stream", and "thread". Interestingly, it is the term that Tibetan 'translators' (Tibetan: *lotsawa*) employed to translate and render the Sanskrit term "tantra".^[14]

***Thugs-rgyud* (Tibetan)^[15]**

Thugs-rgyud may be parsed into "thugs" and "rgyud".

Please refer above for "rgyud". *Thugs* holds the semantic field: "Buddha-mind", "(enlightened) mind", "mind", "soul", "spirit", "purpose", "intention", "unbiased perspective", "spirituality", "responsiveness", "spiritual significance", "awareness", "primordial (state, experience)", "enlightened mind", "heart", "breast", "feelings" and is sometimes a homonym of "citta" (Sanskrit).^[16]

Thugs-rgyud holds the semantic field and has been rendered into English as: "wisdom", "transmission", "heart-mind continuum", "mind", "[continuum/ stream of] mind", "nature of mind" and is a homonym for "sems rgyud" or "rgyud".^[15]

Mental continuum

Berzin (2007) identifies "mental continuum" as Tibetan: *sems-rgyud* and Sanskrit: "santana".^[17]

Mental "stream" metaphors

The metaphorical use of "stream" to describe mentality is endemic but not unique to Buddhist literature and worldview. In English for example, "stream of consciousness" is more familiar than "mindstream". Lachs and Talisse (2008:737) write,

The "stream" or "flow" metaphor can be found in descriptions of mind and reality dating back to a number of ancient sources, including the fragments attributed to the presocratic thinker Heraclitus, the Upanishadic writings of the Hindu canon, and various Buddhist and Taoist texts and commentaries. However, it was the American psychologist and philosopher William James who gave the express a certain technical significance and galvanized its contemporary usage.^[18]

James promoted the 'stream of consciousness' with its particular nomenclature, some state drawn from Bain (refer following), whilst immersed in Buddhist studies and accompanying protracted spiritual discipline of Vipāśyanā (Sanskrit), as related by Wallace (2003: p.6):

Buddhologist Roger R. Jackson similarly portrays Buddhist meditation as a type of ritual act (Jackson 1999:231). While such characterizations are certainly valid for some types of Buddhist meditation, they are profoundly misleading for the practices of meditative quiescence (*samatha*) and contemplative insight (*vipasyana*), which are the two core modes of Buddhist meditative training. Techniques of meditative quiescence entail the rigorous cultivation of attentional stability and vividness, methods having a strong bearing on William James's psychological theories of attention (Wallace 1998, 1999a).^[19]

Buddhism

There are two entwined mindstreams according to the Two Truths, the absolute and relative, that are ultimately non-dual according to Atiyoga. The Divine Mindstream of 'consciousness' which is engaged in the phowa sadhana, for example; and the mindstream of thought, ideation (Tibetan: *sem*; Sanskrit: *manas*) (*vṛtti-citta*^[20]).

Gyatso, Jinpa & Wallace (2003: p. 97) identify two kinds of consciousness continuum and associate the most subtle state of consciousness continuum, elsewhere identified within this Wikipedia article as the 'mindstream substrate' with what is known in Tibetan Buddhist, Dzogchen and Bonpo discourse as 'clear light':

In Vajrayāna Buddhism the subtlest state of consciousness is known as *clear light*. In terms of categories of consciousness, there is one type of consciousness that consists of a permanent stream or an unending continuity and there are other forms of consciousness whose continuum comes to an end. Both these levels of consciousness - one consisting of an endless continuum and the other of a finite continuum - have a momentary nature. That is to say, they arise from moment to moment, and they are constantly in a state of flux. So the permanence of the first kind is only in terms of its continuum. The subtlest consciousness consists of such an eternal continuum, while the streams of the grosser states of consciousness do end.^[21]

Sogyal (1994: p. 73) frames the importance of the stream metaphor in relation to meditation and the nature of mind, the objective of meditative sadhana:

In the ancient meditation instructions, it is said that at the beginning thoughts will arrive one on top of another, uninterrupted, like a steep mountain waterfall. Gradually, as you perfect meditation, thoughts become like the water in a deep, narrow gorge, then a great river slowly winding its way down to the sea, and finally the mind becomes like a still and placid ocean, ruffled by only the occasional ripple or wave.^[22]

As Bucknell *et al.* (1986: p. 112-113) in linking *Tipiṭaka*, *Mahāmudrā* and *David-Néel* state:

In Buddhist literature the mental condition in which sequences of imagery and verbalizing run on endlessly is often compared to a flowing stream. We find in the oldest section of the *Tipiṭaka* the term 'stream of consciousness' (*viññāṇa-sotaṃ*).^[23] The same metaphor is often found in the Tibetan literature. The guru Padma Karpo spoke of 'thoughts...following one after the other as if in a continuous stream';^[24] Mipham Nampar Gyalba observed that the 'stream of images flows unbroken';^[25] and in the Vow of *Mahāmudrā*, there is reference to 'the mind river'.^[26] This manner of speaking is also common at the present day. Tarthang Tülku refers to 'the stream of mental images'^[27] and 'the flow of thoughts and images',^[28] and David-Neel, in a discussion of the meditation practices she observed in Tibet, speaks of 'the continual, swift, flowing stream of thoughts and mental images...'.^[29]

Psychology

Stream of consciousness was coined by the philosopher Bain in 1855 and later popularized by the psychologist James. Bain wrote, "The concurrence of Sensations in one common stream of consciousness, — on the same cerebral highway, — enables those of different senses to be associated as readily as the sensations of the same sense."^[30] After originating in psychological theory, the "stream of consciousness" metaphor became more common in English usage, and was adapted into different contexts, for instance, the stream of consciousness (narrative mode) in literary criticism.

