

## **A Reduction of the Buddha's "Conditional Relations" for Research Methodology**

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### **Introduction**

It is a generally accepted approach in research methodology, whether quantitative or qualitative, and whether experimental or non-experimental, to establish the direction and strength of relationships between causes and effects by the use of dependent variables and independent variables. A countless number of research papers have been, and are still, presented using this relationship between variables. In an effort to enrich research methodology, we would like to propose a reduction of the Buddha's "conditional relations", but not in their original religious sense, which is among the most sophisticated and deepest of His teachings. In fact, only those monks attaining a very high level of enlightenment are said to understand them in their religious sense. We are attempting to make a reduction of these "conditional relations" in order to be able to apply them to research methodology.

These "conditional relations" can be conveniently categorized with the relational research of modern times, although it is not a tailor-made fit. According to Rosenthal and Rosnow, relational research tells us "how things are in relation to other things". They say that in relational research we may want to know how much two variables are related with no implication as to one serving as determinant cause, or antecedent, of the other. Here we refer to observed factors as variables without distinguishing independent from dependent variables (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1996: 60). However, conditional relations do not exclude causal

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relationships; yet they encompass more than causal relationships. This means that conditional relations are wider than relational research.

These “conditional relations” are taken from the *Patthana*, the seventh and final book of Abhidhamma Pitaka (Buddhist philosophical literature). According to the Buddha, there are twenty-four conditional relations (*Paccaya-dhamma*) for understanding the nature of human senses and the path to enlightenment. A few of these relations are so fine and religiously based that we cannot apply them in our investigation of phenomena. However, we will make an attempt to understand most of the relations.

The term *paccaya* is defined as meaning a conditional relation among phenomena. Ledi Sayadaw<sup>1</sup> (1935 translation) classifies the three functions of *paccaya* as ‘producing’, ‘supporting’ and ‘maintaining’. ‘Producing’ is causing to arise or become or exist; ‘supporting’ is causing to develop, prosper or multiply; ‘maintaining’ means prolongation by continuity. Narada Thera (1957) of Colombo translates it simply as the law of causal relations, and each relation is termed as conditional. This translation may be too simple and too narrow in contrast to the interpretation of Bhikkhu Bodi who says “whatever comes into being originates through conditions, stands with the support of conditions, and ceases when conditions cease”. In this sense, the term ‘conditional relation’ is much wider than causal relation.

## Discussion of conditional relations

### 1. Root relation (*Hetu-paccaya*)

The term *hetu* is defined as the relation of a factor that establishes an effect, in the sense of a ‘root’ like the roots of a tree. Ledi Sayadaw describes this relation as ‘the relation by way of root’. Ancient Buddhist scholars gave the example of the roots of a tree that draw up nutrients and water from the soil, and cause them to rise up to the crown of the tree. It is the root that not only firmly

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<sup>1</sup> The Venerable Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923), ordained as ‘Shin Nyana Daza’, was a brilliant Buddhist monk who wrote revolutionary critiques against some old established interpretations of Buddha’s teachings. He viewed British occupation of Burma as a danger of impending destruction of Buddhism, and retreated into a forest in 1887. The forest abode became a popular monastery for religious learning and *vipassana* meditation. He established religious centers throughout Burma for the study of Abhidhamma and the practice of *vipassana* meditation. “*Patthanuddesa Dipani*” (The Buddhist Philosophy of Relations) was one of the 106 books and pamphlets he wrote.

supports the tree but also supplies its growth. In other words, the root is a basic condition for a tree.

This relation is easy to understand because we are accustomed to the words 'root cause' in normal life. For every phenomenon, if we can find the root we can either protect it or dig it out. In simple words, we can take the 'root-condition' as the main cause of any event. To use Wilcot's tree as quoted by Miles and Huberman (1994: 6), experiencing, enquiry and examining are the roots of a knowledge tree made up of ethnology, phenomenology, ethnography, biography, philosophy etc. This relation seems to be in agreement with Aristotle's<sup>2</sup> material cause. Material cause, as noted by Aristotle, refers to the material out of which something is made or comes about (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1996: 29). Stinchcombe's statement, "The shining of the sun causes the temperature to rise", shows the root-relation between sunshine and temperature (Stinchcombe, 1968: 31). However, modern theories of causation focus on covariation, causal direction and non-spuriousness.

