

## SANKHARA

(Saṅkhāra - Determination/synergy)

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What are **determinations**? Monks, determinations are threefold:  
Kati panayye **saṅkhārāti**? Tayome āvuso visākha saṅkhārā:

- **Bodily** determinations,
- **Verbal** determinations
- **Mental** determinations.
  
- **kāya**saṅkhāro
- **vacī**saṅkhāro
- **citta**saṅkhāroti.

What is - Bodily determinations, what is Verbal determinations, what is Mental determinations?  
Katamo panayye kāyasaṅkhāro, katamo vacīsaṅkhāro, katamo cittasaṅkhāroti?

- **In-breaths and out-breaths** are bodily determinations
- **Thinking/pondering** are verbal determinations and
- **Perceptions and feelings** are mental determinations.
  
- **Assāsapassāsā** kho āvuso visākha kāyasaṅkhāro.
- **Vitakkavicārā** vacīsaṅkhāro.
- **Saññā ca vedanā** ca cittasaṅkhāroti.

How are in-breaths and out-breaths bodily determinations, thinking and pondering verbal determinations and perceptions and feelings mental determinations?

- In-breaths and out-breaths are a bodily matter, are bound up with the body, therefore in-breaths and out-breaths are bodily determinations.
- Earlier having thought and pondered, someone breaks into speech, therefore thinking and pondering are verbal determinations.
- Perceiving and feeling is done with the mind, they are things bound up with the mind, therefore perceptions and feelings are mental determinations.
- Assāsapassāsā kho āvuso visākha kāyikā ete dhammā kāyapaṭibaddhā. Tasmā assāsapassāsā kāyasaṅkhāro.
- Pubbe kho āvuso visākha vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindati. Tasmā vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro.
- Saññā ca vedanā ca cetasikā ete dhammā cittaṭṭipadā. Tasmā saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāroti.

### **SN 41.6 (MN 44)**

Note: In relation to the second nidana of paticcasamuppada.

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"And what are **fabrications/synergies**?

These six classes of **intention** — **intention** with regard to form, **intention** with regard to sound, **intention** with regard to smell, **intention** with regard to taste, **intention** with regard to tactile sensation, **intention** with regard to phenomena: these are called fabrications. **From the origination of contact comes the origination of fabrications.** From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of fabrications. And just this noble eightfold path is the path of practice leading to the cessation of fabrications...

The fact that pleasure & happiness arises in dependence on fabrications: that is the allure of fabrications. The fact that fabrications are inconstant, stressful, subject to change: that is the drawback of fabrications. The subduing of desire & passion for fabrications, the abandoning of desire & passion for fabrications: that is the escape from fabrications...

*Katame ca, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā? Chayime, bhikkhave, cetanākāyā—rūpasañcetanā ... pe ... dhamma-sañcetanā. Ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā. Phassasamudayā saṅkhārasamudayo; phassanirodhā saṅkhāranirodho. Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo saṅkhāranirodhagāminī paṭipadā, seyyathidaṃ—sammādiṭṭhi ... pe ... sammāsamādhī.*

*Yaṃ saṅkhāre paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ—ayaṃ saṅkhārānaṃ assādo. Ye saṅkhārā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā—ayaṃ saṅkhārānaṃ ādīnavo. Yo saṅkhāresu chandarāgavinayo chandarāgapahānaṃ—idaṃ saṅkhārānaṃ nissaraṇaṃ.*

**SN 22.57**

Note: In relation to the khandas.

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"And why do you call them 'fabrications'? Because they fabricate fabricated things (they construct the conditioned,) thus they are called 'fabrications.' What do they fabricate as a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood... For the sake of fabrication-hood... For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications.

*Kiñca bhikkhave, saṃkhāre vadetha: saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharontīti bhikkhave, tasmā saṃkhārāti vuccanti. Kiñca saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti: rūpaṃ rūpattāya - saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti. Vedanaṃ vedanattāya saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti. Saññaṃ saññattāya saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti. Saṃkhāre saṃkhārattāya saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti. Viññāṇaṃ viññāṇattāya saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharonti. Saṃkhataṃ abhisamkharontīti kho bhikkhave, tasmā saṃkhārāti vuccanti.*

**SN 22.79**

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When the uninstructed worldling is contacted by a feeling born of ignorance-contact, craving arises: thence that formation (saṅkhāra) is born.

**SN 22.81**

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That is, with ignorance as condition, **determinative formations** come to be; with determinative formations as condition, consciousness.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of determinative formations; with the cessation of determinative formations, cessation of consciousness.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."

*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā; saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ ... pe ... evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Avijjāya tveva asesavirāganirodhā saṅkhāranirodho; saṅkhāranirodhā viññāṇanirodho ... pe ... evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotī"ti.*

**SN 12.37**

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"Bhikkhus, if a person immersed in ignorance generates a meritorious (puññañce) volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the meritorious; if he generates a demeritorious (apuññañce) volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the demeritorious; if he generates an imperturbable (āneñjañce) volitional formation, consciousness fares on to the imperturbable. But when a bhikkhu has abandoned ignorance and aroused true knowledge, then, with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, he does not generate a meritorious volitional formation, or a demeritorious volitional formation, or an imperturbable volitional formation. Since he does not generate or fashion volitional formations, he does not cling to anything in the world.

