

# Are We Living in an Illusion? An Early Buddhist Perspective on Phenomenology

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## Abstract

In phenomenology, the individual's perceptual experience is an illusion, and the consequence of this experience is individual turns toward misery and sorrow in their existence. Examining the phenomenological experience of human beings according to the early Buddhist doctrines is significant due to its description of the sensory experience, illusion in phenomenology, and cessation of the illusion in both secular and sacred notions. Early Buddhist literature, in its suttas, has presented various doctrines related to the phenomenological experience. Such as Dependent Origination, mental proliferation, and the five aggregates. The complete experience of the individual in existence is an illusion, as described in the dependent origination. Then the illusion develops in a conscious and unconscious way according to the early Buddhist teachings. According to the *papañca*, the sensory experience raises the feeling and perception and leads towards automatic and effortless thought arising, and the five aggregates lead towards the mental formation and consciousness, and evolve the changing perception of the external object and develop the consciousness phenomenological experience. The major factor influencing the development of the phenomenological experience is *tanhā* or craving, which is summarily described under the doctrine of the *moha*. However, this phenomenological experience generated due to various factors can be overcome within the concentrated mind and cognitive transformation. Ultimately, the respective study presents a holistic view of phenomenology, referring to the teachings of early Buddhism.

**Keywords:** *Epistemology, Early Buddhism, Illusion, Mindfulness, Phenomenology*

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## Introduction

Individuals' experience in secular living is frustrated and dissatisfied. The cause of these reportable conditions of sorrow and misery is derived from the psychological condition of the phenomenology. Throughout the historical development of philosophy, both Western and Indian philosophical traditions have discussed this psychological condition of phenomenology as a perceptual error. Commonly, this condition of phenomenology is considered a way of understanding the nature of conscious experience subjectively. The dynamic nature of experience from one to another person majorly lies in the phenomenology (Cerbone, 2014). Compared to the various philosophical and religious traditions, the early Buddhists can be recognized as significant schools, which have discussed the phenomenology in a sophisticated view in association with the illusion and miseries (Hoffman, 2002). Another significant feature in comparison to the Western philosophical doctrine, early Buddhism has provided a path of cessation towards overcoming the generated illusion through the phenomenological experience and leads towards the existence of satisfaction, which is free from perceptual errors (Copelj, 2022). However, scholars have paid less attention to exploring doctrinal teachings on early Buddhism in this mentioned view of the phenomenology and its cessation. Majorly, the doctrine of the Dependent Origination (*paticcasamupāda*), mental proliferation (*papañca*), five aggregates (*pañcupādānakhandhā*), delusion (*moha*) has been traditionally described in the notions of the metaphysical dependent origination and extension of the existence, conception association with perception, constitution of the individuality and three positions of the consciousness experience (Gunaratana and Ziegler, 2024; Nananda, 1997; Boisvert, 2006; Narada, 2007). But scholars have pointed out that all these teachings exist as an underlying explanation related to the perception and conception.

Referring to fundamental teachings of phenomenology, if any of the philosophical systems express teachings related to the human perception authentically explain the origin and expansion of phenomenology in human experience. In this light examination of the doctrinal teachings of early Buddhism it presents a foundation for the phenomenology. The theory of dependent origination propagates with the ignorance (avijjā) and consists with the mentality (nāma) and materiality (rūpa) for entertaining the phenomenological experience. Based upon the developed constitution, individual psychological experience is extended with the mental proliferation and continues the flow of mind with the growing phenomenological experience with the collective consciousness. Further, this phenomenological experience may lead towards the performance of the volitional actions in existence, and all the unwholesome conditions are associated with the delusion generated by the five aggregates. In this manner, all the doctrine teachings presented reference human suffering and sorrow can be explored in a foundation of phenomenology. Ultimately, the arising of the right knowledge (sammādiṭṭhi/ vijjā) can free one from the phenomenal experience and leads towards realistic experiences through the untouchable areas of early Buddhism (Fuller, 2004; Newland, 2009).

