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(Dve) Khandhā Sutta

The Discourse on the (Two Kinds of) Aggregates | S 22.48

Theme: The physical and mental limits of our being

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

[Please read the integrated introduction to the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) in the **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56)¹ before studying this volume, where we shall look at each of the aggregates in turn.]

1 The “I” of the beholder

1.1 THE AGGREGATES HAVE NO IDENTITY

1.1.1 We have a tendency to see ourselves as separate entities apart from the world around us. We see this individuality as “I” or a self, distinct from all other existences. **Lily de Silva**, in her paper, “Self-identification and associated problems,” gives a very apt contemporary simile for describing the way in which we view ourselves in terms of the 5 aggregates, and shares some troubling social insights:

A man sitting in a fast moving train gets the illusion of being a stationary viewer while the scenery around him is moving fast. Though this is a real experience, its illusory nature can be easily understood. But the experience of the I and the self created by the five rapidly moving groups of phenomena (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) cannot be so easily understood or even suspected. Man identifies with them so completely that he imagines himself to be an individual persisting through the passage of time. Therefore he says, I *was* in the past, I *am* in the present and I *will* be in the future.

The conventional value of this identification for purposes of responsibility and social roles cannot be denied. But the more tenaciously man clings to them and the more thoroughly he identifies with them the greater and more grievous the problems he creates for himself. When such tenacious identification becomes fanatical, and the fanaticism becomes widespread in exclusive groups, then dramatic world upheavals take place. History which is a record of human experience is replete with such upheavals. (1984:69)

1.1.2 The Vinaya compares the qualities of the Dharma-Vinaya, the teaching and discipline of the Buddha, that is, the theory and practice of Buddhism, to those of **the great ocean** (*mahā,samudda*). The 4th simile is especially relevant in this regard as it refers to name (*nāma*) and identity (*saṅkha*):

And, bhikshus, just as those great rivers, that is to say, the Gangā, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū and the Mahī,² which, on reaching the great ocean, lose their former names and

¹ S 22.56/3:58-61, SD 3.7.

² These 5 major rivers of the Ganges plain are today the Ganges, the Jumna, the Sarayu, the Ghāghra, the Raptī and the Gandak. The first 4 are respectively called Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarabhū, and Aciravatī in the Pali texts. The river Mahī or Mahā Mahī, is a 580-km (360-mi) river of western India which arises in the western Vindhya Range, just south of Sardarpur, and flows northward through Madhya Pradesh state. Turning northwest, it enters Rajasthan state, and then turns southwest through Gujarat state, and enters the sea through a wide estuary past Cambay. After more than 2500 years, some rivers have changed their course and size, and often been given new names. These 5 rivers are said (at least in ancient times) to have a common source (V 2:237; A 4:101, 5:22; S 2:135, 5:38; Miln 20, 104; Vism 10). On the Mahī, see Dhaniya S (Sn 18b). See also J Finegan, *An Archaeological History of Religions of Indian Asia*, NY: Paragon House, 1989:92.

identities, and are reckoned simply as the great ocean, even so, bhikshus, those of these 4 classes [castes]—the kshatriya [royalty], the brahmin [priest class], the vaishya [business class] and the shudra [working class]—having gone forth from home into homelessness in this Dharma-Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathagata, lose their former names and clans, and are reckoned simply as recluses, sons of the Sakya ... (V 2:239)

In the same way, the 5 aggregates work together **without any natural identity**. None of the rivers, or even all of them together, can be identified *as* the ocean, nor can any of the rivers be identified *in* the waters of the ocean. And, yet, the ocean waters are not different from the river waters. In the same way, we cannot identify with any or all of the aggregates, yet they function together, giving us a false notion of a separate entity (“the ocean”). We will return to this river parable below [6].

