



NIMITTA

(Expression - manifestation)

(All the suttas below have parallels in Chinese, Sanskrit and/or Tibetan)

Here some wise, competent, skilful bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating the body in the body, his citta becomes established, his corruptions are abandoned, he picks up that **expression**. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, his citta becomes established, his corruptions are abandoned, he picks up that **expression**.

“That wise, competent, skilful bhikkhu gains pleasant dwellings in this very life, and he gains mindfulness and clear comprehension. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that wise, competent, skilful (kusalo) bhikkhu picks up the **expression** of his own citta.”

SN 47.8

Great king, this was said by the Blessed One who knows and sees, the Arahant, the Fully Enlightened One: ‘Come, bhikkhus, dwell guarding the doors of the sense faculties. Having seen a form with the eye, do not grasp its **manifestation** through its added features. Since, if you leave the eye faculty unguarded, evil unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure might invade you, practise the way of its restraint, guard the eye faculty, undertake the restraint of the eye faculty. Having heard a sound with the ear... Having smelt an odour with the nose ... Having savoured a taste with the tongue ... Having felt a tactile object with the body ... Having cognized a mental phenomenon with the mano, do not grasp its manifestations and added features....

SN 35.127

It may be expected of anyone, Ānanda—whether bhikkhu or bhikkhuni—who dwells with a citta well thriving (making steady progress) in the four ways to attain the acquisition (viz. of its establishment), that such a one will perceive successively loftier stages of distinction.

Suppatitthitacittā: from प्रतिष्ठा pratiṣṭhā [prati-ṣṭhā] = thrive, prosper RV.

Here, *सति sati* = *obtention, acquisition* >> *Satipaṭṭhānā* should be translated as: "The way to attain the acquisition" (viz. of the establishment [*samadhi* - 定], of *citta*).

"What four? Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he is contemplating the body in the body, there arises in him, based on the body, either a fever in the body or sluggishness of *citta*, or the *citta* is distracted outwardly. That bhikkhu should then direct his *citta* towards some inspiring attribute. When he directs his *citta* towards some inspiring **expression**, gladness is born. When he is gladdened, rapture is born. Etc...

SN 47.10

In the same way, Sona, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there pick up your **expression**.

...

So after that, Ven. Sona determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there picked up his **expression**.

AN 6.55

Venerable sir, how should one know, how should one see so that, in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external **manifestations**, I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit no longer occur within?"

"Any kind of form whatsoever, Rahula, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all form as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

Idem with feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness.

"When one knows and sees thus, Rahula, then in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external **manifestations**, I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit no longer occur within."

SN 22.91 & 92

And what, bhikkhus, is the Dhamma exposition on the attribute of burning? It would be better, bhikkhus, for the eye faculty to be lacerated by a red-hot iron pin burning, blazing, and glowing, than for one to grasp the **manifestations** through the added features in a form cognizable by the eye. For if consciousness should stand tied to gratification in the **manifestations** or in the added features, and if one should die on that occasion, it is possible that one will go to one of two destinations: hell or the animal realm. Having seen this danger, I speak thus.

SN 35.235

Seeing a form — mindfulness lapsed — attending to the **expression** of 'endearing,' impassioned in citta, one feels and remains fastened there. One's feelings, born of the form, grow numerous, Greed & annoyance injure one's citta. Thus amassing stress, one is said to be far from Unbinding. Hearing a sound...

Smelling an aroma... Tasting a flavor... Touching a tactile sensation...

Knowing an idea — mindfulness lapsed — attending to the **expression** of 'endearing,' impassioned in citta, one feels and remains fastened there. Etc.

SN 35.95

A knower in the **expression** of the citta, sensing the savor of solitude, practicing jhana, masterful, mindful, you'd attain a pleasure with no object of enjoyment.

Thag 1.85

Oh, when will I be devoted to jhāna,
Rejecting entirely the **expressions** of beauty,
Splitting apart desire for sensual pleasures,
Like an elephant that wanders without ties;
When will it be?