## **2. Object relation (*Aramana-paccaya*)**

Things happen because we have an object in making them happen. An object is like a clinging or a wish or a plan to achieve or a budget to implement. Thus, in practical life a plan or a budget is the manifestation of our aim or object. An object or objective determines the course of any project or its success. It is one of the determinants of ensuing functions; it is the one that leads to a certain activity. Aristotle's **final cause** (or the teleologic factor) is similar to this relation as the end reason a thing strives for.

## **3. Dominance relation (*Adipati-paccaya*)**

Among a number of causal factors one is dominating over other factors. It is necessary for us to look at the dominating factor that could reduce or strengthen the impact of other factors. However, the dominating status could be shifted to other factors depending on the changing situation. Dominance can be

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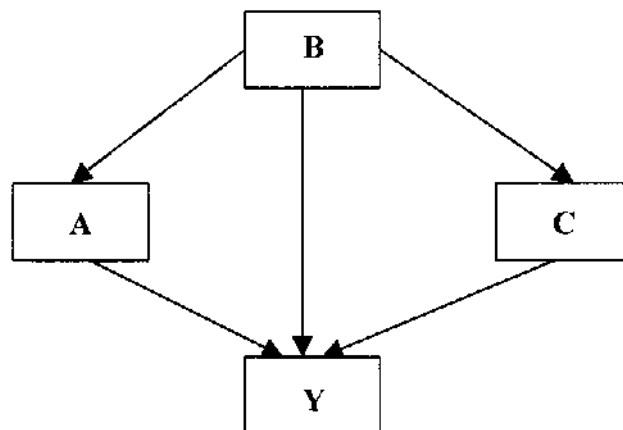
<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's four different uses of cause for the purpose of explanation are as follows: 1. Material cause which refers to the material out of which something is made or comes about; 2. Formal cause which is the implicit form or meaning of the thing; 3. Efficient cause which is the propelling factor that produces the thing or sets it into motion; 4. Final cause which refers to the end reason for which a thing tends naturally to strive (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1996: 28).

termed as ‘overpowering’. Dominating personalities usually become heroes or dictators because they are entrusted with power by others.

A researcher needs to look at the dominating factor at a particular time. For example, export focus might be the dominating factor of Thailand’s economy in the 1990s, but tourism could become the dominating factor in the first decade of the new millennium. In Mintzberg’s organization structure, each one of the five parts are pulling the organization in five different directions. For example, the strategic apex pulls so as to structure the organization as a ‘simple structure’. Thus an organization tends to favor one of the five directions at a time, letting one part be stronger and displace another as the dominant one. This shows the dominance relation in an organization.

The dominance relation is depicted in the following figure.

**Figure 1: Dominating factor**



**Note:** B is the dominating factor over other causal factors, A and C, as well as the dependent Y. It is also possible that at other times A or C could emerge as the dominating factor.

**4. Proximity relation** (*Anantara-paccaya*) and **5. Contiguity relation** (*Samanantara-paccaya*)

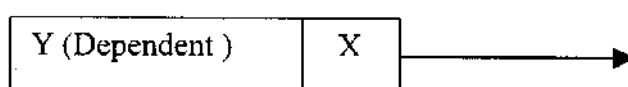
Both of these refer to factors or phenomena immediately following in a continuum. In the religious interpretation, proximity is ‘immediateness’ whereas

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contiguity is ‘thorough immediateness’, with nothing in between. For our purpose, immediate following of factors is enough. Narada Thera (1957: 93) maintains that there is no difference between the two terms in meaning, except in etymology.

These relations are also easy to understand for us because we are used to analysing ‘immediate cause(s)’ of a certain event. To give a modern example, a locomotive and its coaches have a proximity relation because the former pulls the latter very closely, appearing as one unit, a train. In fact, it is the dependent variable (coaches) following the independent variable (the locomotive). The relationship can be depicted in the following figure.

**Figure 2: Proximity of factors**

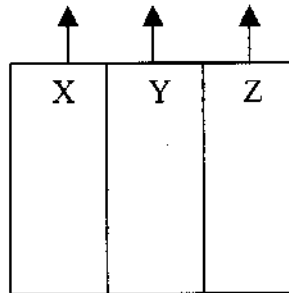


However, we should be aware that just a proximity relation or contiguity relation does not necessarily reflect a causal relationship. We need to combine this with another kind of conditional relation to establish causality. In Figure 2, it is still possible that both X and Y are dependent factors following immediately after an independent factor Z.

