

The 12 Āyatanas and the 18 Dhātus

The Language:

Āyatana is a Sanskrit term that translates best as “gate of coming into existence” or “means of connecting with the world”.

Dhātu is a Sanskrit term that translates best as “that which sustains or supports” or in a more western sense “element”.

Āyatanas:

The 12 āyatanas represent the six sense organs and the objects they perceive:

Eye	Visible Objects
Ear	Sounds
Nose	Odors
Tongue	Tastes
Body	Tactile Sensations (Touch)
Mind	Thoughts

Dhātus:

The 18 dhātus represent the 12 āyatanas and their respective consciousnesses:

Eye	Visible Objects	Eye Consciousness
Ear	Sounds	Ear Consciousness
Nose	Odors	Nose Consciousness
Tongue	Tastes	Tongue Consciousness
Body	Tactile Sensations	Body Consciousness
Mind	Thoughts	Mind Consciousness

This can become useful when one thinks of the situation of an unconscious subject. The object of perception is present, and the subject possesses a functioning ear (or other sense organ). However, because the ear consciousness is not functioning, no sound will be perceived by the subject.