### **Problem Statement**

Considering the significance of explanation lies in the doctrinal teachings of early Buddhism related to phenomenology, illusion, and its cessation, the research question of the study is as follows: What is the early Buddhist perspective on phenomenology presented under the doctrines Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamupāda), mental proliferation (papañca), five aggregates (pañcupādānakhandhā), delusion (moha), and utility of the noble eightfold path (ariya aṭṭaṅgika magga) to overcome

the phenomenology and achieve the realistic experience in existence?

### **Objective (s)**

The major objective of the study is to recognize the manifestation of phenomenological experience and its cessation concerning early Buddhist teachings, and the sub-objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore the association of phenomenology with the doctrinal teachings of the paṭiccasamupāda (Dependent Origination)
- To recognize the arisen of the phenomenological experience associated with the theory of the papañca (mental proliferation)
- To identify the process of the origination of the perception experience and its association with phenomenology reference to the doctrinal concept of pañcupādānakhandhā (clinging of five aggregates)
- To evaluate the nature of the phenomenology associated with mental experience under the concept of the moha (delusion).
- To examine the cessation of the misery of phenomenology (nippapañca) with reference to the meditative practice described in early Buddhism

### **Methodology**

This study is qualitative, and the primary data collected from the sutta refers to the doctrinal teachings of early Buddhism. Then, the secondary data was collected from the scholarly works related to the study objectives. The data analysis methods used

were the content analysis method and the phenomenological approach. The discussion is presented under five themes those are Dependent Origination and Phenomenology, Mental Proliferation and Phenomenology, Five Aggregates and Phenomenology, Delusion and Phenomenology, and Cessation of Phenomenology.

## **Literature Survey**

Phenomenology is defined as the nature of the individual experience that arises within the perceptual experience of the living being. Individual sensory abilities of hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling developed the experience. But here phenomenology is not considered as the correct actualization or pure experience in existence. Due to the impact of the various factors, such as perceptual error, environmental factors, and personal preferences, a subjective or personalized idealization manifests. This malfunction perception is considered as phenomenology or an extended version of illusion or delusion. The main feature of phenomenological experience has been unrealistic (Tymieniecka, 2005; Husserl, 1999). As illustrated in the doctrinal teachings of the dependent origination, individual existence is manifested through the conditioning of the twelve elements known as *nidāna*. Each of these elements consists of the potential to contribute towards generating the experience of suffering and sorrow in existence. Evolverment of the unwholesome condition through dependent origination associated with mental, bodily, and verbal actions, grounding the source of *avījja* (Piyadassi, 1998). However, this has been more descriptively explained in the doctrinal teachings of the *papañca* (mental proliferation) and *pañcasakhandhā* (five aggregates). As explored by the scholars, individual consciousness experience is propagated within the contact of the six sensory qualities of external elements via the six sensory organs. Such continuation

of the flow of sensory consciousness associated with the *vedanā* (feeling), and *saññā* (perception), evolves into an unconscious, effortless thought development process of the reference to the *papañca* with the cognitive process of *vittaka* and *vicāra*. This has been highlighted by scholars as mental proliferation, which reflects an idea of collective consciousness experience that leads towards dynamic conceptualization. Further extension of mental proliferation has been occupied by the five aggregates described in early Buddhism. Above described developed condition of the conception may extend with *saṅkhāra* (mental formation) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness) (Boisvert, 2006; Nananda, 1997). All the conditions are driven by the major cause of the *taṇhā* (craving) and *anusaya* (latent tendencies) pointed out by the scholars, and the propagated psychological experience comes out as one of the poisons known as *moha* (illusion) (De Silva, 1992; De Silva, 2018). Then, the purity of the consciousness can arise through the practices of the *sati* (mindfulness meditation), *samādhi* (tranquility meditation), and *vipasannā* (insight meditation), which lead towards the *nippapañca* (nonproliferation or mental sensitivity) and make the individual free from psychological miseries (Conze, 2012). In this notion, the early Buddhist doctrines have been explored by scholars, but they have not given much more attention to evaluating these concepts concerning the phenomenology through an interconnected manner and the potential of collective practices to overcome the phenomenology generated by the conception in early Buddhism. Therefore, this gap and potential exist in doctrines and practice explored under the below discussion and presented how our experience is generated as an illusion or phenomenology, and it can be cessation holistically.