James' classic 1890 *The Principles of Psychology* used several "stream" metaphors . Chapter 9, "The Stream of Thought" describes "the stream of consciousness" as constantly changing and "sensibly continuous":

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*^[31]

"Mental stream" occurs in another context:

The continuous flow of the mental stream is sacrificed, and in its place an atomism, a brickbat plan of construction, is preached, for the existence of which no good introspective grounds can be brought forward, and out of which presently grow all sorts of paradoxes and contradictions, the heritage of woe of students of the mind.^[32]

The psychologist Tichener used "mind-stream" to differentiate "mind" from "consciousness":

We shall therefore take mind and consciousness to mean the same thing. But as we have the two different words, and it is convenient to make some distinction between them, we shall speak of mind when we mean the sum-total of mental processes occurring in the life-time of an individual, and we shall speak of consciousness when we mean the sum-total of mental processes occurring now, at any given 'present' time. Consciousness will thus be a section, a division, of the mind-stream.^[33]

Historical development of the Mindstream doctrine

Formative context

Within the Buddhist traditions emergent in India and the development of their various views, it is important to affirm the dialogic forum of the Abhidharma as does King (1998: pp. 5–18) who states that:

Buddhist philosophical debate in India took place within an Abhidharmic context.^[34]

As Chatterji (1931: pp. 206–207) states:

Now all the schools of Brahmanic philosophy have posited some permanent entity, i.e. soul as the cognizer to which cognition is variously related. The Buddhists have, however, denied the existence of any such permanent entity. The aggregates of rupa, samjna, samskara, vedana and vijnana,- the first corresponding to what we call material elements and all the rest to mental elements - are the stuff of which an individual is made. Cognition which is not subservient to any intelligent being, is referred as the samjna skandha or the vijnana skandha according as it is determinate (savikalpa) or indeterminate (nirvikalpa). The place of the transcendental atman is taken by vijnana. It is the continuity of cognition (santana) which holds together, unifies and synthesizes the fleeting moments of cognition and seems to give us the notion, though erroneous, of a subject or a knower acquiring knowledge both presentative (nirvikalpa or svalaksana) and representative (savikalpa or samanyalaksana). This is in general the Buddhist view on the nature of the pramatr or the subject. But there are some notable points of difference among the various schools.^[35]

Early Buddhist context

Karunadasa (1999, 2000: p. 1) holds that Early Buddhism and early Buddhist discourse "often refer to the mutual opposition between two views":

- 'permanence' or 'eternalism' (Pali: *sassatavada*) also sometimes referred to as 'the belief in being' (Pali: *bhava-ditti*); and
- 'annihilation' or 'nihilism' (Pali: *ucchadevada*) also sometimes referred to as 'the belief in non-being' (Pali: *vibhava-ditti*).^[36]

As Shakyamuni relates in a 'thread' (Sanskrit: *sūtra*) of discourse to Kaccānagotta in the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*, rendered into English by Myanmar Piṭaka Association Editorial Committee (1993: p. 35):

"For the most part, Kaccāna, sentient beings depend on two kinds of belief - belief that 'there is' (things exist) and belief that 'there is not' (things do not exist).^[37]

Karunadasa (1999, 2000: p. 1) states that:

...it is within the framework of the Buddhist critique of *sassatavada* and *ucchadevada* that the Buddhist doctrines seem to assume their significance. For it is through the demolition of these two world-views that Buddhism seeks to construct its own world-view. The conclusion is that it was as a critical response to the mutual opposition between these two views that Buddhism emerged as a new faith amidst many other faiths.^[36]

In Yogacara

Mañjuśrīmitra states in the *Bodhicittabhavana*, a seminal early text of Ati Yoga that the: "The mental-continuum (citta-santana) is without boundaries or extension; it is not one thing, nor supported by anything."^[38]

Mindstream is a conflation subsuming 'heartmind' (Sanskrit: *bodhi-citta*) and 'wisdom-mind' (Sanskrit: *jñāna-dharmakaya*; Tibetan: *ye-shes chos-sku*).

