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Craving, ignorance and the phenomenology of sensation: A comprehensive Buddhist explanation of the origin of suffering through dependent origination and right view in the Sammaditthi Sutta

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Abstract
This paper attempts to explore the Buddhist explanation of the origin of suffering through a comprehensive analysis of craving (taṇhā), ignorance (avijjā) and the phenomenology of sensation (vedanā) as developed in the Sammaditthi Sutta and the doctrine of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). While traditional interpretations often frame Buddhism as metaphysical or ethical, this study emphasizes the Buddha's radical shift toward experiential phenomenology arguing that he located the 'world' not in external objects but in the sixfold field of sensations arising from contact. Through this lens reality is understood as the moment-to-moment arising and cessation of sensory experiences visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental rather than a stable external environment or metaphysical domain. The paper demonstrates how craving in its three forms sensual desire (kāma-taṇhā), craving for existence (bhava-taṇhā) and craving for non-existence (vibhava-taṇhā) operates as the most immediate cause of suffering while ignorance functions as the deeper, sustaining root. Drawing on the Buddha's analysis of greed, hatred, delusion etc. in the *Sammaditthi Sutta*, this paper shows how wrong view transforms neutral sensations into the fuel for attachment, aversion and ceaseless seeking. By contrast, right view (sammā-diṭṭhi) reveals sensations as impermanent, ownerless, not-self thus interrupting the chain of dependent origination at the critical link between feeling and craving. This paper argues that the Buddha's insight presents a complete psychological system in which suffering arises internally rather than from external conditions. This phenomenological reconstruction of early Buddhist thought not only clarifies ancient doctrine but also provides a conceptual bridge to modern cognitive science, affect theory and therapeutic mindfulness. Ultimately, the article concludes that liberation becomes possible when one understands experience as sensation-based and recognizes craving and ignorance as mind-made processes that can be transformed through wisdom.

Keywords: Dependent origination, right view, Taṇhā (craving), Avijja (ignorance), Vedana (sensation), phenomenology, Sammaditthi Sutta, greed-hatred-delusion, mindfulness, Early Buddhism

Introduction

The Buddha's discovery of the human condition marks one of the most radical shifts in the history of philosophical thought moving decisively away from metaphysical speculation toward a direct phenomenology of lived experience where suffering (dukkha) is understood not as a cosmic pessimism but as an observable truth arising within the mind-body field itself (Rahula, 1974; Gethin, 1998) [7, 13]. In contrast to the metaphysical systems of ancient India which sought explanations in eternal souls, divine creators, heavens or absolute principles the Buddha argued that the 'world' is nothing more than the arising and cessation of feelings (vedanā) conditioned by contact (phassa) insistently emphasizing that what humans call reality is primarily the play of sensations, perceptions and mental constructions (Bodhi, 2000) [3, 15]. This marks a fundamental philosophical revolution for instead of locating truth in distant metaphysical realms, the Buddha directed attention to the immediacy of sensory experience insisting that liberation must be grounded in the correct understanding of how the mind engages with the six sensory bases. Thus, suffering emerges not from the external world but from the internal processes of craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna) and ignorance (avijjā), a position that clashes strongly with modern materialist assumptions that suffering is caused by external conditions and with idealist-religious assumptions that suffering is the result of divine reward and punishment (Harvey, 2013; Omvedt, 2003) [9, 11]. Buddha's analysis of suffering is experiential and psychological not theological as humans suffer because they relate to sensations incorrectly operating through a mind structured by habitual reactions like greed toward pleasant sensations, hatred toward unpleasant sensations and delusion toward neutral ones. This experiential model becomes the foundation of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) where feeling conditions craving, craving conditions clinging, clinging conditions the continuation of suffering in all its forms creating a feedback loop that continues as long as ignorance shapes perception (Gethin, 1998; Collins, 2019) [6, 7]. Yet modern interpretations both secular psychological and neo-spiritual often misinterpret craving as merely sensual indulgence or material greed missing the Buddha's deeper insight that craving is fundamentally the mind's habit of reaching out toward any sensation even subtle craving for existence (bhava-taṇhā) or non-existence (vibhava-taṇhā), both of which sustain the cycle of dissatisfaction (Rahula, 1974) [13]. Similarly suffering itself is misunderstood as a pessimistic worldview, when the Buddha actually presents dukkha as a diagnostic truth like a recognition that sensations are impermanent, ownerless, dependent and ultimately unreliable as foundations of lasting happiness. Against this misinterpretation, the present paper argues that the Buddha's method is best understood as a precise phenomenology, a mapping of how sensations,

consciousness and reactions arise together and form what humans mistakenly call 'the world.' Therefore, this paper aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the origin of suffering by synthesizing craving, ignorance and sensation within the structure of dependent origination as articulated in the Sammaditthi Sutta a discourse in which the Buddha and Ven. Sāriputta offer the clearest explanation of right view (sammā-diṭṭhi) as the ability to see the arising and ceasing of phenomena without distortion (Bodhi, 2000) [3, 15]. This article proposes that the Sammaditthi Sutta functions not merely as doctrinal instruction but as a complete phenomenological map of the mind revealing how sensations fabricate psychological reality and how ignorance misinterprets these sensations as external truths rather than mental events. Methodologically, this study employs textual and philosophical analysis drawing exclusively from the books and audio notes of Buddhist monks and other thinkers-researchers which offers a detailed contemporary interpretation of Buddhist psychology and early Buddhist discourses from the Pali Canon to reconstruct the Buddha's experiential understanding of suffering. The scope of the analysis includes interpreting the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, clarifying the phenomenology of the six sense bases, delineating the three cravings and demonstrating how ignorance underlies all misperception. The purpose is not to add new metaphysics to Buddhism but to illuminate the Buddha's original insight that liberation is achieved not by altering external conditions but by transforming the cognitive and affective habits through which sensations are interpreted.

