

## [Maha Prajnaparamita Sastra](#)

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This page describes “the eleven knowledges (ekadasha-jnana) according to the mahayana” as written by [Nagarjuna](#) in his Maha-prajnaparamita-sastra (lit. “the treatise on the great virtue of wisdom”) in the 2nd century. This book, written in five volumes, represents an encyclopedia on Buddhism as well as a commentary on the Pancavimsatisahasrika [Prajnaparamita](#).



# III. The Eleven Knowledges (ekādaśa-jñāna) according to the Mahāyāna

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## 1. Knowledge conforming to reality

The knowledge conforming to reality ([yathābhūtajñāna](#)) has a special characteristic (*viśeṣalakṣaṇa*): it will be fully explained in the following chapters of [233c] the [Prajñāpāramitā](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. The eleven knowledges

Some say:

1) The knowledge of things ([dharmajñāna](#)) cognizes the [five aggregates](#) of attachment (*pañcopādānaskandha*) as impermanent (*anitya*), painful (*duḥkha*), empty (*śūnya*) and without self (*anātmaka*). It knows that [dharmas](#) are all the result of a complex of causes and conditions (*hetupratyayasāmagryapekṣa*) in the sense that ‘actions have ignorance as condition’ (*avidyāpratyayāḥ saṃskārāḥ*) and so on up to ‘old age and death have birth as condition’ (*jātipratyayaṃ jarāmaraṇam*).

Thus the [Buddha](#) said to the [brahmacārin](#) *Siu-che-mo* ([Susīma](#)): “First it is necessary to use the knowledge [of the causality] of things in order to analyze dharmas, then to use the knowledge concerning [nirvāṇa](#).”<sup>[2]</sup>

2) Subsequent knowledge ([anvayajñāna](#)). – Knowing that the present five aggregates of attachment (*pratyutpannopādānaskandha*) are impermanent (*anitya*), painful (*duḥkha*), empty (*śūnya*) and non-self (*anātmaka*), one deduces that, in the past (*atīta*) and the future (*anāgata*) and in the [form realm](#) (*rūpadhātu*) and the formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*) as well, the five aggregates of attachment are likewise impermanent, suffering, empty and without self.

Thus, if we notice that presently fire (*agni*) warms and burns, we know by induction ([anumāna](#)) that fires past and future or fires in other places likewise [warm and burn].

3) The knowledge of another’s mind ([paracittajñāna](#)) cognizes the mind (*citta*) and mental events (*caitasikadharmā*) of other beings.

Question. – If it cognizes the mind and mental events of others, why is it called simply the knowledge of the mind of another [and not the knowledge of the mind and mental events of others]?

Answer. – The mind being sovereign, it is sufficient to call it the knowledge of another’s mind: by saying mind, we know that the mental events are understood as well.

4) Conventional knowledge (*samvrtijñāna*) is a purely knowledge of designation (*prajñaptijñāna*). The saint knows that, in regard to reality (*tattva*), worldly people (*prthagjana*) know it only verbally (*prajñaptitah*). This is why this knowledge is called knowledge of designation (*prajñaptijñāna*). In the same way, those for whom a house (*grha*) is just a word-list of boards (*phalaka*), posts (*sthūnā*), pillars (*stambha*) and walls (*bhitti*) only understand these materials and do not understand the real meaning (*bhūtārtha*) of a house. That is conventional knowledge (*samvrtijñāna*).

5) The knowledge of suffering (*duḥkhajñāna*) brings into play a knowledge about suffering in order to reprimand the five aggregates of attachment (*pañcopādānaskandha*).

Question. – The five aggregates of attachment are both impermanent (*anitya*), painful (*duḥkha*), empty (*śūnya*) and non-self (*anātmaka*). Why speak only of the knowledge of suffering (*duḥkha*) and not speak of a knowledge of impermanence, emptiness and non-self?<sup>[3]</sup>

Answer. – We speak of the knowledge of suffering in regard to the [truth of suffering](#), the knowledge of the origin in regard to the truth of the origin, the knowledge of cessation in regard to the truth of cessation, and the knowledge of the path in regard to the [truth of the path](#).

Question. – But the five aggregates of attachment have all kinds of evils; why proclaim only one truth on suffering and not proclaim truths on impermanence, emptiness and non-self as well?

Answer. – If truths on impermanence, emptiness and non-self were proclaimed, this would not offend the meaning of the [Buddhist] doctrine. But as beings are, above all, lovers of happiness (*sukhakāma*) and enemies of suffering (*duḥkhapratikūla*), the Buddha's lament that everything in the world is suffering (*loke sarvaṃ duḥkham*) was intended to lead beings to become detached from it.