Lusthaus (undated) in mapping the development and doctrinal relationships of *ālaya-vijñāna*, *tathāgatagarbha*, Yogācāra, *ātman*, Abhidharma, *prakṛti* and the Mindstream states:

Several Yogācāra notions basic to the Abhidharma wing [of Yogācāra] came under severe attack by other Buddhists, especially the notion of *ālaya-vijñāna*, which was denounced as something akin to the Hindu notions of *ātman* (permanent, invariant self) and *prakṛti* (primordial substrative nature from which all mental, emotional and physical things evolve). Eventually the critiques became so entrenched that the Abhidharma wing atrophied. By the end of the eighth century it was eclipsed by the logico-epistemic tradition [of Yogācāra] and by a hybrid school that combined basic Yogācāra doctrines with *Tathāgatagarbha* thought. The logico-epistemological wing in part side-stepped the critique by using the term *citta-santāna*, "mind-stream", instead of *ālaya-vijñāna*, for what amounted to roughly the same idea. It was easier to deny that a "stream" represented a reified self. On the other hand, the *Tathāgatagarbha* hybrid school was no stranger to the charge of smuggling notions of selfhood into its doctrines, since, for example, it explicitly defined the *tathāgatagarbha* as "permanent, pleasurable, *self*, and pure (*nitya*, *sukha*, *ātman*, *śuddha*). Many *Tathāgatagarbha* texts, in fact, argue for the acceptance of selfhood (*ātman*) as a sign of higher accomplishment. The hybrid school attempted to conflate *tathāgatagarbha* with the *ālaya-vijñāna*.^[39]

The word "atman" is used in *tathāgatagarbha* literature after being defined or re-qualified in a new, idiosyncratic way. The Buddha-Nature Treatise for example defines "Self" as the perfection of the anatman-paramita. Thus one realizes his/her "true self" by perfecting his/her understanding of the truth of anatman. See Atman (Buddhism).

Dzogchen (2007: p. 84) asserts an unsourced paraphrase or pastiche of a view attributed to Nagarjuna:

Nagarjuna says that the mindstream of every unenlightened being is permeated by the heart essence of buddhahood. The fundamental nature of our mindstreams is *tathāgatagarbha*, or buddha nature, the seed and heart essence of an enlightened being. It is this quality that gives us the capacity to become buddhas.^[40]

The view in the direct quotation above is generally attributed to the Yogachara. It is clear that the first sentence in the above quotation holds the position attributed to Nagarjuna. It is unclear whether the latter two sentences in the quotation are also that of Nagarjuna, or alternatively the position of Dzogchen Rinpoche.

Waldron (2003: p. 178) renders Vasubandhu's Yogacara account from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of 'cyclic causality' (bhavacakra), kleśa and karma in relation to the mindstream:

...the mind stream (*santāna*) increases gradually by the mental afflictions (*kleśa*) and by actions (*karma*), and goes again to the next world. In this way the circle of existence is without beginning."^[41] [42]

King (1998) holds that:

Schmithausen offers a list of twenty uses which the concept of alayavijnana provided (14 'philosophical' and 6 exegetical) for the early Yogacarins. Most of these cluster around the explanation of personal continuity given the absence of an abiding-self, and providing a link between karmic action and subsequent fruition. The Sautrantika metaphor of the seed (bija) became central in the case of the latter issue once the Vaibhasika conception of the existence of dharmas in past, present and future (the sarvastivada position) was rejected. However, as Schmithausen points out, although the Sautrantika postulated the notion of a karmic seed to establish causal continuity over time, the Yogacara seems to have felt that this required the further postulation of a store (alaya) consciousness as the repository of

these seeds. Nevertheless, it is important to note at this point that the store-consciousness is by no means considered to be an ultimate reality in the works of either Vasubandhu the Yogacarin or Asanga, as has sometimes been suggested.^[34]

Dharmakirti (fl. 7th century) wrote a treatise on the nature of the mindstream in his 'Substantiation of Other Mindstreams' (Sanskrit: *Samtānāntarasiddhi*).^[43] There is an English translation of *Samtānāntarasiddhi* by Gupta (1969: pp.81-121) which is a rendering of Stecherbatsky's work from the Russian.^[44] Ratnakirti (fl. c7-8th century), a disciple of Dharmakirti, wrote a work that developed and refined the themes of *Samtānāntarasiddhi* further, entitled: 'Refutation of Other mindstreams' (Sanskrit: *Samtānāntaradusana*). Ratnakirti did not refute the tenets of the *Santanantarasiddhi* but leavened the nature of the issue from an empirical one, that is, where there are manifold minds cognized by one's experience of other's mental processes attributed through the perceived actions of other sentient beings that arise in one's continuum; to an absolutist view, where there is only 'one mindstream' (Sanskrit: ekacitta). Ratnakirti's argument is that the 'valid cognition' (Sanskrit: pramana) of another's mindstream is an 'inference' (Sanskrit: anumana), not a 'direct perception' (Sanskrit: pratyaksa). Moreover, Ratnakirti introduced the Two truths doctrine as key to the nature of the discussion as inference is trafficking with 'illusiory universals' (Sanskrit: samanya), the proof of the mindstreams of others, whilst empirically valid in 'relative truth' (Sanskrit: samvrtisatya), does not hold ultimate metaphysical certainty in 'absolute truth' (paramarthasatya).