Thag 19.1

From distorted perception your citta is on fire. Shun the **manifestation** of the beautiful accompanied by lust. See mental fabrications as other, as stress, & not-self. Extinguish your great lust. Don't keep burning again & again. Develop the citta — well-centered & one — in the foul, through the foul.

Have your mindfulness immersed in the body. Be one who pursues disenchantment. Develop the **expression**-less. Cast out conceit. Then, from breaking through conceit, you will go on your way at peace.

SN 8.4

'It is said "the **expression**-less establishment of citta". What now is the expression-less concentration of mind?'

"Then, friends, it occurred to me: 'Here, by not directing the mano to all **manifestations**, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the **expression**-less establishment of citta. This is called the expression-less establishment of citta.'

"Then, friends, by not directing the mano to all **manifestations**, I entered and dwelt in the **expression**-less establishment of citta. While I dwelt therein my consciousness followed along with **manifestations**.

“Then, friends, the Blessed One came to me by means of spiritual power and said this: ‘Moggallāna, Moggallāna, do not be negligent, brahmin, regarding the **expression**-less establishment of citta. Steady your mind in the expression-less establishment of citta, unify your mind in the expression-less establishment of citta. concentrate your mind in the expression-less establishment of citta.’ Then, on a later occasion, by not directing the mano to all **manifestations**, I entered and dwelt in the expression-less establishment of citta.

SN 40.9

"Monks, there are these three types of unskillful thinking: thinking of sensuality, thinking of ill will, thinking of harm. These three types of unskillful thinking cease without remainder in one who dwells with his citta well thriving (making steady progress) in the four ways to attain the acquisition (viz. of its establishment), or who develops the **expression**-less establishment. This is reason enough, monks, to develop the expression-less establishment. The expression-less establishment, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, great benefit.

SN 22.80

And what, venerable sir, is the **expression**-less liberation from ceto (cetovimutti)? Not directing the mano towards all manifestations, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the expression-less establishment of citta. This is called the expression-less liberation from ceto.

Note: Ceto is the "polluted" cit, by mano. Citta is the pristine unpolluted cit (before it became the "polluted" ceto). The establishment (samādhī) of citta is about getting established (back) in this pristine citta devoid of the "pollution" of mano.

SN 41.7

Ten children I bore from this physical heap. Then weak from that, aged, I went to a nun. She taught me the Dhamma: aggregates, sense spheres, & elements. Hearing her Dhamma, I cut off my hair & ordained.

Having purified the divine eye while still a probationer, I know my previous lives, where I lived in the past. I develop the **expression**-less meditation, well-focused oneness. I gain the liberation of immediacy — from lack of clinging, unbound. The five aggregates, comprehended, stand like a tree with its root cut through. I spit on old age. There is now no further becoming.

Thig 5.8

The one whose defilements are dried up,
Who's not attached to food,
Whose resort is the liberation
That is **manifestation**-less and empty:
Their track is hard to trace,

Like that of birds in the sky.

Thag 1.92

Meditate on the **expression**-less,
Throw out the underlying tendency to conceit,
And when you have a breakthrough in understanding conceit,
You will live at peace.”

Thag 21.1

LEXICAL REFERENCES

Sanskrit

√ मा मा - pp. (mita)

- to show , display , exhibit RV.

- to measure , mete out , mark off RV.

- to measure across = traverse RV.

- to measure out , apportion , grant RV.

- to prepare , arrange , fashion , form , build , make RV.

- to be measured RV.

- to cause to be measured or built , measure , build , erect Up. GrS. MBh.

नि ni - ind.

- down , back , in , into , within.

- *Nimitta* (ni-mitta = नि ni + pp. √ मा मा)

Lit. what is built and caused to be measured with (mitta) down (ni). [viz. what is displayed (manifested) after the descent (avakkanti) from Nāmarūpa].

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In the pre-Buddhist texts.

Not much of the "display" meaning.

O men who lift the ladles up, these hewn and **erected** in the ground

yé vṛkṇāso ádhi kṣámi nímitāso yatásrucaḥ

RV. 3.8.7

For him who follows your Law the mountains and heaven and earth stand as if firmly **built**.

táva dyāvāpṛthiví párvatāsó 'nu vratāya nímiteva tasthuḥ

RV. 3.30.4

Or **erected** on a field deep-spoiled and fruitful.

bhadré kṣétre nímitā tīlvile vā

RV. 5.62.7

Rich in prosperity, rich in milk, **founded** and **built** upon the earth.