The Buddha's Shift: From Metaphysics to Phenomenology

The Buddha's intellectual revolution begins with his deliberate rejection of the two dominant worldviews of his time materialism (ucchedavāda) and idealism (sassata-vāda) both of which the early discourses identify as extremes incapable of explaining the lived reality of suffering (dukkha) or the means to its cessation (Bodhi, 2000; Gethin, 1998) [3, 7, 15]. Materialists, from the Cārvāka lineage and similar schools assumed that the world is nothing but matter and that suffering arises from material deprivation; thus their solution was to improve external conditions and maximize sensual pleasure. Idealists, including Brahmanical thinkers posited an eternal self (ātman), divine creator (Īśvara) or universal soul whose will governs human destiny; in such systems suffering results either from fate, divine punishment or karmic accounting interpreted through metaphysical entities (Olivelle, 2006) [12]. The Buddha challenged both positions as fundamentally misguided because they fail to examine the immediate structure of experience, instead projecting suffering either outward into material circumstances or upward into metaphysical heavens. Both positions, he argued, share a deeper epistemic failure as they ignore experience (vedanā), the very domain in which suffering is actually known. Through this radical move the Buddha redirected philosophical attention from speculative ontology to direct phenomenology asserting that the source of suffering lies not in external matter or divine intention but in the unexamined workings of the mind itself (Rahula, 1974) [13]. His famous declaration in the Rohitassa Sutta "In this very fathom-long body, with its perceptions and consciousness, I declare the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world" (SN 2.26) constitutes one of the most groundbreaking epistemological statements in world philosophy, for it identifies the world not as an objective structure 'out there' but as the stream of sensations, perceptions and mental reactions arising within this embodied field. Here 'world' means the world as experienced and what humans call reality is actually the continuous emergence and disappearance of sensations conditioned by contact (phassa), a teaching elaborated systematically in dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) where feeling conditions craving, craving conditions clinging and clinging conditions ongoing suffering (Gethin, 1998; Bodhi, 2000) [3, 7, 15]. This insight marks a decisive break from metaphysics as the Buddha does not claim that the material world is unreal nor that a spiritual world is supreme; rather, he argues that the only world relevant to liberation is the experiential world, the world of feelings, reactions, and cognitive constructions. In this way the Buddha replaces ontology with phenomenology shifting the philosophical task from answering "What really exists?" to answering "How does experience function?" This shift becomes the foundation of right view (sammā-diṭṭhi), the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path which the Sammaditthi Sutta identifies as the understanding of how suffering arises and ceases through conditions (MN 9). Right view is therefore not a doctrinal belief, metaphysical assertion or theological allegiance; it is the clear seeing that sensations arise dependently that reactions to them are conditioned habits and that suffering is constructed through the mind's misperception of impermanent, ownerless and conditioned phenomena (Harvey, 2013) [9]. In this phenomenological model the Buddha identifies craving (taṇhā) and ignorance (avijjā) not as metaphysical principles but as misinterpretations of experience like craving is the mind's habit of grasping at pleasant sensations or escaping unpleasant ones while ignorance is the failure to perceive sensations as impermanent and without an enduring self. The Buddha thus reveals that humans do not suffer because of the world; they suffer because of the way they experience the world, turning sensations into identities, ownership and narratives of self. This shift anticipates by more than two millennia, the insights of modern phenomenology and cognitive science, which likewise argue that perception constructs the world rather than merely reflecting objective reality (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) [14]. In early Buddhism this is expressed through the emphasis on direct observation of the body, feelings, mind and mental objects (satipaṭṭhāna) practices that train the practitioner to see experience without the distortions imposed by craving or aversion (Anālayo, 2003) [1]. Right view thus emerges as the epistemic ground for liberation because when sensations are seen clearly as arising from causes, ceasing with causes, lacking inherent essence the compulsive reactions that generate suffering lose their foundation. The Buddha's rejection of metaphysics is therefore not a denial of reality but a re-orientation toward the only reality that matters for liberation the lived immediacy of sensation and the mind's

response to it. By insisting that the entirety of the world is contained 'in this very body,' the Buddha reframes philosophy as a therapeutic discipline aimed at understanding experience, dismantling illusion, freeing the mind from the habitual patterns that perpetuate suffering. In this sense, Buddhist thought inaugurates a phenomenology of suffering long before Western philosophy developed similar methods offering a profound and empirically grounded account of how the mind constructs its world and how that world can be transformed through the cultivation of wisdom, mindfulness and ethical clarity.