#### **6. Coexistence relation (*Sahajata-paccaya*)**

In the religious literature, coexistence is illustrated by four great elements (earth, water, fire and air) representing the properties of extension, cohesion, heat and motion. Ledi Sayadaw defines coexistence as a phenomenon arising simultaneously with its effects. As an example, the sun rises together with the heat and light it produces (1935: 23). Stinchcombe’s ‘covariation’ (1968: 54) would be the term that reflects the coexistence relationship. In Bhikku Bodi’s translation, it is called a *conascence condition* where a phenomenon in arising makes other phenomena arise together with itself (1984: 135).

As an example, a coexistence relationship is said to be established when a newly formed legislative body creates a cabinet. Even coalition partners in a government are said to be in a coexistence relation. A pictorial presentation of a co-existence relation is shown below.

**Figure 3: Coexistence relation**

### 7. Reciprocity relation (*Anna manna-paccaya*)

In this relation, there is no separation of independent factor and dependent factor; every factor in a particular group is depending on and depended on by others. In short, there is interdependence among factors or variables. The example given in the religious literature is 'three sticks set upright leaning against one another at their upper ends'. If one of them falls, all will fall at the same time. Bhikkhu Bodi calls it a 'mutuality condition'. Buddha's reciprocity relation does not require a time lag because every factor is mutually dependent at the same time. This relation departs from the simplistic notion of causality, that causality is one-sided and sequential.

A modern example of this relationship is a business partnership where agreement depends on partners. The relation between computer hardware and software could also be viewed as that kind of relation. In the context of public administration, a revenue system and governance have a reciprocity relation because the former strengthens the latter whereas the latter organizes the former. A significant reciprocity relation could be found between man and environment.

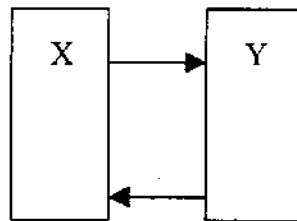
Blalock accepts reciprocal causation, but points out that one needs to collect data on variables at several point of time because of the time lag between them (1964: 40, 56). A reciprocity relation strengthens each member in a group like the ASEAN members resulting in everlasting bondage and survival. However, in times of crisis the weakness of one nation could have a deep impact on other members like in the 1997 ASEAN financial crisis.

According to Henry Mintzberg's systems approach, there is no dependent or independent variable in a system and everything is interdependent. He isolates

four basic criteria of interdependencies in an organization, namely workforce interdependencies, power interdependencies scale interdependencies and social interdependencies. Again, he classifies workforce interdependencies into three basic kinds - pooled, sequential and reciprocal - among which reciprocal interdependencies is the most complex and the tightest one. As an example, the turning, drilling and milling departments in a factory are reciprocal in nature.

The reciprocity relation is expressed in the following figure.

**Figure 4: Reciprocal factors**



#### **8. Dependence relation (*Nissaya-paccaya*)**

Bhikku Bodi translates this as a support condition because it is a phenomenon that assists other phenomena by serving as a foundation for them just as the earth supports trees or a canvass supports a painting. Narada Thera gives as an example that a good environment, early education etc. will serve as causal relation by way of 'dependence' to acquire health, wealth and knowledge in later life. Ledi Sayadaw sums it up that everything is causally related to something else by way of dependence.

To apply this relation, the functions of a government agency depend on its human resources that are to be established at the beginning. As it explicitly differentiates the status of dependent variable and independent variable, modern causation theories fall into this category of relation. However, just being dependent may or may not suffice to achieve a required result.

#### **9. Sufficing relation (*Upanissaya-paccaya*)**

This relation is stronger than the dependence relation in that it provides support for the growth of other phenomena. Ancient religious scholars gave the example of rain as the sufficient condition for the growth of trees. This relation

also applies to a time gap between the independent variable and dependent variable, implicitly identifying the former as a 'remote cause'. The time distance or 'remoteness' depends on the merit of each case.

This relation has some similarities with the modern term "necessary and sufficient condition" for causation. We can claim that A causes B if A is both necessary and a sufficient condition for B (Blalock, 1964: 30). It could be an equivalent of Aristotle's **efficient cause**, the propelling factor that produces the result.