Universality

Though a conceptual mystery, mindstream may be conceived as nonlinear and holistic. The medium and conduit of mindstream is æther or space and is unbounded by temporality or locality. Welwood describes it in this way:

If the contents of mind are like pails and buckets floating in a stream, and the mindstream is like the dynamic flowing of the water, pure awareness is like the water itself in its essential wetness. Sometimes the water is still, sometimes it is turbulent; yet it always remains as it is – wet, fluid, watery. In the same way, pure awareness is never confined [n]or disrupted by any mind-state. Therefore, it is the source of liberation and true equanimity. (Welwood, 2000)

Welwood introduces "pure awareness", the essence-quality of the mindstream, and may be considered synonymous with 'natural mind' rigpa (Tibetan) or the primordial and principal constitutional consciousness of being and accessible by (and the point of origin of) all sentient beings. 'Sentient beings' is a technical Vajrayana term denoting the mindstream(s) of all those consciousness(es) not yet aware of the emptiness and fullness of perfection. Welwood (2000: unpaginated) links the mindstream with the trikaya:



In terms of the Buddhist teaching of the three kayas, we could say that the contents of consciousness belong to the nirmanakaya, the realm of manifest form. The pulsation of the mindstream, with its alternation between movement and stillness, belongs to the sambhogakaya, the realm of energy flow. And the larger, open ground of awareness, first discovered in moments of stillness, is the dharmakaya, the realm of pure being (the thing-in-itself), eternally present, spontaneous, and free of entrapment in any form whatsoever. (Welwood, 2000)

The Buddhist and Bön teachings of mindstream and heartmind inform one another, as does bodymind. As Chodron (1991) states: "Just as the body is a 'continuity' even though it has parts, the mindstream or consciousness is also a 'continuity', although it has parts." Hawter (1995) succinctly relates that: "All of our actions lay down imprints on our mindstream which have the potential to ripen at some time in the future." This should not imply that the mindstream is linear and only flows one way, but the mindstream is understood in the Himalayan Tradition to flow all ways, always. For Morrell (1999): "The Mahayanists also contend that the mind forms a continuous, unending and unbroken mindstream or flow of consciousness, from beginningless time and indestructible. Thoughts and feelings in the mindstream are regarded as of supreme importance to Buddhist practice."

Kelzang Gyatso (1708-1757 CE), His Holiness the 7th Dalai Lama is translated in Mullin (1982) as stating that: "all things in the world and beyond [a]re simply projections of names and thoughts. Not even the tiniest atom exists by

itself, [i]ndependently [or] in its own right" (Mullin, 1982: 53). Therefore, the Universe^[45] ^[46] ^[47] is the thoughtform of the collective mindstream of all sentient beings (and there is nothing which is non-sentient; pansentience^[48]). This pansentient totality is the great continuum, the "great perfection" or "total completion" (Tibetan: *rdzog pa chen po*) of Dzogchen and Ati Yoga^[49] (Tibetan: *shin tu rnal 'byor*^[50] where "shin tu"^[51] holds the semantic field "total", "complete", "absolute" and "rnal 'byor"^[52] holds the semantic field of "yoga"; Sanskrit: "Ati" holds the semantic field "primordial", "original", "first"; "yoga" holds the semantic field "communion", "union").

Iconography

 External images	
	For an example of an iconographic representation of the mindstream refer this 'icon' (Tibetan: <i>[[thangka</i> ^[53] <i>]] of Tapihritsa</i>)

The mindstream as experiential phenomenon: usage and application in sadhana

Experiential determinant: *vāsanās*

Capriles (2008: p.323) under the guidance of Norbu in discussing the *alaya vijñana* (storehouse consciousness) states that:

..the term "storehouse" and the metaphor of the tank should not deceive us into conveying it as a container-like *topos*, static and passive: the *alaya vijñana* (is) a continually changing stream of consciousness (Skt. *santana*; Tib. *semgyü*) consisting of successive instants of knowledge (and as such, rather than being a continuous entity...it may be compared to a succession of perfectly elastic, friction-free billiard balls hitting each other), which is regarded as a vehicle carrying karmic imprints (skt. *avarana* or *vasana*, according to the case; Tib. *bagchag* [*bag chags*]) from one life to the next--or , which is the same, from one psychological state to the next.^[54]

The adventitious obscurations of the mindstream are the *vāsanās* which may be viewed as obstructive sediment if we extend the metaphor: sediment that forms 'concretions', 'fixed ideas or conceptions' (Sanskrit: *Samskāra*). Technically, it is the *vāsanās* which link the continuity. As Lusthaus (2002: p.472) states drawing from the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* which discusses 'linkage *vasanas*' (*bhāvāṅga-vāsanās*, *yu-chih hsi-ch'i*):

Linkage *vāsanās* account for karmic continuity between lives and between moments.^[55]

