

Abhidhamma Senior

03/2001 What are the four characteristic properties of cetasikas? Give a brief description.

02/1999 What are the mental factors (cetasikas)? Explain the 4 characteristic properties of them.

The 52 states associated with consciousness, that arise and cease together (with consciousness), that have the same object and base (as consciousness), are known as mental factors.

In the Abhidhammattha Sangaha, the second type of ultimate reality is cetasikas or mental factors, which together with vinnana (consciousness) constitute the nama in the compound Nama-Rupa, the so-called being.

The cetasikas are mental phenomena that occur in immediate conjunction with citta or consciousness, and assist citta by performing more specific tasks in the total act of cognition. The mental factors cannot arise without citta, nor can citta arise completely segregated from the mental factors. But though the two are functionally independent, citta is regarded as primary because the mental factors assist in the cognition of the object depending upon citta, which is the primary cognitive element.

The 4 characteristic properties of cetasikas are :

1. Arising together with consciousness
2. Ceasing together with consciousness
3. Having the same object as consciousness
4. Having the same base as consciousness

These 4 characteristics define the relationship between the citta and its concomitant cetasikas. If only “arising together” were mentioned, then it would include (wrongly) as cetasikas, those material phenomena that arise simultaneously with the citta, that is, material phenomena produced by mind and by kamma. However, these material phenomena do not perish at the same time as the co-arisen citta, but must endure for 17 mind-moments. Thus to exclude them, the characteristic “ceasing together” is introduced.

However, there are two material phenomena – bodily intimation and vocal intimation – which arise and cease together with consciousness. But they do not take an object, and this distinguishes mental phenomena – both citta and cetasikas – from material phenomena : all mental phenomena experience an object, co-arisen citta and cetasikas experience the same object, while material phenomena do not experience any object at all. Thus the 3rd characteristic of having the same object is stated.

In those realms in which the aggregate of material form is found, ie. the sensuous world and fine-material world, the citta and its cetasikas have the same physical base, that is, they arise with the common support of either one of the material sense organs or the heart base. This is the 4th characteristic of cetasikas.