#### **10. Pre-existence relation (*Purejata-paccaya*)**

This is also called an 'antecedent' or 'prenascent condition'. It is the relation of a phenomenon that arises earlier and assists another to rise by its presence. The religious literature gives the example of the string and bow that arise earlier than the violin sound they produce. According to Narada Thera, the pre-existent things are regarded as causally related only when they continue to exist in the present, not by mere antecedent (1957: 95).

Modern day researchers use 'independent variables' to mean 'antecedent events' because being antecedent is one of the criteria of causation. One of the five main methods of establishing causal direction as suggested by Stinchcombe is observing the variable that precedes changes in the dependent variable (1968: 35). If the change in a causal variable precedes a change in a dependent variable, the second change could have been produced by the first change. For Bunge, as quoted by Blalock, conjunction is not sufficient to establish a causal relation from other types of associations. Day is always followed by night but days do not produce nights (Blalock, 1964: 9). Another thing is that a certain time lag is often necessary to produce the result. In modern economic theory and practice, a decrease in oil production is followed by a price rise. However, the pre-existence relation could not be stronger than the proximity relation and contiguity relation, depending on the time lag.

#### **11. Post-existence relation (*Pacchajata-paccaya*)**

This is also called a 'consequence relation' or 'postnascent condition'. As a reverse of the pre-existence relation, this relation can be found when a factor functions as a condition for the preservation and strengthening of a previously

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arisen factor or phenomenon. Ledi Sayadaw gives the example of the subsequent rains promoting growth of the trees planted in earlier years.

As a modern example, fresh graduates joining a faculty could promote the success of a university. A university may be a hundred years old, but its survival and prosperity depend on new faculty in the long run. Being earlier does not necessarily mean always independent. Even old parents may have to depend on their children.

### 12. Habitual recurrence relation (*Asevana-paccaya*)

This relation is also translated as 'succession relation' or 'repetition condition' or 'frequency condition'. Bhikkhu Bodi explains it as the relation of phenomena that assist and strengthen succeeding phenomena through the power of repetition (1984: 137). According to Ledi Sayadaw, great achievements in art, science and literature happen when they are carried out continuously, repeatedly and incessantly in thought, word or deed.

In simple words, constant repetition can lead to a phenomenon. For a serious researcher, repetition of experiments or study would bring light to new knowledge. In the same way, repeated heat transforms cool water to boiling water. It is a kind of transformation from quantity to quality. In an investigation, repetition of probing questions or experiments leads to greater reliability of a conclusion.

### 13. Kamma<sup>3</sup> relation (*Kamma-paccaya*)

This is known as a relation caused by action. Narada Thera likens this relation to a seed causally related to a tree. Although the religious sense emphasizes 'volition' or 'will' being predominant in all actions, it would be sufficient to take 'action' as a causal factor for our reduction purpose. In fact, the literal translation of 'kamma' is 'action'.

As it is well known, every action has its reaction or effects although the result may be immediate or latent until a later time. An action can be referred to as an effort putting in a particular energy. To go back to John D. Trimmer's system concept as quoted by Blalock, actions can be taken as 'forcings'. Moreover, Blalock quotes Mario Bunge that just being antecedent, without 'producing'

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<sup>3</sup> The same as 'karma' in Sanskrit.

(forcing), is not sufficient as a causal factor (1994: 9-10). The kamma relation can be remote as well as immediate.

#### 14. Effect relation (*Vipaka-paccaya*)

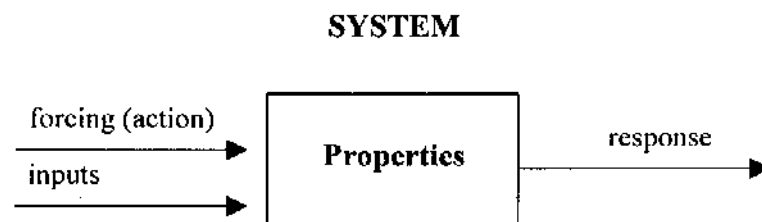
This relation is also translated as a kamma-result condition. It is a passive phenomenon resulting from past kamma, and therefore could be a reverse side of *Kamma-paccaya*. Ledi Sayadaw explains it as the resultant states that are very tranquil, inactive and non-stimulating. As the Venerable Sayadaw Zanaka-biwongsa elaborates on the kamma relation and effect relation together as if they are two sides of the same coin, these two relations could be taken as one for our reduction purpose.