The mindstream may be construed or envisioned in manifold ways and it is valuable following Yogacara conceptions of the mechanics of perception and experience to model it as flowing or projecting outwards, as a stream of *vasana* from the cache of the *alayavijñana* determining the play of our experience and worldview:

In early Mahayana literature 'vijñapti' came to designate any cognitive act which is carried out by the mind (*manas*). In the Yogacara school all experience is claimed to be fundamentally 'mental' in nature. More specifically, an individual's experience is constituted by a series of projections externally intimated from the store-consciousness (*alayavijñana*) of karmic impressions (*vasana*). There appears to be no explicit distinction here between types of *vinapti* as we find in the Vaibhasika texts.^[34]

Lusthaus (2002: p.474) further explores this projection of *vāsanās* as "latent linguistic conditioning" (*ming-yen hsi ch'i*) that forms our "perceptual field" (*viśaya*) in his commentary to the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun*

Due to this type of *vāsanās* one actually sees and experiences the world in certain ways, and one actually becomes a certain type of person, embodying certain theories which immediately shape the manner in which we experience. A dialectical materialist, for instance, who has embodied a theory of dialectical

materialism, actually sees the world as an occasion of dialectical economic forces in which people--including oneself--are instantiations of economic principles, such as class conflict, alienations, structures of production, and so on. A psychiatrist, embodying certain psychological theories, sees her patients as enactments of those theories, and may notice things about her patients that others don't see. Linguistic conceptual conditioning shapes how things (*viṣaya*) appear, and also the modes through which we approach experience (*citta-caitta*).^[56]

Wangyal (2002: p.10) in discussing the Five Pure Lights which are the fabric of the mindstream states:

Karmic dispositions and conditioning determine the nature of the world we inhabit: What we experience externally is a projection of what is internal. This world is a hell for some people, for others it is heaven.^[57]

Wangyal (2002: p.117) in explicating the "The Fifth Lamp" (*zhing khams ngo-sprod sgron-ma*) from within the larger treatise of the "Six Lamps" (*Sgron-ma drug*), contained within the Bonpo *Zhang Zhung Nyan Gyud*, conveys that a hollow doll with holes in the 'nine gateways' (*Skt: navadvāre*) is employed as a teaching tool in Dzogchen to quicken this view:

In a dark room, a lit candle is placed inside the doll. There is light in the center of the doll, light moving throughout the doll, and light illuminating what is external to the doll--it is all the same light...The Light from inside the doll illuminates what is external to it. This is the opposite of the way we think in the West, where it is believed that the world comes into us through the senses...It is important to remember that what appears to be outside is actually phenomena arising in awareness. Experience is non-dual; subject and object arise together. They are divided into internal self and external object only conceptually--the light is not actually divided within or without. In reality both poles of duality are empty, luminous phenomena arising in the nature of mind.^[58]

For further discussion of the "Lamps" (*sgron-ma*) refer Scheidegger (2007).^[59]

Conditioning the mindstream: empowerment and sadhana

Empowerment

Yuthok *et al.* (1997: p. 46) elucidates the intimate connection of the mindstream, initiation and mandala:

It is only through initiation that the blessings of...a mandala may be stamped on the individual's mindstream. Initiation can be given and received only when the time, location and circumstances are appropriate. Only an enlightened, undisputed master may bestow it. The initiation is not given to large crowds of people. It may be received only by disciples who are receptive by virtue of their faith and devotion. If the transmission is successful, disciples will experience it at some level. This may be physical, mental or verbal. People who receive the physical form of blessing sometimes move about and shake. Those who receive verbal blessings may utter all sorts of mantras that they never heard before, which block out their perception of normal sounds. When the mindstream is blessed, the mind is inundated with a new vision of reality. Initiations normally rely on an external mandala, usually painted in sand or on cloth. Once a disciple is initiated, he must re-initiate himself daily through regular practice. Eventually, this will lead him or her to realisation.^[60]

Sadhana

Kunsang, *et al.* (2008: p. 94) renders the following dialogue between Yeshe Tsogyal and Padmasambhava:

Lady Tsogyal asked the Lotus-Born master: What is the dividing line between mind and mind-essence?

The master replied: *Mind (sem)* is the formative thinking. *Mind-essence (semnyi)* is free of thinking and mental doing. When experiencing this essence to be your stream-of-being, interrupt your mind's thought activity and let it be, uncontrived and as it naturally is. This quiet and vividly awake state, free of any mental doing, is the vital point of naturally clearing the mind itself. Tsogyal, this advice of utmost importance, I give to you.^[61]

In the 'Discourse on Mindfulness' (Pali: *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*) located within the *Majjhima Nikaya* of the Pali Canon, Buddha Shakyamuni is rendered as foregrounding 'mindfulness' or the enduring presence of the immediacy of experience and a foundational practice to Buddhist spiritual discipline and a preliminary to *śamatha* (Sanskrit) and *vipaśyanā* (Sanskrit). Fenner (1994) provides an accessible point of entry to *satipaṭṭhāna* sadhana:

In this meditative practice, we learn to recognize and observe the individual components that make up the full range of human experience. The exercise is to attend to the different processes and phenomena that occur in the here-and-now as we are sitting in meditative posture or engaged in the various activities of our lives. This involves systematically observing our experience to find out what is there.^[62]

The experience of *satipaṭṭhāna* sadhana provides the 'outer' or coarse experience of the mindstream or the flow of representation and mentation and is intimately connected with the technical term 'sotapanna' (Pali). Ponlop (2004) clearly charts the developmental relationship of the sadhanas of *shamatha* and *vipashyana*:

The ways these two aspects of meditation are practiced is that one begins with the practice of *shamatha*; on the basis of that, it becomes possible to practice *vipashyana* or *lhagthong*. Through one's practice of *vipashyana* being based on and carried on in the midst of *shamatha*, one eventually ends up practicing a unification of *shamatha* and *vipashyana*. The unification leads to a very clear and direct experience of the nature of all things. This brings one very close to what is called the absolute truth.^[63]

In the context of the skillful mindstream doctrine, this 'absolute truth' is cognate with the mindstream substrate, the base or foundation of mind, lucidity and consciousness and is known in the Nyingmapa and Bonpo traditions of Dzogchen as the 'clear light' (Wylie: *'od gsal*) also rendered as 'inner radiance' and 'luminosity'.

Buddhist and Hindu Tantric *sadhana*, and particularly that entwined heritage promulgated by the Mahasiddha, involve the *sadhaka* 'generating a linkage' *kye-rim* between their mindstream with that of a *guru* or *yidam* as a precursor to 'fully aspecting' *dzog-rim* their yidam and ishta-deva and their "spiritual personality".^[64] The mindstream and the imaginal interiority of visualization are employed in the *kye-rim* mode of meditative trance sadhana and the internal construction of the buddhafield, mandala and refuge tree.

Gyatso (1998: p. 27) translates Jigme Lingpa's autobiographical work "Dancing Moon in the Water" ('Chudai Garken'; Wylie: *chu zla'i gar mkhan*) that foregrounds Dream Yoga sadhana:

Then, again while sleeping for a bit,
through the force of the blessing

from realizing the heart-mind continuum,

the conceptual thoughts of the ground-of-all
woke as the Dharma body.

I became absorbed

in the spectacle of empty radiant light,
a manifestation without conceptions.

Then it spread,

moved into an external manifestation,
and I saw,

in the awareness-radiation
 of vision-producing radiant light,
 several self-produced patterns
 on the surface of a rock
 shined upon by the sun.^[65]

Lati, Zahler and Hopkins (1983, 1997: pp. 24–25) through the institutionalized lens of the Gelugpa and their graduated and developmental 'stages of the path' (Tibetan: *lamrim*), frame the sadhana that Shakyamuni Buddha employed to extinguish that which was unwholesome in his mental continuum and mention: artha, maitri, karuna, bodhisattva, bodhi, śūnyatā, pāramitā, five paths, bhūmi and dharma:

...Buddha...came to discard his own welfare (*don, artha*) and to have concern for the welfare of others; and he cultivated love (*byams pa, maitri*) and compassion (*snying rje, karuṇā*), which served as the root for the special mind, the Bodhisattva attitude. Bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*) means "hero with respect to contemplating enlightenment (*byang chub, bodhi*)." Thus, he changed his original attitude of cherishing himself and discarding others to that of cherishing others and discarding his own welfare. He also meditated on emptiness (*stong pa nyid, śūnyatā*). Through cultivating in union the wisdom realizing emptiness and the special Bodhisattva attitude, the altruistic mind of enlightenment, and through accompanying these practices with the six perfections (*phar phyin, pāramitā*) - giving (*sbyin pa, dāna*), ethics (*tshul khrims, śīla*), patience (*bzod pa, kṣānti*), effort (*brtson grus, vīrya*), concentration (*bsam gtan, dhyāna*), and wisdom (*she rab, prajñā*) - he ascended the five paths (*lam, mārga*) - the paths of accumulation (*tshogs lam, saṃbhāramārga*), preparation (*prayogamārga, sbyor lam*), seeing (*mthong lam, darśanamārga*), meditation (*sgom lam, bhāvanāmārga*), and no more learning (*mi slob lam, aśaikṣamārga*) - and the ten grounds (*sa, bhūmi*) and completed the collections of merit (*bsod nams, puṇya*) and exalted wisdom (*ye shes, jñāna*). He was able to extinguish all faults in his own mental continuum (*rgyud, saṃtāna*) and to accomplish all auspicious attributes. He was able to achieve the wisdom that knows phenomena (*chos, dharma*) and their status, and when he did this, he became a Buddha. Thus, a Buddha is not someone who is produced causelessly; ...[but] is produced in dependence on causes.^[66]

In an unknown (though insightful) commentator's purport to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras Sutra I.34, pranayama, meditation on the breath, is linked to the mindstream:

Thus the outflow of the breath, being associated with release, it is used to release the negative energy, thoughts, and emotions which interrupt the Divine mind-stream. Since breath is related to our basic energy, in this light then, we can also understand how we can regulate the cit-prana and soothe and clarify the mind by bringing our awareness back to the exhalation of the breath and the regulation of the breath. This will bring freshness and clarification to the mindstream.^[67]

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama is asked "what is the nature of the mindstream that reincarnates from lifetime to lifetime?" (1997) he answers making reference to the soul, continuum, the Sakya master Rendawa (Wylie: red mda' pa), the composite of body and mind, the aggregates, alayavijnana, and the Mind-Only school, as follows:

If one understands the term "soul" as a continuum of individuality from moment to moment, from lifetime to lifetime, then one can say that Buddhism also accepts a concept of soul; there is a kind of continuum of consciousness. From that point of view, the debate on whether or not there is a soul becomes strictly semantic. However, in the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness, or "no soul" theory, the understanding is that there is no eternal, unchanging, abiding, permanent self called "soul." That is what is being denied in Buddhism.

Buddhism does not deny the continuum of consciousness. Because of this, we find some Tibetan scholars, such as the Sakya master Rendawa, who accept that there is such a thing as self or soul, the "kangsak ki dak" (Tib. *gang zag gi bdag*). However, the same word, the "kangsak ki dak", the self, or

person, or personal self, or identity, is at the same time denied by many other scholars.

We find diverse opinions, even among Buddhist scholars, as to what exactly the nature of self is, what exactly that thing or entity is that continues from one moment to the next moment, from one lifetime to the next lifetime. Some try to locate it within the aggregates, the composite of body and mind. Some explain it in terms of a designation based on the body and mind composite, and so on.... One of the divisions of [the "Mind-Only"] school maintains there is a special continuum of consciousness called *alayavijnana* which is the fundamental consciousness.

Waldron links Vasubandhu, *bhavachakra*, *klesha* and *karma*:

Vasubandhu describes this classic account of cyclic causality in terms of one's 'mind stream': "the mind stream (*santana*) increases gradually by the mental afflictions (*klesa*) and by actions (*karma*), and goes again to the next world. In this way the circle of existence is without beginning (*anadibhavacakraka*)." (AKBh III 19a-d; Poussin, tome 2, pp. 57-59; Shastri, pp. 433-34.)^[6]

Vajranatha states:

When we look inside of ourselves and just observe, we find that there is only a stream of consciousness (T. *shes-rgyud*, S. *vijnana-santana*). The Buddha introduced this term long before William James did some hundred years ago. When we say "my mind", this refers not to a thing or a vestment. Yet this stream of consciousness has a continuity and an individuality. Our stream of consciousness is separate from those of other people. There are individual streams of consciousness and individual mental processes. We are not all One Mind. If we were, as soon as one of us realized something, all of us would simultaneously realize it.^[68]

Atiyoga

In general Himalayan spiritual discourse, Atiyoga is held to be the peak of the Dharma of the Nine Vehicles for both the Nyingmapa and Bonpo and is comparable to the complete realization of Mahamudra for the Sarma traditions. Though this hierarchical view is the general paradigm, Atiyoga is also the unity, fulfillment and primordial base of all the other Yana. It is commonly held that Atiyoga speaks its own language and this is impenetrable for those who have not had empowerments, *lung* and direct experience, establishing the clear view of the nature of the mindstream. This is known as the 'pointing out instruction' according to Namkha'i. In the other Yana there is the doctrine of inter- and intra-permeable mindstreams, that support the entwining *nirmanakaya* or *tulku* lineages of the re-embodiment and 'treasure' (Wylie: *gTer*) traditions. Padma Translation Committee's rendering of an embedded quotation of one of the famed "Twelve Vajra Laughs" (drawn from the 'Pile of Jewels Tantra'; Wylie: *Rin po che spungs pa' rgyud* which is numbered as one of the Seventeen tantras) cited in the *Nelug Dzö* one of Longchenpa's 'Seven Treasures' (Wylie: *mDzod bdun*) is clearly an example of the technical twilight language of Ati Yoga and the pedigree of the 'skillful' doctrine of the mindstream:

Listen further, O Vajra of Speech! Behold the nature of phenomena, empty and all-pervasive timeless awareness. How marvelous--it is unborn and abides timelessly, coemergent with being itself. Even if a person were to seize a sharp weapon and slay all beings at once, that person's mindstream would still be free of benefit or harm. Ha! Ha!^[69]

In a Peircean or de Saussurian semiotic analysis of the semantic signifier "mindstream", the signifier mindstream denotes an ineffable signified of an open and pervasive mystery: To limit the limitless by stating that it may not subject itself to boundaries or limit itself by grace is bunk. Sky is a limitless limit. Ati Yoga is a verb. Ati Yoga: "ati" or "adi" a Sanskrit term that holds the semantic field "beginning", "wellspring", "origination"; and "yoga" a Sanskrit term that may be rendered most appropriately into English in its full semantic analogue, "communion". Therefore, the verb or process of Atiyoga is *to commune* with the primordially of the unknowable and pregnant 'void' or 'zero' (Sanskrit: *śūnyā*). The perfect infinitive tense "to commune" was employed to convey an embedded philosophical view of the viewless Great Perfection. Void, is Emptiness, is Sky, is Space, is Zero: a garland of analogues. In the