## Result and Discussion

The examination of the phenomenological experience according to the early Buddhist literature was first explored under the doctrinal concept of the paṭiccasamupāda (Dependent Origination). Then, examine the phenomenology with the doctrine of the papañca (mental proliferation) and pañcasakhandhā (five aggregates) refer to the unconsciousness and consciousness of psychological experiences of the individual. The summarized form of the phenomenological experience is described under the doctrine of the moha should be examined. Finally, the utility of the cessation approach to overcome phenomenology is evaluated in order according to the headings as follows:

### Dependent Origination and Phenomenology

The doctrinal teachings of early Buddhism are centered on the concept of the paṭiccasamupāda (Dependent Origination) and within the association of the twelve links described in the suttas, the arising and expansion of the individual phenomenological experience has been illustrated (Zahavi et.al, 2011). According to the Mahānidānasutta (DN 15) and Vibhaṅgasutta (SN 12.2), the twelve elements are pointed out as avijjā (ignorance), saṅkhārā (volitions), viññāṇa (consciousness), nāmarūpa (name and form), saḷāyatana (six sense bases), phasso (contact), vedanā (sensation), taṇhā (craving), upādāna (grasping), bhavo (becoming existence), jāti (birth), jarāmaraṇam (age and death). Considering the doctrine of the illusion and phenomenology, the element of the avijjā (ignorance) can be recognized as the individual's unrealistic or misinterpretation of experience leads to the illusion or phenomenology. However, examining the explanation given for the avijjā in the Vibhaṅgasutta (SN 12.2) has pointed out an individual misunderstanding about the suffering, origin of suffering, cessation of suffering, and cessation



path of the suffering. This single attribute doesn't express an evident understanding of the illusion or phenomenology. However, the doctrinal teachings of dependent origination arise within the interconnection between the twelve attributes, each attribute arises from another with the conditioning of the previous elements. This is known as anuloma paṭiccasamupāda, which is dependent origination, is formation in forward order within the association of cause and effect. The Pali word paccaya is the word that is used to combine each element of the dependent origination, and this word gives the meaning of support, cause, dependent, and conditioning (Ronkin, 2005; Davids & Stede, 1993). Examine the sutta literature, from the avijjā existence may continue and extend up to the jarāmarañam. This is the holistic process arising from the eleven elements that can be recognized as the development of the illusion and phenomenological experience associated with the avijjā in dependent origination. Due to the birth jāti, an individual will lead to the natural death jarāmarañam. Within those two corners individual may experience pleasure, pain, and sorrow, and death is the destruction of all the atoms. According to this process, existence continues as described in the bhava with the manifestation of the sensory capabilities and five aggregations. The existence may be present in the three dimensions known as the sensual realm, form realm, and formless realm. Then, individuals grasp the notions of sensual, views, precepts, and observances. Afterward, association of the craving and sensory experience directed by the sensory organs such as feeling, contact of the six sense fields of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind based on the foundation of the nāma and rūpa or internal and external objects nature developed with the great four elements. The consequence is the development of consciousness with the above five sensory experiences associated with the organ of māna, leading towards the formation of the volitional



actions of saṅkhārā with body, mind, and speech. Based upon this foundation individual may perform all the wholesome and unwholesome actions and thoughts, and it may contribute towards the formation of the kamma and conditioning for the seeds for the next birth (Gunaratana and Ziegler, 2024). In reference, the avijjā or phenomenological experience of the individual will arise according to the dependent origination as described above, and its consequence may lead to both mundane and metaphysical domains (Battachariya, 1995). Besides the elements of the dependent origination association to phenomenology, individual error in the process of perception can be recognized as the foundation for the avijjā. However, if pure perception is available for the experience, the individual never experiences the avijjā or ignorance. Some factors lead to the perception of experience as phenomenological or illusion. That cause can be recognized as the taṇhā. Further, elaboration of taṇhā in early Buddhism points out that the craving for sensory pleasure, existence, and permanence leads individuals towards the miseries (Webster, 2005). Holistically, this perception and emotional experience may arise from the individual phenomenological experience and lead towards an unwholesome state in the individual's complete existence can be recognized as the phenomenology associated with avijjā in the dependent origination.