#### 15. Nutriment relation (*Ahara-paccaya*)

Literally, this can be taken as the relation of material food as a nutriment condition for the physical body. In a wider sense, it is also translated as a support condition. According to Ledi Sayadaw, a relating thing nourishes its related thing so as to enable it to endure long, to develop, to flourish, and to strive, by means of support.

To go back to our train example, it is likened to fuel and water or electricity to drive the engine of a locomotive. In a manufacturing process, it is the relation of inputs to output. Taking this relation into consideration, forcing (action) alone in Trimmer's responding diagram (Blalock, 1964: 8) would not be sufficient to produce a result or response; inputs must be added. A revised diagram is drawn below.

**Figure 5: Revised responding diagram**



**16. Control relation (*Indriya-paccaya*)**

Bhikkhu Bodi calls this a 'faculty condition' because originally it refers to the five physical sense faculties that serve as faculty conditions for the mental phenomena as well as material phenomena originated by consciousness. In a wider sense, controlling factors exercise control in their respective spheres.

As a practical example, we can take state agencies like police and immigration as controlling factors for respective public affairs. Each controller does not interfere with the other, having absolute control in its own area. Another example is a number of teachers taking control of their respective classrooms. However, a controlling factor is concerned with only one specific area but is not dominating as a dominance relation that covers all.

**17. Ecstasy relation (*Jhana-paccaya*) and 18. Means relation (*Magga-paccaya*)**

As these two relations are exclusively religious and cannot be applied to research methodology, they will be omitted in our reduction attempt.

**19. Association relation (*Sampayutta-paccaya*)**

This kind of relation happens when phenomena assist each other through their association by having a common physical base. Examples can be found at the micro level as well as the macro level such as ASEAN or APEC. Being members of an association, one can support another. A medicine can be another example in which various elements are compounded to cure a disease or pain. All these elements are mixed up in such a way that their individual identity is lost, creating a new one.

**20. Dissociation relation (*Vippayutta-paccaya*)**

This means that two phenomena assist one another although they have an essential given difference, as distinct from the association relation that has a common base. An example given in the religious literature is the relation "between water and a lotus leaf that are mutually bound". The relation between faculty and administrative staff would enhance both parties and the university as well. As another example, operations research originated from a relation among different disciplines.

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**21. Presence relation (*Atthi-paccaya*) and 22. Continuance (non-disappearance) relation (*Avigata-paccaya*)**

In the religious sense these relations are different but, for adaptation to research, they could be taken as one and the same thing. Presence relation refers to the relation of one phenomenon to another by its presence alongside the other. Continuance relation means that the presence should be continued. Both relations could be combined into 'continued presence relation'.

As an example, the presence of traffic police could reduce traffic violations or accidents. The presence of rules and regulations would promote the proper functioning of a system. In experimental research, an experimental group has the presence relation to a dependent variable. We can see the impact of an experiment on a dependent variable in contrast to the dependent variable in a control group.

**23. Absence relation (*Nathi-paccaya*) and 24. Abeyance (disappearance) relation (*Vigata-paccaya*)**

These two relations are the opposite of the last two relations, and these relations can be taken together as one for our reduction purposes. Bhikkhu Bodi defines the absence relation as mental phenomena that, by their ceasing, enable the mental phenomena immediately following themselves to arise.

For our reduction, we can take the physical phenomena or events that cease to exist to give rise to others. As an example, the absence of a security force in a community could give opportunities for criminal offences. For another example, the absence of hunting can increase the population of endangered animals. To go back to the contemporary history of the United States, the sudden death of John F. Kennedy paved the way for Lyndon Johnson to become the President. However, the absence relation is different from that of a control group in experimental research, which cannot have influence over dependent variables.

**Evaluation of conditional relations for their use in research methodology**

Nyanatiloka Mahathera states that these 24 conditional relations do not necessarily exclude one another; some one may even be fully identical with another (1982: 13). Piyadassi Thera observes that *patthana* (conditional relations) clearly demonstrate how things are 'multiply caused' (*aneka-hetuka*); and, in stating things are neither causeless nor due to one single cause, Buddhism antedated

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modern science by twenty five centuries (1981: 3). Bhikkhu Bodi is also much impressed by *paccaya* because it “enumerates the variety of conditional modes in minute detail, exploring every nook and corner of the interconnections” (1984: 133). These appraisals are based only on religious exposition, not in the sense of the research methodology we are introducing.