The Phenomenology of Sensation (Vedanā): Reality as Experienced

The Buddha's phenomenology begins with the radical claim that the entire world arises at the moment of contact (phassa) the coming-together of a sense organ, its corresponding object and the appropriate consciousness (Bodhi, 2000) [3, 15]. This threefold contact generates sensation (vedanā) and it is this sensation not external objects that constitutes the actual content of human experience. Thus, what we typically call 'world' is in fact a constant stream of sensory events arising through six modalities like the eye encountering a form gives rise not to an 'object' but to a visual feeling; the ear meeting sound yields an auditory feeling; the nose meeting odor produces an olfactory feeling; the tongue contacting flavour produces a gustatory feeling; the body encountering tangible phenomena produces a tactile feeling; and the mind encountering mental objects (dhammā) generates mental feelings, including thoughts, memories, fantasies and internal imagery (Majjhima Nikāya,148). In this model, contact is the birth of the experiential world, the point at which raw sensory data is converted into felt experience. The Buddha consistently emphasizes that humans do not suffer because of a metaphysical world 'out there,' but because of the way sensations are interpreted and reacted to 'in here' (Saṃyutta-Nikāya, 12.2). The central epistemological reversal is that form is never experienced directly; what is seen is not 'form' but a visual appearance arising in the field of consciousness conditioned by sensory contact and shaped by the perceiver's mental state (Gethin, 1998) [7]. Likewise, sound is not heard as an objective vibration existing independently; what is actually known is a hearing-sensation, a mental event arising and vanishing with every moment of auditory contact. This phenomenological insight breaks decisively from Western realism which holds that perception reveals external objects as they are; in contrast, the Buddha's view anticipates modern cognitive science by asserting that perception creates the object of experience rather than reflecting an independent world (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) [14]. In this sense the Buddha's epistemology is neither idealist nor realist it is experiential: what we know is not the world itself but the sensations produced by contact.

This framework leads to a crucial distinction between direct cognition (six vijñānas) and indirect cognition (manovijñāna). Direct cognition refers to the immediate knowing of sensory feelings like eye-consciousness knows the visual sensation, ear-consciousness knows the auditory sensation and so on through smell, taste, touch and mental contact. These cognitions are non-conceptual, arising simultaneously with the sensation itself and ceasing the moment sensation ceases (Harvey, 2013) [9]. They do not interpret, judge or compare; they simply know the raw feeling. By contrast, indirect cognition manovijñāna arises a moment later based on conceptual processing as attention selects the sensation, memory provides past templates, thought constructs meaning and labeling assigns identity ('this is a tree,' 'this is music,' 'this is my enemy'). The Buddha frequently warns that this second-level cognition creates a mental world layered upon the sensory world generating narratives, emotions and identities that far exceed the raw sensation that originally arose (MN 18). In this model, memory is not a storage of objects but a storage of past sensations like the mind does not store the tree, but the visual-feeling-of-tree; not the music, but the auditory-feeling-of-music; not the lover, but the felt-experience-of-that-person (Anālayo, 2003) [1]. When the mind recalls something, it reactivates past sensations not external objects. Thus, 'world' is essentially a recreated field of feelings fresh ones arising through contact and old ones replayed through memory. This is why the Buddha calls the mind a 'painter' who creates the images of the world through its habitual tendencies (Dhp 1-2). The entire cognitive apparatus contact, sensation, perception, intention, attention, memory is thus revealed as a self-sustaining system of sensation and reaction, not a mechanism for detecting objective entities.

This phenomenological account leads directly into the doctrine of emptiness (suññatā). Because sensations arise only through contact and because contact itself depends on causes and conditions, every sensory event is impermanent (anicca), ownerless (anattā) and therefore incapable of providing lasting satisfaction (dukkha) (Rahula, 1974) [13]. The Buddha's analysis dismantles the assumption that sensory experience has a stable essence like the 'sweetness' of fruit for example is not inherent in the fruit, since the same fruit tastes different when one is sick or when the tongue is injured; sweetness is a sensation arising from causes and ceasing when those causes change (SN 35.93). Likewise, visual beauty does not exist in the object but arises through a complex interaction of light, eye-consciousness, mood, memory and cultural conditioning. Because sensations depend on conditions that constantly shift, they have no fixed nature and cannot be possessed no one can hold on to a sight, sound or thought even for a moment. The Buddha therefore concludes that the true nature of sensation is emptiness of self: sensations are not 'mine,' not 'me,' and not 'what I am' (MN 109). This is not a nihilistic teaching but a liberating insight like when sensations are seen as impermanent, unowned and conditioned, the compulsive reactions of craving (taṇhā) and aversion (paṭigha) lose their foundation. One no longer chases pleasant sensations as though they were sources of eternal happiness nor resists unpleasant sensations as though they were personal threats. Instead, sensations are understood as fleeting phenomena that arise and pass in accordance with dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). This insight directly subverts the ordinary belief that "I see the world" or "I hear the world." In the Buddha's phenomenology, the truth is subtler like 'the mind sees only

sensations', and those sensations are empty, impermanent and without an inherent core. In this way, the phenomenology of vedanā becomes the cornerstone of the Buddha's path to liberation, for by observing sensations with mindfulness and equanimity neither grasping nor resisting the practitioner dismantles the very conditions that sustain suffering. The Buddha's statement that "the world is within this body" (SN 2.26) thus finds its clearest meaning as the world we inhabit is not a metaphysical realm but a continuous unfolding of felt-experience and liberation becomes possible only when one fully understands the conditioned, empty, sensation-based nature of reality.