### **Mental Proliferation and Phenomenology**

The unrealistic, deluded state of the mind is recognized as the mental proliferation; early Buddhist literature has highlighted this concept as the papañca. The meaning given for the papañca was obstacle or illusion. This indicates that the state of the papañca described in the Buddhist literature explains the individual phenomenological experience (Nanananda, 1997). Teachings related to this phenomenological experience of the papañca have been mainly illustrated in the Madhupiṇḍika sutta (MN18).

According to this sutta, through the association of the sensory organ and qualities of the sensory experience is generated the respective sensory consciousness is described according to the table of the following:

Sensory Organ	Sensory Quality	Sensory Consciousness
Eye (cakkhu)	Sights (rūpa)	Eye consciousness (cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ)
Ear (sota)	Sounds (sadde)	Ear consciousness (sotavīññāṇaṃ)
Nose (ghāṇa)	Smells (gandhe)	Nose consciousness (ghānavīññāṇaṃ)
Tongue (jivha)	Tastes (rasa)	Tongue consciousness (jivhāvīññāṇaṃ)
Body (kāya)	Touches (phoṭṭhabbe)	Body consciousness (kāyavīññāṇaṃ)
Mind (mana)	Mental objects (dhamma)	Mind consciousness (manovīññāṇaṃ)

Table 1. Origin of the Mental Proliferation in Early Buddhism

According to the above diagram, individual sensory experience may evolve, and to build this, the sensory quality or object needs to appear clearly without any barriers to observing, and paying attention is an essential process; without the two conditions, the above-mentioned three combinations will not occur. This sensory impingement will not conclude with the rise of consciousness; this may further evolve with the feelings and experiences the feeling of all the above six sensory perceives. The individual may evolve in thinking about these experiences, and it will proliferate or develop conceptual ideas according to the experience gained in the past, present, and future (Amaro, 2021). Further, as described in the sutra, proliferation arises with the sensory perception contact, feeling, and perception is the manifestation. However, in here, the above sutta, this complete

process of mental proliferation is presented as the papañca saññā saṅkhā, highlighting a cognitive process; otherwise, as described, it has not been a phenomenological experience, just a perception experience. As described in the literature, the cognizing of the sensory perception manifestation and conceptual proliferation between this process occurs as vittakka (initial thought, thinking, or reflection). The sutta of the sakkapañhasutta (DN 21) indicated that vittakka is associated with another factor of the vicara (examination). The combination of these two principles, the development of mental proliferation with contact, feeling, and perception, can be evaluated. As scholars indicated, the process of mental proliferation in the mind is automatic, and the effortless process occurs within the mind. But without an active factor, this can be function, the role of the vittakka may arise the various thoughts related to the collective psychological idea generated by the perception, these thoughts can be wholesome and unwholesome, and their shapes will take according to nature of deeply rooted anusaya of the individual being (Evans, 2017). As described in the Madhupiṇḍika sutta (MN18), mental proliferation generated by the vittakka is associated with the unconsciousness tendencies of lust (rāgānusayā), ill-will (paṭighānusayā), wrong view (diṭṭhānusayā), doubt (vicikicchānusayā), I-ness (mānānusayā), lust for becoming (bhavarāgānusayā), ignorance (avijjānusayā). If the process of thought generation occurs effortlessly with the influence of the tendencies, the process of the vicara or inquiry is questionable. Through the influence of tendencies, the thoughts will arise depending upon the language with the exploration done by the vicara according to the individual experience or ideologies developed from the past, present, and events that come in the future through an autonomous self-existence (Nauriyal et.al, 2006). Considering these teachings, phenomenology concerning the papañca can be recognized as individual recognition and

understanding occurs with the characteristics of the objects believed as reality due to the influence of tendencies.