Most of the popular research methods are used to establish the causal relation of an independent variable as a multiplier of a dependent variable. In contrast, the conditional relations encompass more than a multiplier, because these relations show the causal relationship to the existence of a phenomenon, and to the maintenance of it. In fact, the conditional relations have a wider approach to causation than western theories.

The conditional relations (*paccaya*) maintain that there can be more than one kind of relationship between two phenomena. However, we cannot use one conditional relation for every phenomenon, because each relation is applicable only to a particular group of phenomena. In contrast, most of the western concepts of causality, if not all, do not seem to differentiate the area of application as if the same medicine is a cure-all for all diseases. Here, in applying conditional relations, we must be able to match the type(s) of relation with the phenomena under observation.

The conditional relations cover the ‘causality’ question but go further to seek a real “understanding” of the phenomena. “Understanding” looks subjective but is much wider than a single, direct causality question. As mentioned at the beginning, conditional relations are more inclined to relational research. Relational research tells us how things are in relation to other things. One of its functions is to uncover the relations among different variables. It will explain which variables are correlated (and how much), and which are not. Thus conditional relations are more inclined to relational research and qualitative methodology.

## **Conclusion**

Buddha’s conditionality shows the whole world as being subject to a chain of causes and effects, or actions and reactions. Everything is a cause on the one hand and an effect on the other, in a never-ending continuum. Nothing is causeless and unconditional.

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The aim of this paper is to introduce these conditional relations as useful tools in research methodology. However, there are many obstacles to understanding Buddhist literature especially for non-Buddhists because of the lack of orientation, the problem in translation to one's native language and interpretation. However, different translations of the terminology of conditional relations do not stand as hindrance to understanding because these translations are not conceptually different (see Appendix ). On the contrary, a reader would have a better comprehension of the relations especially by studying the interpretations of each scholar.

Again, for our reduction purpose, it is not of prime importance to understand the religious meaning of these conditions because we want them only for application, in our methodology, to mundane affairs. Moreover, reduction of these conditional relations to a research methodology requires imagination as well as brainstorming. In spite of all these demands, it is worthy of such an effort in the light of its detailed connectivity and multidimensional causal relations.

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**Appendix**  
**Different Translations of Terminology of Conditional Relations**

No.	Pali Text	By U Nyana	By Narada Thera	By Goenka	Adopted in this Paper
1.	<i>Hetu</i>	Root	Root	Condition	Root
2.	<i>Aramana</i>	Object	Object	Object	Object
3.	<i>Adipati</i>	Dominance	Predominance	Dominance	Dominant
4.	<i>Anantara</i>	Contiguity	Contiguity	Contiguity	Proximity
5.	<i>Samantara</i>	Immediate contiguity	Immediacy	Immediate contiguity	Contiguity
6.	<i>Sahajata</i>	Co-existence	Conascence	Co-existence	Co-existence
7.	<i>Anna Manna</i>	Reciprocity	Mutuality	Reciprocity	Reciprocity
8.	<i>Nissaya</i>	Dependence	Dependence	Dependence	Dependence
9.	<i>Upanissaya</i>	Sufficing condition	Powerful dependence	Sufficing condition	Sufficing
10.	<i>Purejata</i>	Pre-existence	Pre-existence	Antecedence	Pre-existence
11.	<i>Pacchajata</i>	Post-existence	Postnascence	Consequence	Post-existence
12.	<i>Asevana</i>	Habitual recurrence	Repetition	Succession	Habitual recurrence
13.	<i>Kamma</i>	Kamma	Kamma	Kamma	Kamma
14.	<i>Vipaka</i>	Effect	Effect	Effect	Effect
15.	<i>Ahara</i>	Food	Nutriment	Support	Nutriment
16.	<i>Indriya</i>	Control	Control	Control	Control
17.	<i>Jhana</i>	Jhana	Jhana	Ecstasy	Ecstasy
18.	<i>Magga</i>	Path	Path	Means	Means
19.	<i>Sampayutta</i>	Association	Association	Association	Association
20.	<i>Vippayutta</i>	Dissociation	Dissociation	Dissociation	Dissociation
21.	<i>Athi</i>	Presence	Presence	Presence	Presence
22.	<i>Natthi</i>	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence
23.	<i>Vigata</i>	Abeyance	Separation	Abeyance	Abeyance
24.	<i>Avigata</i>	Continuance	Non-separation	Continuance	Continuance