Dependent Origination and the Arising of Suffering

The Buddha's teaching on dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) is the most intricate psychological model of suffering in early Buddhism explaining how dukkha emerges not from an original sin, metaphysical fall or divine punishment but through a dynamic chain of conditions that unfold moment by moment within human consciousness (Bodhi, 2000) [3, 15]. The twelve links ignorance (avijjā), formations (saṅkhārā), consciousness (viññāṇa), name-and-form (nāma-rūpa), six sense bases (saḷāyatana), contact (phassa), feeling (vedanā), craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna), becoming (bhava), birth (jāti) and aging-death (jarāmaraṇa) are not metaphysical events stretched across multiple lives alone but are also psychological processes unfolding in every act of perception (Gethin, 1998) [7]. Ignorance conditions formations by distorting perception, fueling habitual reactions and intentions; these formations condition consciousness by 'bending' awareness toward reactive tendencies; consciousness and name-form mutually sustain each other as cognitive patterns give shape to embodied experience; the six bases arise as the structures through which experience appears; contact emerges when these bases meet their corresponding objects; feeling arises immediately after contact; craving follows feeling when the mind identifies with pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations; clinging solidifies craving into possessive habits; becoming represents the existential momentum that these attachments accumulate; birth reflects the arising of a sense of self in relation to experience; and aging-death marks the inevitable decay of every constructed identity (Harvey, 2013) [9]. However, within this elaborate chain, the Buddha focuses repeatedly on the crucial psychological triad of contact-feeling-craving, where the possibility of liberation becomes real. Because feeling (vedanā) is the pivot upon which the whole chain turns, the Buddha instructs practitioners to observe sensations at the moment they arise before craving interprets them as, "This is mine; this is me; this is what I am" (MN 148). He explicitly states that without mindfulness of feelings dependent origination remains an abstract principle; with mindfulness, the chain becomes visible in real time and the practitioner sees how craving emerges automatically in the absence of wisdom (SN 36.6). In this phenomenological reading, contact produces the 'world' as it is experienced; feeling evaluates the contact as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; and craving reacts to it through grasping, resisting or searching for alternatives. When this process is unconscious the chain unfolds with inexorable momentum, generating clinging, becoming and the emergence of new forms of dissatisfaction. But when the practitioner observes the arising of feeling without reacting the chain collapses, preventing craving from arising and thus cutting off clinging, becoming and the subsequent suffering that follows (Anālayo, 2003) [1]. This is why the Buddha declared "With the arising of feeling, craving arises; with the cessation of feeling, craving ceases" (SN 12.43), meaning not the cessation of sensation itself but the cessation of ignorance-based reaction to sensation.

This centrality of feeling is reaffirmed in the Sammaditthi Sutta, where Ven. Sāriputta explains that understanding feeling and its conditions constitutes right view (MN 9). The practitioner sees that pleasant feelings lead to craving for continuation, unpleasant feelings lead to craving for cessation and neutral feelings lead to delusion, the subtle tendency to seek stimulation or avoid stillness. Thus, all three forms of craving kāma-taṇhā (sensual craving), bhava-taṇhā (craving for existence), and vibhava-taṇhā (craving for non-existence) are rooted in misperception of feelings not in external objects. The insight that liberation happens at the point of feeling marks one of the Buddha's major philosophical innovations as suffering is not defeated by controlling the external world nor by prayer to an external deity, nor by changing circumstances, but by understanding the inner mechanics of experience. The Buddha's analysis reveals that craving does not arise because the world is tempting or corrupt but because the mind misinterprets feeling as a permanent event, a possession or a part of the self (Rahula, 1974) [13]. As long as feeling is mistaken for 'my experience,' craving inevitably follows; when feeling is seen as impermanent, impersonal and conditioned, craving cannot take hold. This is why dependent origination is not a linear chain but a cyclical, interdependent process without a first cause. The Buddha rejects the idea of an original moment where suffering began; since all phenomena arise in dependence upon conditions, craving itself depends on feeling; feeling depends on contact; contact depends on the senses; the senses depend on name-and-form; name-and-form depends on consciousness; and consciousness depends on formations which themselves depend on ignorance (SN 12.15). Ignorance does not precede craving as a first cause rather, ignorance sustains craving, craving sustains further ignorance and the cycle turns endlessly like a wheel. This circularity prevents any metaphysical speculation about beginnings which the Buddha explicitly discourages as unprofitable (Ariyapariyesana Sutta, MN 26). Instead, he emphasizes that the task is not to find a first cause but to break the cycle at the present moment by removing ignorance through insight into dependent origination (Bodhi, 2020) [3, 15]. When one sees that craving arises only because feeling is misperceived and that feeling is misperceived only because of ignorance, the path to liberation becomes self-evident: cultivate mindfulness of feelings, observe them without attachment, understand their impermanent and ownerless nature and thereby dissolve the conditions for craving. In this way dependent origination becomes not a cosmological theory but a practical guide to dismantling suffering at its roots. The Buddha's emphasis on direct experience over metaphysical speculation marks a profound shift in human understanding of suffering as

liberation unfolds not by manipulating the external world but by understanding the conditioned processes that fabricate experience moment by moment. When feeling is met with clarity instead of craving, the chain of dependent origination is interrupted; when the chain is interrupted, becoming ceases; when becoming ceases, the sense of a suffering-self collapses; and with the collapse of this delusion, the mind touches the freedom the Buddha called nirvāṇa, 'the unbinding' of the chain itself.