Dharmic traditions, Dharma has a 5000 year tradition of being conveyed and rarefied by realization forded through analysis and grammar of alphanumeric systems and semiology both esoteric and exoteric. Case in point in Ati Yoga, the final or thirteenth bhumi of the 'absolute bodhichitta', being the varnamala, the 'garland of bija'. 'Atiyoga' begins and ends with "Ah". For the Nyingma who self-identify as the ngagpas, siddhas and sadhakas of "Secret Mantra", "Ah" is the bija mantra of the nature of the mindstream of Samantabhadra. Unlike the Dzogchen tradition of the Nyingma, the Bonpo Dzogchenpa have a sophisticated technical and iconographic language and semiology for limiting that which cannot be limited.

See also

- Luminous mind
- Cognition
- Samyama
- Flow (psychology)
- Subtle body
- Personal identity (philosophy)
- Sadhana
- Svabhava
- Thoughtform
- Three Vajras
- Stream of consciousness

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External links

- July 15, 2006 ^[76] A quotation from the Dalai Lama discusses the nature of the mindstream and how it is placed within the Vajrayana tradition (accessed: December 13, 2007)

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- [2] Nonlocal and atemporal may be resolved into a qualification of omnipresent.
- [3] The lexical item 'Moment', has been employed in the sense of its etymon "momentum" though the 'stream', 'array' or 'procession' is atemporal and nonlocal.
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- [24] As quoted in Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience*, p.157. See also Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, p.129.,
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- [26] See Garma C. C. Chang, *Teachings of Tibetan Yoga* (New York: University Books, 1963), p.35.
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[46] A footnote in the English rendering of Manjushrimitra's *Bodhicittabhavana*, by Kunpal Tulku (2005) entitled *The Cultivation of Enlightened Mind* states that:

In Buddhist terminology the Universe is referred to as a Tri-sahasra-mahasahasra-dhatu. This describes a Universe consisting of galaxies of $(1000)^3 \times 1000$ world-systems with an almost unimaginable event horizon. In every direction these world-systems stretch out, some circling distant uninhabited hot stellar nebula, others rich in sentient beings. When we gaze upwards at the stars, we are gazing toward countless civilizations spanning across the shoreless ocean of the night sky. And yet what we see is only a fraction of the Universe as such. **Source:** (<http://www.dharmafellowship.org/library/texts/cultivation-of-enlightened-mind.htm#two>) (accessed: November 28, 2007)

[47] Patrul Rinpoche *et al.* (1994: p.407) define 'Cosmos of a billion universes' (Tibetan: *stong gsum*) as :

...a cosmos composed of one billion (1000^3) universes like ours and corresponding to the area of activity of one Buddha.

Source: Rinpoche, Patrul (author); Brown, Kerry (ed.); and Sharma, Sima (ed.) (1994). *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (Tibetan title: *kunzang lama'i shelung*). Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. With a forward by the Dalai Lama. San Francisco, California, USA: HarperCollinsPublishers. ISBN 0-06-066449-5 (cloth: alk. paper). p.407

[48] Orofino (1990: p.82) in discussing the Bönpo Dzogchenpa view of *Kun-gzhi* (Tibetan: Kun (<http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/kun-gzhi>)) (the "all-base") renders into English an extract from the *Kun-gzhi'i zhal-shes sgrong-ma*, a philosophical tract from the *Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud*, the discourse of Tapihritsa who in a vision, appeared to *sNang-bzher lod-po*, who (by implication) transcribed the discourse (fol. 1a et seq.):

'Here will be given the oral teaching which removes doubts on the natural state of *kun-gzhi*: like the sky, it may appear to be divided into external and internal. Some people with limited minds think that the Wisdom Mind is found within one's own mind but does not pervade external objects. The space of the sky, for example, totally and uniformly pervades all phenomenal existence without any difference between inside and outside, but in constructing a house one separates internal from external space, and one gives this internal space a form, be it square, triangular, oval or round, according to the space the house takes. In the same way the Wisdom Mind totally and uniformly pervades *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, without a division of internal and external. There is no separation of external and internal within space in itself: just as it pervades the external, so it also pervades the internal. Thus the mind of living beings distinguishes dualistically an original mind and an internal one. But because internal and external do not exist, neither do these limits. Self-originated wisdom, just as it pervades the consciousness of every individual also pervades all phenomenal objective existence and the entire external universe. It expands in all directions without a centre or a periphery, having no inside or outside.' Orofino, Giacomella (translation & commentary) (1990). *Sacred Tibetan Teachings on Death and Liberation: Texts from the most Ancient Traditions of Tibet*. Preface by Namkhai Norbu. Bridport, Dorset, U.K.: Prism Press. ISBN 1 85327 049 0. p.82.

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