ūrjasvatī payasvatī pṛthivyām nímitā mitā

AV. 9.3.16

[The] House that was **erected** with the prayer, **built** and *erected* by the wise.

Brahmaṇā śālām nímitām kavibhir nímitām mitām.

AV 9.3.19

Base of the seat and sheds, on whom the sacrificial stake is **erected**,

On whom the Yajus-knowing priests recite their hymns and chant their psalms,

yasyām sadohavirdhāne yūpo yasyām **nimīyate** |

brahmāṇo yasyām arcanty ṛgbhiḥ sāmna yajurvidaḥ yujyante

AV. 12.1.38

One should know that all beings here can **be measured to** it. Just before sunrise, it is the Him̐-interjection, and animals can be measured to it. Animals, therefore, make the sound him̐, for they share in the Him̐-interjection of this Saman chant.

tasmin**nimāni** sarvāṇi bhūtānyanvāyattānīti vidyāttasya yatpurodayātsa him̐kārastadasya
paśavo'nvāyattāstasmātte him̐ kurvanti him̐kārabhājino hyetasya sāmnaḥ

ChUp. 2.9.2

Note:

There is the meaning of "cause" and "reason" in later post-Buddhist texts (Āp. & ŚvetUp.); but they would hardly be considered relevant, for they have no counterpart in the pre-Buddhist texts.

For instance, in AV. 12.1.38 above, the sacrificial stake has for nimitta the "base of the seat and sheds", on which it is reared. But you cannot say that the "base of the seat and sheds" is the cause or reason of the sacrificial stake. The cause & reason of the sacrificial stake is the need to sacrifice (for instance).

You can link the sacrificial stake to the base of the seat and sheds - the sacrificial stake is built upon the base of the seat and sheds. That is the primary relationship between a nimitta & its thing.

Nimitta might be the cause and reason of its thing - but this is not the primary common meaning of nimitta..

Again, later "contemporary" texts are good to be referenced, only if they have an equivalence in the pre-Buddhist texts. For it shows that the meaning went across the close pre and post Buddhist era.

*To believe that a close-**post**-Buddhist word's meaning (with no counterpart in the close-pre-Buddhist texts), can be related to Buddhism itself, is not impossible - but highly speculative.*

Nimitta is often associated with **anuvyañjana** = a mark that causes to appear, to be manifest (usually by its attractiveness).

It is **through** this mark that the nimitta (attribute) is usually grasped.

*It would be better, bhikkhus, for the eye faculty to be lacerated by a red-hot iron pin burning, blazing, and glowing, than for one to grasp the **manifestation** through the **ornaments alongside** in a form cognizable by the eye.*

*Varam, bhikkhave, tattāya ayosalākāya ādittāya sampajjalitāya sajotibhūtāya cakkhundriyaṃ sampalimaṭṭham, na tveva cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu **anubyañjanaso** nimittagāho.*

SN 35.235

PALI:

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Anuvyañjana (anubyañjana) = a minor or secondary characteristic. (PTS)

anu + vyañjana

Anu [Vedic anu] = along, alongside.

Vyañjana [fr . vi+añj , cp . añjati & abbhañjati] = (accompanying) attribute , distinctive mark , sign , characteristic.

see byañjana, viyañjana

SANSKRIT:

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Byañjana [Sk . vyañjana]

व्यञ्जन vyañjana [act. vyañj]

- decoration , ornament RV.

- a mark , badge , spot , sign , token ĀpŚr.

- allusion , suggestion ĀśvŚr.

व्यञ्ज् vyañj [vi-añj]

- to decorate , adorn , beautify RV.

- to cause to appear , manifest , display RV. MBh.

- to be manifested or expressed RV.

√ अञ्ज् añj

- to apply an ointment or pigment, smear with, anoint; to decorate, prepare (RV.)
- to honour, celebrate; (RV.)
- to cause to appear, make clear. (RV.)

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