Craving (Taṇhā) as the Most Immediate Cause of Suffering

The Buddha's diagnosis of suffering becomes fully intelligible only when we understand taṇhā craving as the most immediate experientially verifiable cause of dukkha, a view grounded not in metaphysical speculation but in careful phenomenological observation (Rahula, 1974) [13]. In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha identifies three forms of craving like kāma-taṇhā, the craving for sensual pleasures; bhava-taṇhā, the craving for existence, continuity, identity and selfhood; and vibhava-taṇhā, the craving for annihilation, escape or non-existence, often manifested as fantasies of eternal heaven or radical self-erasure (Bodhi, 2000) [3, 15]. Kāma-taṇhā arises from attachment to pleasant sensations like beautiful sights, agreeable sounds, flavours, bodily pleasures, praise, admiration, validation and creates the illusion that happiness lies in accumulating and protecting sensual stimuli. Bhava-taṇhā operates more subtly, manifesting as the desire to 'be something' like to be admired, to be successful, to be intelligent, to be spiritual, to be loved, to be important, to be remembered. Vibhava-taṇhā is its mirror-image as the wish to escape being, to disappear into nothingness, to dissolve the self in some imagined pure realm free from the burdens of bodily existence; it reflects the longing for eternal afterlife in heaven, or for 'total liberation' understood as the cessation of personal identity rather than cessation of delusion (Gethin, 1998) [7]. In all three, the Buddha is clear as it is not happiness that causes suffering but the craving for happiness; craving is the fever in the wound, not the pleasant or unpleasant sensations themselves (Harvey, 2013) [9]. This distinction is critical because the Buddha never condemned joy, beauty, pleasure, comfort, or companionship; what he rejected was the grasping, the insistence that pleasant experience must persist, that it is 'mine,' that it defines 'who I am,' and that it must not change. As the Sammaditthi Sutta explains, feeling (vedanā) is neutral pleasant, painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant but craving interprets and misidentifies it as personal, permanent and desirable (MN 9). Thus, happiness without attachment does not generate suffering; it is the clinging to happiness that creates dukkha because what is impermanent cannot be possessed and what cannot be possessed cannot satisfy craving's demands for stability. This logic becomes clearer through the Buddha's analysis of how craving produces three distinct types of suffering, each rooted in the misperception of sensations. The first, suffering of change (vipariṇāma-dukkha), arises when pleasurable contact leads to craving, craving leads to attachment and attachment collapses as the pleasant object inevitably changes or disappears. A joyful relationship becomes grief when the partner changes; a delightful flavour becomes disgust when eaten in excess; wealth brings protection until economic shifts turn it into anxiety; fame feels intoxicating until its impermanence is exposed by public criticism. Thus the chain unfolds as pleasurable sensation-greed (lobha)-attachment-sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair when conditions shift (SN 12.2). The second type, suffering upon suffering (dukkha-dukkha) arises from unpleasant sensations; when aversion (dosa) reacts to pain, loss, insult or discomfort, the mind adds a second layer of suffering by resisting what is already unpleasant. This is the classic 'two arrows' teaching as the first arrow is the painful sensation; the second arrow is the mind's resistance, anger or resentment (Bodhi, 2020) [3, 15]. A person experiencing physical illness suffers physically but when hatred toward the illness arises "Why me?" psychological distress multiplies the pain. The third kind, conditional suffering (saṅkhāra-dukkha) arises from neutral sensations that provoke delusion (moha), the restless seeking of stimulation, distraction, identity or meaning. Neutral feelings waiting in a queue, sitting alone with no entertainment, having nothing to do activate a compulsive search for 'something pleasant,' leading to endless scrolling, consumption, fantasizing or planning, thereby perpetuating the samsaric cycle of seeking without fulfillment (Anālayo, 2003) [1]. Thus, craving for pleasure leads to the suffering of change; craving for escape from pain leads to suffering upon suffering; craving for stimulation leads to conditional suffering. These mechanisms become vivid through real-life psychological examples. Consider romantic relationships like craving for idealized love makes early pleasure intoxicating but the same craving turns into jealousy, fear of abandonment, devastation etc. when the relationship changes. Craving for wealth produces tremendous motivation but also stress, competition and insecurity because possessing wealth intensifies fear of losing it. Fame operates through bhava-taṇhā, the craving to 'exist' as a meaningful identity; celebrities suffer intensely from criticism, loss of relevance or the collapse of public image. Even spiritual identity generates suffering like craving to be a 'good meditator,' a 'wise person,' or a 'liberated being' produces subtle forms of bhava-taṇhā that strengthen the very ego Buddhism seeks to dismantle. Vibhava-taṇhā appears when people long to escape themselves through intoxication, nihilism, and compulsive sleep, fantasies of eternal heaven or belief in instant spiritual salvation. The Buddha identified both suicidal tendencies and metaphysical escapism as rooted in vibhava-taṇhā, because both arise from the wish to annihilate the unbearable aspects of identity rather than uproot ignorance (Gombrich, 2009) [8]. In this way craving infiltrates every dimension of life as relationships, career, possessions, reputation, pleasure, spirituality and self-image because sensations are impermanent and uncontrollable, craving for them inevitably generates sorrow when they fade, fear while they last and restlessness when they are absent. The Buddha therefore described craving not merely as a moral flaw but as the psychological mechanism that perpetuates samsāra, 'the house-builder,' the force that constructs and reconstructs identity through attachment. When craving ceases through insight into the impermanent, impersonal

nature of sensations, the mind no longer chases, resists or tries to modify experience; it rests in equanimity free from the compulsions that fuel suffering. Thus, the Buddha's teaching on taṇhā is fundamentally experiential because liberation does not require eliminating happiness but eliminating the craving that mistakes happiness for salvation and pain for personal failure. It is in this precise, phenomenological sense that craving is described as 'the origin of suffering' not a metaphysical first cause but the most immediate, observable condition sustaining the entire cycle of dissatisfaction.