On the other hand, being faced with impermanence, emptiness and non-self, beings are not very frightened; this is why the Buddha did not speak of them [as distinct truths].

Furthermore, in the [Dharma](#) proclaimed by the Buddha, the five aggregates of attachment carry different names, but all meaning 'suffering'. This is why the Buddha spoke only of the knowledge of suffering.

This *duḥkhajñāna* is sometimes impure (*sāsrava*), sometimes pure (*anāsrava*):

- a. It is impure [in the preparatory Path], when it is in heat (*uṣmagata*), summits (*mūrdhan*), patience (*ksānti*) and supreme worldly dharmas (*laukikāgradharma*).<sup>[4]</sup>
- b. It is pure when the ascetic penetrates into the Path of seeing the truths (*satyadarśanamārga*).

Why is that? From there on up to the supreme worldly dharmas, the [yogin](#) considers suffering in [four ways](#).

6–8) It is the same for the knowledge of the origin, the knowledge of cessation and the knowledge of the Path.

Furthermore, the knowledge of suffering (*duḥkhajñāna*) cognizes that suffering nature (*duḥkhākāra*) does not really arise. – The knowledge of the origin [234a] (*samudayajñāna*) cognizes that dharmas are disjunctive and without conjunction. – The knowledge of cessation (*nirodhajñāna*) cognizes that dharmas are forever peaceful (*ādiśānta*) and like nirvāṇa (*nirvāṇasama*). – The knowledge of the path (*mārgajñāna*) cognizes that dharmas are forever pure (*nityasuddha*), without rectitude or evil.<sup>[5]</sup>

9) The knowledge of the elimination of the impurities (*ksayajñāna*) cognizes that all dharmas are non-existent (*anupalabdha*).

10) The knowledge of the non-rearising of the impurities (*anutpādayjñāna*) cognizes that dharmas, being unreal (*abhūta*) and indeterminate (*aniyata*), do not arise (*anutpanna*).

11) The knowledge conforming to reality (*yathābhūtajñāna*) is that which can be cognized by the ten preceding knowledges. By means of this knowledge in accordance with reality, the characteristics (*nimitta*), conditions (*pratyaya*), special features (*prabheda*) and considerations (*anupaśyanā*) belonging to each of the [ten knowledges](#) are cognized, but in this knowledge conforming to reality, there is no characteristic, condition, or special feature; it destroys all considerations of things and itself has none.

In the first ten knowledges, there is the eye of the Dharma (*dharmacakṣus*) and the eye of wisdom (*prajñācakṣus*); in the knowledge conforming to reality, there is only the eye of the Buddha (*buddhacakṣus*).<sup>[6]</sup>

The first ten knowledges are shared by the [arhats](#), [pratyekabuddhas](#) and [bodhisattvas](#); the Buddha alone possesses the knowledge conforming to reality. Why? Only the Buddha possesses the Dharma which does not deceive (*aśāthyadharmā*); this is how we know that he alone possesses the knowledge conforming to reality.

Finally, when the ten knowledges enter into the knowledge in accordance with reality, they lose their original names and then there is only one true knowledge. Similarly, when all the rivers of the ten directions enter into the great sea (*mahāsamudra*), they lose their original names and are just called great sea.

These various explanations of the meaning of the eleven knowledges are given here in brief (*saṃkṣiptena*). A note in red says that the eleven knowledges are finished here.

## FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES:

[1]: Pañcaviṃśati. T 223, k. 5, p. 255a2; k. 21, p. 376b19. The *Traité* will comment on these passages: T 1509, k. 48, p. 406c7; k. 84, p. 647b14; 650c21–23; k. 99, p. 749a14. The *yathābhūtajñāna* summing up the entire knowledge of the Mahāyāna coincides with the *sarvākārajñāna* discussed above, p. 640–642F.

[2]: Susīmasutta in Saṃyutta, II, p. 134 (Tsa a han, T 99, k. 14, p. 97b6): *Pubbe kho Susīma dhammaṭṭhiññāṇaṃ pacchā nibbāṇe ñāṇam ti*.

[3]: In other words, since everything is impermanent, suffering, empty and non-self, why did the Buddha who proclaimed a truth of suffering not proclaim a truth of permanence, emptiness and non-self?

[4]: The four aids to penetration (*nirvedhabhāgīya*) developed in the preparatory Path (*prayogamārga*): see above, p. 395F, n., and Kośa, VI, p. 163–168.

[5]: This paragraph condenses the Mahāyānist interpretation of the four holy Truths into a few words.

[6]: The five eyes (*māṃsa-*, *divya-*, *prajñā-*, *dharmā-*, *buddhacakṣus*) are defined in Pañcaviṃśati, p. 77–83: Śātasāhasrikā, p. 290–301).

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