## Five Aggregates and Phenomenology

The self-consciousness-oriented process related to the arising of the phenomenological experience is described under the five aggregates (pañcaskandha) in early Buddhism. Rather than an autonomous way, the proper idea development and the association with the phenomenological experience can be recognized through the examination of the pañcaskandha. According to the Cūḷavedalla Sutta (MN 44), indicate what these five aggregates are, namely, those are rūpa (form), vedanā (feeling), sañña (perception) and saṅkhāra (mental formation), and viññāṇa (consciousness). Vibhaṅgasutta (SN 12.2) again classified these five aggregates into two distinct groups according to the doctrines of the nāma and rūpa. The nāma presents the individual psychological nature of the personality constituted with the kandhas of the vedanā, sañña, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa. Rūpa is the physical constitution of the individual present with the rūpa. Individual personality is constituted of these two elements or a combination of the physical and psychological constitution. However, evaluating the function of each element of the pañcaskandha presents its association with the individual process of cognition. About the rūpa, from its presence, the body as well as the physical constitution of the objects with the four elements of the earth, fire, water, and air. Vedanā presents three types of sensations or feelings known as pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral that arise due to contact with the object. Sañña or perception can be recognized in six formations as described in the Sattatṭhāna sutta (SN 22.57): perception of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental object, and recognition. Then, the saṅkhāra or mental formations are associated with the fabrication of the mind with the conditioning of all the properties, with

cultivating seeds for action, thought, and speech (kaya, vachi, and mano). Viññāṇa, commonly translated as consciousness, may indicate the characterization of all conditioned phenomena with the six types of viññāṇa of the eye, ear, odors, taste, bodily, and mind objects (Boisvert, 2006; Thanissaro, 2012). Examine the function of the aggregates, and their association with individual psychological and cognitive processes of the perception, about the phenomenology, as scholars point out the viññāṇa has been diversely explained in the literature, and one of the explanations related to viññāṇa is its not impermanence and contribution of the continuation of the moments of the life or memory (David and Thompson, 2017). In comparison to the active and passive consciousness, viññāṇa represents the passive consciousness, the wandering state of the mind, more oriented towards an internal state of the mind than involving the active cognitive functions such as thinking and judgments (Maciejczak, 2022). Viññāṇa is a non-entity from time to time; it takes various natures according to the experience given by the other aggregates. Due to the realistic foundation of early Buddhism, the perception process is associated with external objects, within the contact (passa) individual experiences feeling or sensation. Due to the nature of the object, it can be present as a pleasurable, unpleasant, or mixed state of the previous two attributes. Afterward, the individual directs attention toward the object and with the ability the perceive aware of the shape, color, size, and other material features associated with the subjective experience gained in the vedanā. Combining all the experience gained under the above steps will be collected by the saṅkhāra, or made the formation of an aggregation of the experience. This formulation affects all the levels of personality as described above: mind, body, and speech. Formulation of the phenomenological experience occurs due to this function of the vedanā, sañña, and saṅkhāra with the association of the external object or bodily experience due to

the stream of consciousness in *viññāṇa*, individual experience is changing moment to moment and unable to experience the reality of the experience (Karunamuni, 2015). Additionally, as described in the sutta literature, all these five elements function separately, and *upādāna* (conditioning) is making the aggregation of the phenomenology or miseries. *Upādāna* is a psychological state similar to craving (*taṇhā* or *lobhā*) that builds the association of these elements as five aggregates, and the phenomenological experience in the aggregation occurs due to the influence of *taṇhā* (Fink, 2015)