Ignorance (Avijjā) as the Root Cause

Ignorance (avijjā) described in early Buddhist texts as 'not knowing suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation,' forms the deepest root of dukkha and the very first link in the cycle of dependent origination shaping the way beings misperceive reality at every moment (Bodhi, 2012; MN 9) [4]. This ignorance is not a passive absence of information but an active distorted mode of seeing that mistakes sensations for external objects, takes feelings as proof of an independently existing world and confuses fleeting pleasure with genuine happiness thereby generating the entire structure of craving and grasping (Gombrich, 2009) [8]. The Buddha repeatedly warns that ordinary perception is a radical misinterpretation means what we believe we 'see' is not the external form but the *sensation* of seeing; what we think we 'hear' is not an objective sound but the auditory sensation that arises in dependence upon contact (phassa). Avijjā therefore refers to the wrong view that identifies sensory experience with external objects an ignorance so deeply ingrained that beings assume the objects of experience exist 'out there,' independent, permanent, graspable and controllable even though in the Buddha's phenomenology only sensations arise, persist briefly and vanish (SN 12.67; Harvey, 2013) [9]. The second major misunderstanding tied to ignorance is the belief that pleasant feeling equals happiness that happiness is found in possessing, repeating or holding pleasurable sensations; this wrong view makes craving inevitable because when pleasant feeling fades, the mind assumes happiness has disappeared and therefore chases new sensations to restore it. Thus, ignorance manufactures a world of lack and pursuit where beings continually look outside themselves for what is conditioned and impermanent, never realizing that the root problem is not the absence of pleasure but the misperception of pleasure as something stable and ownable.

Early Buddhist teachings describe two primary forms of ignorance each operating at a different depth of mind. The first is ignorance of karma means not understanding conditionality, cause and effect, and the way experience unfolds lawfully. This includes the mistaken belief that pleasure and pain come from external events or divine reward and punishment rather than from the mind's own reactions, habits and underlying tendencies (Gethin, 1998) [7]. Because ordinary beings do not see that experience is dependently arisen, they do not recognize how craving leads to suffering, how generosity leads to joy, how hatred poisons perception or how mindfulness leads to clarity. The second, deeper form of ignorance is ignorance of ultimate reality which means failing to see impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and not-self (anattā); this ignorance blinds beings to the fact that sensations arise dependent on causes and conditions, do not belong to anyone and disappear instantly, never forming a stable self or world (Rahula, 1974) [13]. Without insight into these three characteristics, the mind automatically constructs identity around feeling like "I am happy," "I am in pain," "I am neutral," attaching selfhood to passing phenomena and thereby perpetuating the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Thus, ignorance creates both misperception (taking sensations as objects) and misidentification (taking sensations as 'me' or 'mine') and these two errors jointly condition craving, clinging, becoming.

Ignorance activates craving through a predictable cognitive chain described with precision in the Sammaditthi Sutta and in dependent origination like contact (phassa) gives rise to feeling (vedanā) but because of ignorance, feeling triggers wrong attention (ayoniso manasikāra), which immediately produces distorted perception, conceptual proliferation and craving (taṇhā) (MN 9; SN 12.1). Instead of seeing feeling simply as feeling, ignorance prompts the mind to interpret sensations through habitual patterns 'pleasant means good,' 'pleasant means mine,' 'unpleasant must be removed,' 'neutral is boring and must be replaced' and these interpretations give rise to desire, aversion or delusion. Wrong attention selects certain aspects of experience, magnifies them and creates narratives around them leading to the mental construction of "I want," "I hate," or "I need," and these narratives crystallize into craving (Bodhi, 2020) [5]. Because ignorance blinds beings to impermanence, the mind assumes the present feeling should continue; because it is blind to not-self, it assumes the feeling belongs to a self who must protect it; because it is blind to dukkha, it assumes satisfaction can be achieved through grasping. This entire chain takes milliseconds happening so quickly that beings believe desire is natural, rational or even necessary not realizing the craving arose because ignorance misperceived feeling in the first place. In this precise sense, avijjā not craving is the root of suffering; craving is only its most immediate expression. By contrast, enlightened beings perceive feelings in a radically different way. The Buddha teaches that an awakened one experiences pleasant, painful and neutral sensations just as ordinary beings do, but does not fabricate 'I' or 'mine' around them because ignorance has been uprooted (SN 36.6). For the enlightened, feeling is simply an arising phenomenon, a conditioned event that appears and disappears in the flow of experience without any need for grasping or resistance. When contact ceases the feeling ceases and with no ignorance to misinterpret sensation, craving does not arise and suffering does not follow. This is why the Buddha describes liberation as the cessation of craving through the cessation of ignorance not through suppression of sensation. The arahant knows the arising of feeling, its allure, and its danger and its escape seeing that pleasant feelings are impermanent, painful feelings are impermanent and neutral feelings are also impermanent thus resting in equanimity without misidentification (Bodhi, 2012) [4]. Enlightenment is therefore not the elimination of sensation but the elimination of ignorance, the misperception that turns sensations into

objects, feelings into identities and experience into suffering. When ignorance ceases, the world of craving collapses, revealing the mind's natural freedom.

