

Five Skandhas (Aggregates) arranged in the form of a mandala palace.

Note that the structure of the palace, such as walls and ceiling, are made of the purified aggregates, not the coarse everyday experiences we have. A meditator always imagines her/himself in the palace facing east. So thoughts/perceptions, for example, are the “basis” for the west wall but the actual west wall is made of purified thoughts/perceptions, represented by Amitabha Buddha. Still, purified or unpurified are simply two aspects of the same category of experience, thoughts/perceptions, whether the experiences of our ordinary selves or of our Buddha-nature selves. By some ways of thinking, both of these happen at the same moment, since we are both Buddhas and ordinary Joes/Janes in the same moment. Jane just doesn’t know she is a Buddha.

Similarly, consciousness aggregate is in the center, in the sense of the basis being unpurified everyday consciousness, but the actual center is occupied by a Buddha, such as Manjushri, which is the purified consciousness which recognizes the emptiness of all phenomena. From the point of view of being on the Buddhist path of realizing the true nature we already have, purification is a relative matter, depending on one’s successful meditation and self transformation practice. So practicing compassion meditations would purify the thought/perception aggregate by lessening self-grasping delusive thoughts and increasing altruistic “we are all of one taste in our essence” thoughts. Of course, as Buddhas we already are perfectly altruistic, but as Joe/Jane we need some improvement. ☺