## Delusion and Phenomenology

The Buddhist literature points out three poisons that have negative effects on individual secular and sacred living, known as the *rāga* (lust or attachment), *dvesa* (hate or aversion), and *moha* (delusion or ignorance), as described in the *ādiṭṭapariyāyasutta* (SN 35.169). In here, *moha* can be recognized as an unwholesome factor that is associated with the individual phenomenological experience. To understand the phenomenology described under the *moha*, the complete recognition of the other two positions is essential. According to early Buddhist teachings individual force of life, instinct, and the force of life is lust or craving. This can be recognized as a primary level of the craving towards the sensory pleasure attachment to the objects and desires. The state of *taṇhā* is also a synonym for the *rāga*, which is craving towards the experience of the sensual desires permanently in the existence of the individual (Jayatilleke, 2010). As described in the *akusalamūlasutta* (AN 3.69), the layman's actions, speech, and thoughts are directed by lust or greediness. The result of a lust and attachment-driven individual is that they are always focused on fulfilling their desires without considering any of the moral or ethical values. These unethical actions may negatively affect him and others. However, the major problem

individuals experience in their existence is these lust-driven actions or thoughts can't be fulfilled all the time as we expect. Due to various barriers, individuals are unable to permanently experience the happiness generated by lust or greed recurrently. The consequence of this process is this psychological state of dissatisfaction, and unhappiness with sensual pleasure makes individuals irritable and aggressive, and they respond with anger. The individual mind is not present in a pleasant or calm state due to this unpleasant nature created by aggression, and always mind is always present in a disturbed state with the reactions of the mind, body, and action. The mental state and actions such as violence, frustration, irritability, and harm do not just arise from aversion due to unfulfilled desires or sensual pleasure, making the disturbed state of the mind the anger directed towards these negative behaviors (Govinda and Govinda, 1991). Based upon these two conditions, the inability to develop a calm state of mind and the perception associated with the sensory organ and objects are always cognized within the foundation of lust and aggression. Then the perception and cognition evolve improperly and give rise to the wrong vision and thoughts. This condition can be recognized as the moha, and moha is not a single element, it's a condition of the unwholesome root of lust and aggression. Individuals always present with moha, or the unfulfilled desire and aggression of dissatisfaction. Therefore, the phenomenology experience described under moha is the psychological state of understanding the cognitive awareness properly due to lust and aggression or thoughts recognized with the perception of lust and aggression (Thanh, 2001). The consequence is that the individual is away from reality as described in the vipallāsa-sutta (AN 4.49), due to moha created in the above condition enabling the phenomenological experience as seeing the impermanent as permanence, suffering as happiness, non-self as self and good seen as bad is the phenomenological experience described under



the moha. Through the experience in the sammā ditti or right view, all these three conditions will able to cessation and see the experience within the right view or perception experience derived from the purified or calm state of the mind free the perceptual experience from the lust, greediness, and aversion may lead the individual to sees and cognize the reality and avoid the phenomenology experience arise under the moha (Bodhi, 2011).

### **Cessation of Phenomenology**

As described above, the Buddhist literature has provided a comprehensive explanation of the individual phenomenological experience, origin, evolution, and consequence. Significantly, Buddhist teachings indicated that individual phenomenological experience is adequate for the psychological experience it's directly the suffering and sorrow as a root of unwholesome. However, the early Buddhist literature has provided a pragmatic path to overcome these miseries in individual existence. These approaches can be recognized as nippapañca, sati, samādhi, and vipasannā. The foundational phenomenological experience is generated with the mental proliferation state of the papañca. To make an individual free from this automatic thought-reacting process present under the Buddhist meditation practice, utilize the practice of bare attention; this individual is able to non-judgmentally observe the thought generated in the mind and make the mind free from the concepts generated by the vitakka and vicara (Nyanaponika, 1986). The early Buddhist sutta of anurādhassutta (SN 22.86) introduces another approach called nippapañca to overcome the phenomenological thoughts, as described in this sutta through the understanding of the sensory consciousness in its pure nature individual can generate the opposite nature of the papañca known as nippapañca to be free from the phenomenological experience. This has been