Greed, Hatred, Delusion: The Three Poisons

The Buddha's diagnosis of human suffering reaches its sharpest clarity in his classification of greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha) as the three poisons the fundamental psychological forces that distort perception, produce craving, and sustain the cycle of dukkha across lifetimes (Rahula, 1974; Gethin, 1998) [7, 13]. Yet what makes these three roots so insidious is that society does not merely tolerate them but actively glorifies them under more attractive labels like greed is renamed 'ambition' or 'motivation,' hatred is celebrated as 'righteous anger' or 'justice,' and delusion is valorized as 'innovation,' 'progress,' and 'vision,' even though each of these seemingly positive forms rests on the same cognitive distortions the Buddha identified as the engines of suffering (Harvey, 2013) [9]. Modern culture rewards greed as the necessary drive behind economic growth, competition and achievement but the Buddha saw that craving whether for wealth, status, pleasure or even spiritual attainment inevitably produces the suffering of change (vipariṇāma-dukkha) because anything obtained through craving is impermanent and whatever is impermanent cannot provide lasting satisfaction (SN 42.11). Hatred, similarly is framed as moral courage or social activism but the Buddha noted that aversion is simply the flip-side of craving because it is craving for a world without what one dislikes and therefore produces suffering upon suffering (dukkha-dukkha) because the mind clings to the unpleasant sensation and resists its impermanence, multiplying pain instead of reducing it (Bodhi, 2012) [4]. Delusion, the most praised of all in modern society, masquerades as aspiration, idealism, even hope yet for the Buddha delusion is the most dangerous poison because it rests upon the fundamental misperception that pleasant, unpleasant and neutral sensations belong to an independently existing world, rather than recognizing that they arise from contact and vanish instantly (MN 9; Gombrich, 2009) [8]. In the Buddha's teaching, the correct understanding of these three poisons arises only through wisdom (paññā) which reveals that greed is not the engine of success but the root cause of suffering because it misreads pleasure as happiness and attaches the self to passing sensations; thus, when pleasure inevitably changes the mind falls into sorrow, fear, dissatisfaction (Rahula, 1974) [13]. Hatred, likewise, is recognized not as a moral stance but as a second layer of bondage in which the mind reacts violently to painful sensation thereby creating further attachment to suffering this is why the Buddha described anger as "a poison one drinks expecting another to die" (Harvey, 2013) [9]. Delusion, however, is the subtle and pervasive force that sustains both greed and hatred because it is the inability to stay with bare sensation, the inability to see neutrality without rushing toward pleasure or away from discomfort. Because delusion does not appear dramatic like greed or violent like hatred, ordinary beings rarely detect it; yet in the Buddha's psychology, delusion is the cognitive ground from which craving grows and therefore the most fundamental obstruction to liberation (Gethin, 1998) [7]. This explains why the Buddha emphasized wrong attention (ayoniso manasikāra) as the trigger of delusion as when the mind encounters a neutral feeling and cannot bear to remain with it, it begins to seek something more stimulating and this seeking immediately conditions craving, self-construction, and becoming (SN 12.25). Delusion dominates human life because the ordinary mind is structurally incapable of dwelling in neutrality; contemporary psychology and classical Buddhist analysis converge here noting that the untrained mind jumps restlessly between past and future, between desire and fear, between memory and imagination (Bodhi, 2020) [5]. The Buddha described this restless wandering as papañca, conceptual proliferation where the mind endlessly manufactures stories, identities, fantasies in response to fleeting sensations never staying with direct experience long enough to see its impermanence or not-self nature (Gombrich, 2009) [8]. This constant seeking expressed as "I need something more," "I must change this," "I must escape this neutrality" occupies nearly 70% of ordinary consciousness making delusion the most dominant poison; greed and hatred merely arise as its derivatives, depending on whether the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensation is misinterpreted (Harvey, 2013) [9]. Because the mind cannot tolerate the quietness of neutral feeling (adukkham-asukha vedanā), it projects fantasies, plans, desires, fears and memories producing the saṅkhāra-dukkha of 'conditional suffering,' which keeps beings bound to samsara even when no external difficulties are present. This is why the Buddha declared that the real battlefield is not in the external world but in the moment of feeling where delusion arises and turns sensation into identity, craving and suffering (MN 148). Thus, the three poisons are not metaphysical forces but deeply human psychological habits sustained by ignorance and reinforced by cultural narratives that praise ambition, justify anger, romanticize restlessness. The path to liberation begins with seeing greed as the root of dissatisfaction, hatred as suffering multiplied, delusion as the ceaseless seeking that drives the entire wheel of becoming a vision that transforms the ethical, psychological and spiritual landscape of human existence.

Right View (Sammā-Diṭṭhi): The Buddha's Solution

Right View or sammā-diṭṭhi appears simple when named but becomes the most radical turn in the Buddha's teaching because it shifts the entire frame of human knowing from 'the world out there' to 'the experience happening here,' and this shift is what breaks the chain of suffering (Bodhi, 2012) [4]. The Buddha taught two levels of Right View and they operate together though ordinary readers treat them as separate pieces; the first is the mundane view that understands karma, the continuity of consciousness and moral causality, the kind of view that keeps a person oriented toward ethical action and away from destructive behaviour because actions have results and results shape the future (Gethin, 1998) [7]. The second level is supramundane as seeing the Four Noble Truths directly not as ideas but as living processes inside the body-mind suffering as a felt reality, its cause as the arising of craving, its cessation as the stopping of craving and the path as this eightfold discipline that leads the mind back to clarity (Rahula, 1974) [13]. The