...

"What do you think, bhikkhus, can a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed generate a meritorious volitional formation, or a demeritorious volitional formation, or an imperturbable volitional formation?"

"No, venerable sir."

"When there are utterly no volitional formations, with the cessation of volitional formations, would consciousness be discerned?"

"No, venerable sir."

**SN 12.51.**

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“Those ascetics and brahmins, bhikkhu, who do not understand as it really is (*the four noble truths*): ‘This is suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; who do not understand as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—they delight in volitional formations that lead to birth, in volitional formations that lead to aging, in volitional formations that lead to death, in volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Delighting in such volitional formations, they generate volitional formations that lead to birth, generate volitional formations that lead to aging, generate volitional formations that lead to death, generate volitional formations that lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.”

**SN 56.42**

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Then the Blessed One suppressed that illness by means of energy and lived on, having resolved upon the **life formation** (will to live).

*Atha kho bhagavā taṃ ābādhaṃ vīriyena paṭipañāmetvā jīvitasañkhāraṃ adhiṭṭhāya vihāsi.*

**SN 47.9**

Note: Will to live= also āyusakhāra or bhavasakhāra

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## NOTES

Definition of **Sankhara** in the [Pali Text Society Dictionary](#):

From Sanskrit. meaning "preparation" and "sacrament," also in philosophical literature "former impression, disposition.

Lit. "preparation, get up"; applied coefficient (of consciousness as well as of physical life,, constituent, constituent potentiality; (pl.) synergies, cause-combination.

Aggregate of the conditions or essential properties for a given process or result — e. g. (i.) the sum of the conditions or properties making up or resulting in life or existence; the essentials or "element" of anything.

Essential conditions, antecedents or synergy (co-ordinated activity), mental coefficients, requisite for act. speech, thought : kaya', vaci", citta", or mano", described respectively as "respiration," "attention and consideration," "percepts and feeling".

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- Asañkhata (undetermined, unfabricated).

- Sañkhataṃ paṭiccasamuppannaṃ > prepared and dependently arisen.

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### Notes:

Sañkhārā is derived from the prefix saṃ = “together,” and the verb karoti = “to make.”

Sañkhāra: what produces the manifestations (abhisankharoti) of combining elements.

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These are forces which are different from matter and mind (rupa-citta-viprayukta).

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Sañkhara nidana: here, we don't have a will as cetana but a "determinative" will, as defined by a specific and constant cause.

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Lower level saṅkhāras (i.e. not belonging to saṅkhāra nidāna , but belonging to the saṅkhārā khanda), are forces which are different from matter and mind (rupa-citta-viprayukta,) but combined with mind. Here, the definitions of the will (cetani) and of the force (saṅkhāra) are indeed the same. They both produce the manifestations of combining elements.

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The volitional formations aggregate, subject to clinging ... are rooted in desire. (SN 22.82).  
The desire and lust for the volitional formation clinging aggregate ... is the clinging there. (id)

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## LEXICAL REFERENCES

### Pali:

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**Saṅkhāra** (fr. saṃ+kṛ, not Vedic)

### Sanskrit:

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■■■■ samkṛ [ saṃ-√ kṛ ]

- to pour out , bestow liberally or abundantly (RV. AV. TS.)
- to mix or pour together , commingle (MBh. ~)

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√■■■ kṛ

- to make , render (AitBr - RV. ŚBr.)
- to proceed , act , put in practice - (VS. - ŚBr. - AitBr.)
- to do , make , perform , accomplish , cause , effect , prepare , undertake - (RV.)
- to procure for another , bestow , grant - (RV. - ŚBr.)
- to do repeatedly - (RV. - AV. TS.)

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■■■ sam [connected with sa]

- with , together with , along with , together , altogether and expressing " conjunction " , " union " , " thoroughness " , " intensity " , " completeness.

■ sa ( connected with [ saha ] , [ sam ] , [ sama ])

- an inseparable prefix expressing " junction " , " conjunction "

■■ saha (connected with [sadha])

- together with , along with , with.
- in common , in company , jointly , conjointly , in concert, at the same time or simultaneously with (RV.)

■■ sadha var. saha [sa-dhā]

with , together with

√■■ dhā

- to make , produce , generate , create , cause , effect , perform , execute (RV. TBr. ŚvetUp.)

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Also

### Pali:

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**Sankhata** [also Saṅkhata, Saṅkhāta]

Saṅkhata, (pp. of saṅkharoti; Sk. saṃskṛta)

- put together, compound; conditioned, produced by a combination of causes.

Saṅkharoti [saṁ+kṛ]  
- to put together [prepare] work.

**Sanskrit:**

■■■■■■■■ [ saṁskṛta ] [ saṁ-skṛtá ] [pp. saṁskṛ]  
- made ready , prepared , completed , finished (RV.)  
- making ready , preparation (RV. TS. ŚBr. GṛŚrS.)

■■■■■■■■ saṁskṛ [sam-kṛ]  
see above.

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