further elaborated in the mahāsatiṭṭhanasutta, presented to contemplate the experience in body (kāyānupassana), sensation or feeling (vedanānupassana), mind (cittānupassana), and Buddhist teachings (dhammānupassana). Under the practice of body awareness individual develops the calmness of the body sensation with concentration on the inhalation and exhalation, or contemplates on body location. Then, contemplating the sensory experience in the feeling contemplation individual notices the changing nature of the pleasurable and frustrating conditions and the rise of the feeling in the psychological experience. Under the observation of the mind, individuals understand the unwholesome factors of greed, aversion, and delusion associated with the psychological process of the mind. This state can be recognized as the suppression of the unwholesome factors of the mind for a temporary period. Non-canonical literature of the Visuddhimagga also presented a similar process of gaining the state of the samādhi. Through the use of kasina, individuals can bring the mind into a concentrated state with the use of the meditation objects into the states of the vitakka, vicārā, pīti, sukha ekaggatā (Dhammaratana, 2011). The consequence of this process is mind has come to the concentrated state of the samādhi or suppression of the unwholesome state, which means the mind is free from creating the phenomenological thoughts both in consciousness and the unconscious state. According to the teachings of the samādhi, here the mind is completely in the consciousness or present moment and free from the phenomenological experience temporarily. To sustain this psychological experience for complete existence, a cognitive transformation described under the pañña is essential here (Labbh, 1991). The complete free state of the phenomenological experience is developed with the state of the Vipassana or insightful meditation. As illustrated in the above sutra, after the individual comes into the state of the samādhi, contemplating

the pure psychological process helps to overcome the phenomenological process willingly. The contemplating object's themes are hindrance, aggregates, sense fields, awakening factors, and noble truths. After the individual attains the state of the pañña with the vipassanā or dhammānupassana, the individual has the understanding of the origin of the phenomenological experience and can potentially gain the sensory experience in its pure nature rather than the cognizing and understanding with the interpretation of the phenomenological experience (Hart, 2020). Further, as described in the early Buddhist literature, individuals who attain the state of the non-returner (arhat) were also able to overcome the phenomenological experience and be free from the cyclic process that continues due to avijjā, described in the dependent origination doctrine.

## Conclusion

The question raised in the title can be answered as yes, according to the early Buddhist teachings, we are living in an illusion or phenomenological experience. As described in the content, the individual psychological experience of phenomenology has been explained in the various doctrine teachings of early Buddhism in both of distinctive and a synthesized manner. According to the doctrine of dependent origination, individual complete psychological experience has been considered an illusion within the avijjā. The phenomenological experience that occurs in the present existence is the illusion, and it may continue to the complete existence one after the other; the unawareness about this process has been considered as the major phenomenology as described in early Buddhism. However, from a cognitive perspective, individual phenomenological experience has been explained in early Buddhism. Majorly, the explanation of the individual phenomenology is associated with the sensory experience. The association of the sensory organ and sensory

qualities present in the external object may generate consciousness about the sensory experience; without the combination of these three elements of the sensory process, the phenomenological experience does not continue. Then, the sensory experience leads to the feeling and sensation and identifies the characteristics of the object according to the psychological function of the vittaka and vicārā. The nature of the phenomenological experience occurs due to the influence of latent tendencies. This is the unconscious process of phenomenology, and the consciousness process also occurs similarly, but the difference lies in that the individual, through his subjective experience, constitutes the experience, and the moment changes in the mind influence the craving developed individual phenomenological experience about the five aggregates. Once again, this similar function has been explained within the three doctrinal teachings of the rāga, devsa, and moha. These three principles show that an individual mental state is been impurities due to craving, lust, and anger. The consequence is perception is a mixture of lust and anger, and makes the individual more away from reality, and the developed experience is considered as moha or delusion. However, the opposite of this process, early Buddhist teachings have introduced the path to overcome this phenomenological experience and be free from the sorrow and miseries in secular and sacred living. Enable the purified state of the mind and training to experience sensory experience according to its pure nature rather than interpreting it within a complete cognitive transformation and knowledge of the perception process described in Buddhism able to make the individual free from avijjā (ignorance) described in early Buddhism.

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