Understanding Nama/Rupa

Buddhist doctrine describes two aspects of human experience: *Nama*, which is translated as *what happens in the mind,* and *Rupa*, translated as *form*, that is, *all the conditions that stimulate the nervous system before being fabricated into a moment of selfing by mental activities*.

The concept of namarupa is also part of the Hindu view of human experience. In the Hindu view, namarupa represents the manifestation of human life, mentally and physically, from the realm of the Ultimate, Brahman, and appears as Atman, the human soul.

These two understandings are not necessarily in conflict. Both differentiate the functions of the mind from the sensations experienced in the body. The Buddhist approach to salvation proposes that the recycling of Karma from one life to another is not endless, as is suggested in Hindu thought, but can be released from human bondage through overcoming greed, hatred and ignorance. Buddhist mindfulness practices focus on overcoming ignorance, the mistaken belief that there is an autonomous, enduring self. An important insight in this practice is deeply investigating mental processes through dhamma vicaya, investigation of mental phenomena, discussed in the posting of February 21, 2018.

This concept is like the *Five Aggregates of Clinging, Panca Khanda* in Pali: Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Conditioning Factors and Consciousness. The first is Rupa, and the other four are Nama.

A key understanding for liberation from greed, hatred and ignorance is *paticca samuppada*, typically translated as *dependent origination*. I prefer the term *contingent provisional emergence* as a more accurate rendering, developed with more current views (search [contingent provisional emergence](http://www.orlandoinsightmeditation.org/wp-content/uploads/) for my notes on this, which will explain where in the process nama/rupa appears).

In terms of the maturation in the practice of mindfulness for Awakening, there are stages of purification. One of them involves the ability to notice clearly that what is sensed (seen, heard, smelled, tasted and felt in the body) is interpreted by the mind and fabricated into the internal narrative of “selfing”. This is nama/rupa.

Nama/rupa comes about through the coordinated activities of the *Seven Awakening Factors*, *Satta Sambojjhanga* in Pali: mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena, energy/effort/persistence, enthusiastic interest, tranquility, stability of attention and equanimity/balance. Mindful awareness, combined with investigation in a persistent way that sorts through what’s emerging into awareness, heightens interest in what’s being experienced. Because this process, particularly when channeled through mindfulness of breathing, stabilizes attention. As this process develops, there is minimal intrusion by thoughts and impulses, so the flow of experience becomes tranquil and balanced.

Further cultivation of the Awakening Factors increases the quickness, clarity and non-reactive process of awareness, supporting the further development of insight into the absence of an enduring autonomous self. These processes are further developed until the experience of Nirvana is attained.