Sammaditthi Sutta (MN 9), attributed to Ven. Sāriputta is remarkable because it expands Right View into thirty-two applications showing that wisdom must recognize the Four Noble Truths across every domain of human experience aggregates, elements, sense bases, nutriments, taints, dependent origination, contact, feeling, craving, ignorance almost as if the Buddha wanted to make sure that no corner of the psychological world remained unexamined or left to metaphysical speculation (Bodhi, 2012) [4]. This sutta refuses to let the practitioner rest in intellectual understanding; it pushes relentlessly like seeing suffering in the five aggregates, seeing its cause in craving for them, seeing cessation as the fading of attachment to them and the path as the disciplined observation that reveals their impermanent nature. Then it moves to the eighteen elements, pointing again to the same structure. And again, with the twelve sense bases. And again, with the nutriments that feed consciousness. The repetition is not stylistic it forces the mind to stop projecting 'world-world' and finally recognize 'feeling-feeling,' which is the Buddha's epistemological revolution (Gombrich, 2009) [8]. This shift "the mind knows sensations, not objects" undoes the basic mistake of human perception, the mistake that turns passing sensations into lasting things, neutral feelings into threats and pleasant feelings into identities to defend, chase, mourn or recreate. Right View sees that what the mind calls 'the world' is only the arising of feeling when eye meets form, ear meets sound or any sense meets its object; the world is not external solidity but the brief flash of sensation at the moment of contact (phassa) which then conditions feeling (vedanā), which can condition craving but only if ignorance is present (Harvey, 2013) [9]. And here the Buddha inserts the turning point as wisdom recognizes feeling as just feeling, neither self nor other, neither promise nor threat, neither happiness nor unhappiness but simply arising and passing. When Right View sees feeling in this bare way, craving cannot form upon it because craving requires misinterpretation and misinterpretation requires ignorance (Bodhi, 2020) [5]. Once ignorance is weakened, craving loses its fuel, becoming stops and suffering collapses; there is nothing mystical about this, only a clear psychological sequence that the Buddha described again and again in dependent origination (SN 12.2). Some readers expect Right View to solve life's problems outwardly but the Buddha never promised that; instead, he shows how perception itself creates suffering and how correction of perception dissolves it. Wisdom does not remove unpleasant sensations; it removes the ignorance that converts them into poison. Once the mind stops projecting permanence onto impermanence, selfhood onto process and happiness onto the unstable, the three poisons cannot grip the mind in the same way. Something drops. The movement slows. The craving mechanism falters. And this slight break this single moment where feeling is known simply as feeling is the first doorway to liberation (Rahula, 1974) [13]. Right View ends suffering not because it magically transforms the world but because it dissolves the mistaken world the mind was constructing revealing experience as impermanent, ownerless and transparent, a field where sensations arise and cease without leaving residue, without building self, without feeding becoming.

Conclusion

The paper returns finally to the Buddha's most subversive insight that suffering never arises from the world 'out there,' not from objects, people, accidents, wealth, loss or fate but from the way the mind misunderstands its own sensations turning fleeting feelings into solid realities and then struggling to defend them, chase them or escape them. This is the Buddha's clean almost startling diagnosis because craving is the immediate cause of suffering, ignorance the deep root and the field where both arise is sensation itself, the tiny moment when contact gives birth to feeling and the mind begins weaving a world out of it. Everything happens so fast that we assume the object is responsible but the Buddha says no, look again, look closely the world you fight with is your own misconceived feeling. And suddenly things shift. The philosophical frame cracks open. You start seeing how the entire mass of suffering fear, anger, disappointment, anxiety, obsession, heartbreak rests on a single mistake about how experience works. Once that mistake is exposed, craving loses its foundation becoming slows and the whole structure that holds suffering together grows thin. The implications are surprisingly wide. Modern cognitive science already admits that perception is constructed not received, and this aligns uncannily with the Buddha's account of feeling and proliferation. Psychology now studies how craving loops drive addiction, attention disorders, compulsive thinking and trauma patterns each one following the same sequence like contact, feeling, misinterpretation, reaction. Phenomenologists try to describe lived experience without metaphysical claims but the Buddha did that twenty-five centuries earlier with even greater precision and a deeply practical aim. Mindfulness-based therapies use the same principle like observe feelings without clinging and the emotional charge dissolves. Trauma research shows that healing begins when sensation is felt directly without the old story layered on top. Everywhere you look the ancient insight reappears in new vocabulary almost as if the modern world has been circling back to what the Buddha saw under the Bodhi tree. What this article contributes is a unified map a way of seeing the origin of suffering that brings craving, ignorance, sensation, contact and dependent origination into one continuous movement instead of separate doctrinal pieces. By centering the Sammaditthi Sutta and reading dependent origination as a moment-to-moment psychological chain rather than a cosmological cycle, the study restores early Buddhism to its phenomenological core where liberation depends not on metaphysical belief but on how one meets experience in each moment. This perspective pulls Buddhist studies away from abstract metaphysics and returns it to its practical ground as the Buddha's method of examining sensations, understanding their nature, breaking the habit of reacting with craving. By doing so, the paper also offers a bridge between Buddhist thought and contemporary disciplines that examine perception, cognition, emotional life etc. suggesting that the early texts contain a rigorous psychology still capable of reshaping how we understand the mind. And the final note is simple almost disarmingly so 'liberation is not mystical or distant. It does not require caves, rituals, extreme austerity or metaphysical certainty. It begins the moment one observes feeling as feeling nothing added,

nothing erased. When contact arises, feeling arises, and if wisdom appears right there, in that brief space before craving forms, the entire chain of suffering collapses.' The Buddha put it plainly and left no secret door as "When one sees feeling as it actually is… craving does not arise" (SN 12.23). Everything depends on that small turn, that clear seeing. Suffering begins in the mind and so does freedom.

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