**What is perception (Saññā)?**

* It is one of the five groups of existence / aggregates (khandha).

1) Form (rupā)

2) Feeling (vedanā)

3) Perception (saññā)

4) Mental formation (sankhara)

5) Consciousness (viñña / citta)

* It is the awareness of an object’s distinctive marks. If, in repeated perception of an object, these marks are recognized and perception function as ‘memory’.
* It enables one to recognize an object that has once been perceived by the mind through the senses. It is similar to the wild animal’s discernment in the scarecrow of the man at work.
* Without saññā, we would not remember our names, our parents, our families, our houses etc. Even unintelligent and dull persons have saññā because they can memorize some names and ideas.
* Saññā memorize both good and bad, right and wrong. Due to false notions (ideas, beliefs, understandings) one will mistake a tree-stump for a ghost at night – this is wrong recognition.
* People who believe the wrong to be right, the immoral to be moral are mislead by wrong view (ditthi cetasika) as well as saññā cetasika. Such false faiths and wrong views are very difficult to correct or to reform when their saññā is very strong.
* It is obvious not only ditthi and tanha but also saññā that cause sufferings.

**Perception in accordance to Sutta Pitaka**

* Sense perception in the Sutta Pitaka is concerned with the sense faculties and their respective objects. The senses contact with their objects and as a result the person becomes mentally aware of these objects.
* With contact, it gives rise to feelings. These feelings are kept in memory as perception. Here perception can be identified as memory.
* As a result of constant recollection and reflection, these feelings are transformed into strong ideas, thoughts, beliefs, views or dispositions. They are known as sańkhāra, which also resemble kamma. Dispositions are mainly responsible for the origin of consciousness in rebirth.

**Perception in accordance to Abhidhamma**

* In Abhidhamma, perception (sańńā) means a sign kept in the mind for recalling later the feeling that has already experienced. The various perception or memories are always recalled and reflected in order to experience the feeling again, because feeling is one of the four kinds of food that requires for the survival of beings.
* Abhidhamma theory of perception begins with the bhavańga consciousness, which is explained as free from thought (víthimutta). This is present when the mind is completely vacant like in the state of dreamless sleep.
* The meaning of the term is the ‘course of being’. It is compared to a stream because it flows like a river from birth to death and again from death to birth until we make an end to the existence. Although it functions as a link between existences, it is not eternal and is subjected to birth, decay and death.
* The first consciousness at birth and the last consciousness at death are both moments of the same bhavańga. They are identical but their functions are different from each other.

* The process of perception is given under seventeen stages of thought-moments which are compared with an analogy of mango fruit as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thought-moment | Simile |
| 1) Stream-consciousness | A man sleeping under a mango tree which is full of ripe mango fruits |
|  |  |
| 2) Contact between the sense faculties (the eye) and the sense objects (the mango fruit) | Falling of a ripe mango fruit |
|  |  |
| 3) Recollecting | Awaking with the sound of falling fruit |
|  |  |
| Once these three moments have taken place, the object enters the conscious sphere |  |
|  |  |
| 4)Adverting –consciousness – eye, ear, nose, tongue and body | Opening eye and looking at the fruit |
|  |  |
| 5) Perceiving consciousness – eye consciousness, ear consciousness etc | Taking the fruit |
|  |  |
| 6) Investigating consciousness | Squeezing the fruit |
|  |  |
| 7) Determining consciousness | Smelling the fruit |
|  |  |
| 8 to 14) Thought moments (javana) – experiencing consciousness | Eating the fruit |
| 15 to 16) Thought moment registration consciousness | Swallowing the fruit with saliva |
|  |  |
| 17) Stream=consciousness exists again | Again the man sleeps |

If we analyze our thought process carefully, and if through heedfulness we master them, this can result in a deepened understanding of the ultimate nature of things as impermanent and not-self.

**Why analyze the process of thought or perception?**

* The purpose is to facilitate our understanding of the ultimate nature of things – the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self.

Impermanence and not-self are clearly revealed in the following analogies:-

1. The Buddha likened the life span of a living being to a single point on the wheel of a chariot. He said that, a living being only endure for the time it takes one thought to arise and perish, just as the chariot wheel, whether rolling or at rest, makes contact with the ground at only a single point.

In this context, the past moment existed but it does not exist now, nor will it exist in the future; the present moment exists now but did not exist in the past, nor will it exist in the future; and the future moment, although it will exist in the future, does not exist now, nor did it exist in the past.

1. The Buddha also referred to the case of a king who had never heard the sound of a lute. When he did hear one, he asked his ministers what was that enchanting sound. The minister replied that it was the sound of a lute which was produced by a combination of diverse factors. The king broke it up and had the pieces burned and scattered their ashes, saying that the sound of a lute was nowhere to be found.

Similarly, there is no self among the physical (form) and mental factors (feeling, perception, volition and consciousness) of experience. Thought process is like the sound of a lute, also devoid of self.

* Madhupindika sutta (MN18) plays a central role in the early Buddhist analysis of conflict - the blame for conflict lies within, in the unskillful habits of the mind, rather than without. The culprit in this case is a habit called papañca.

**Definition of papañca**

* The Pali commentaries define papañca as covering three types of thought - craving, conceit and views.
* It functions to slow the mind down in its escape from samsara because its categories begin with the objectifying thought “I am the thinker”.
* It means diffuseness, spreading, proliferating.

**How papañca arises?**

* Madhupindika sutta (MN18) maps the causal processes that give rise to papañca, and lead from papañca to conflict as follows:-
* Contact > feeling > perception > thinking > the perceptions & categories of papañca
* Dependent on eye & forms, eye-consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact; with contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling – happy, unhappy and indifferent.
* What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind).

What one perceives, one thinks / reasons about.

What one thinks about, one obsesses (papañcizes).

* Through the process of papañca, the feeling then becomes a victim of his / her own patterns of thinking’
* Based on what a person papañcizes, the perception and categories of papañca assail him / her with regard to past, present and future forms cognizable via the eyes.
* The root of the categories of papañca is the perception “I am the thinker”. From this self-reflexive thought, a number of categories can be derived – being / not being, me / not me, mine / not mind.
* Once one’s self becomes a thing under those categories, it is impossible not to be assailed by the perceptions and categories derived from these basic distinctions.
* When there’s a sense of identification with something that experiences, then based on the feelings arising from sensory contact, some feelings will seem appealing – worth getting for the self, and others will seem unappealing – worth pushing away.
* From this, there grows desire which comes into conflict with the desires of others who are also engaging in papañca. This is how inner objectification breed external contention.

**How to end papañca?**

* In Kakacūpama sutta (MN21), the Buddha says:-
* Rather than viewing a feeling as an appealing or unappealing thing, one should look at it as part of a causal process :-

*When a particular feeling is pursued, do skillful or unskillful qualities increase in the mind? If skillful qualities increase, the feeling may be pursue, if unskillful qualities increase, it shouldn’t.*

* When comparing feelings that leads to skillful qualities, notice which are more refined: - *Those accompanied with thinking (directed thought) and evaluation, or those free of thinking and evaluation, as in the highest stage of mental absorption or jhana.* Obviously the more refined feeling is to cut through the act of thinking that, according to Madhupindika sutta (Mn18), provides the basis for papañca.
* Learning to avoid references to any notion of “self” and to view feelings not as things but as part of a causal process affecting the qualities in the mind - the basis for papañca is gradually undercut, and there are fewer occasions for conflict.