1.1.3 The Buddha declares, too, that it is **untenable to maintain that nothing exists**: this is because an arising is seen, by which he means dependent arising: “with ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities; ... with birth as condition there arises decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering” (S 12.1).³ Here again we see an impersonal process that we identify as “life.” In this sense, life is real. **Brahmavaṃso** gives a very apt simile from his theoretical physics background:

A simile might help here. In mathematics a point is a concept drawn from the science of life. It describes aspects of real phenomena. Yet a point has no size. It is smaller than any measure that you can suggest, yet it is bigger than nothing. In a sense, we cannot say a point is, because it does not persist, it does not continue in space. Yet one cannot say it is not, as it is clearly different from nothing. The point is similar to *the momentary nature of conscious experience*. Nothing continues in being therefore it cannot be something. Something arises therefore it cannot be nothing. The solution to this paradox, the excluded middle, is the impersonal process. (Brahmavaṃso 2003b:76; italics added)

1.2 THE AGGREGATES: MEANING AND SEQUENCE

1.2.1 The aggregates (*khandha*) are so called because, amongst other things, an aggregate is a “**heap**” (*rāsī*). They each refer to a multiplicity of phenomena that have the same defining characteristic, for example, form (*rūpa*) whether “past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near” comprise the form aggregate (*rūpa-k, khandha*), and so too for the other 4 aggregates (S 22.48).⁴

1.2.2 Two discourses—the (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56) and the **Satt-ṭ, ṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57)⁵ — list the constituents of each aggregate in simpler terms than the later, more elaborate analysis found, for example, in the Visuddhi, magga and the Commentaries. **The Khajjanīya Sutta** (S 22.79) explains why each aggregate is so called,⁶ and “it is revealing that these explanations are phrased in terms of functions rather than fixed essence.” (S:B 841)

³ S 12.1/2:1 f. See Dependent arising, SD 5.16 (19c).

⁴ (Dve) Khandhā S (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a, ie, this Sutta.

⁵ S 22.56/3:58-61 (SD 3.7); S 22.57/3:61-65 (SD 29.2).

⁶ S 22.79/3:86-91 (SD 17.9).

1.2.3 We, as living beings, are nothing more than the 5 aggregates⁷ of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, as declared by the nun Vajirā in **the Vajirā Sutta** (S 5.10), thus:

<i>Yathā hi aṅga,sambhārā</i>	Just as by a putting together of parts	
<i>hoti saddo ratho hoti</i>	there is the sound [word] “chariot,”	
<i>evaṃ khandhesu santesu</i>	even so when there are the aggregates,	
<i>hoti satto ti sammuti</i>	there is the convention, “being.”	(S 5.10/1:135) ⁸

1.2.4 In the Pali Canon, the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) are always⁹ listed, as follows:

- (1) *rūpa* form;
- (2) *vedanā* feeling;
- (3) *saññā* perception;
- (4) *saṅkhārā* formations; and
- (5) *viññāṇa* consciousness.

No explanation, however, is given for this sequence, but there are clear hints regarding the sequence in the Suttas, as we shall see in connection with **the Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), below.

1.2.5 Boisvert sees the logic of **the traditional ordering** of the 5 aggregates mirroring the order of the links (*nidāna*) of the dependent arising cycle (with translations of terms), thus:¹⁰

	<i>Nidāna</i>	<i>Khandha</i>	
consciousness	<i>viññāṇa</i>	<i>viññāṇa</i>	
name-and-form	<i>nāma,rūpa</i>	all the 5 aggregates	
the 6 sense-bases	<i>saḷāyatana</i>	<i>rūpa</i>	form
contact	<i>phassa</i>	<i>rūpa</i>	
feeling	<i>vedanā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	
		<i>saññā</i>	perception
craving	<i>taṇhā</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>	formations
clinging	<i>upādāna</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>	
existence	<i>bhava</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>	

⁷ Here, “aggregate” (*khandha*, Skt *skandha*) means a tree-trunk or log (S 1:207 = Sn 272; S 4:94). It also means the shoulder (S 1:115) or body bulk, usu the back of a person or an animal (V 2:152; D 3:251; S 1:95). In the Pali canon, *khandha* is often used in the sense of a collection or “heap,” eg, *dukkha-k,khandha* (M 1:192 f, 200 f; S 2:134, 3:93), *puñña-k,khandha* (S 5:400 = A 3:336), *bhoga-k,khandha* (D 2:81, 84, 86, 206 f; A 5:84, 205, 206; It 51); or simply a great mass, as in *aggi-k,khandha* (M 2:34. 41), *udaka-k,khandha* (S 4:179; A 3:36). Sometimes, *khandha* may indicate such a grouping and also a division of a sequence or set, eg *sīla-k,khandha*, *samādhi-k,khandha*, *paññā-k,khandha* (eg D 1:206).

⁸ See Sue Hamilton 2000:18-32 (ch 1).

⁹ Except in Patta S (S 1.4.26), where the sequence is modified due to the metre (*metri causa*): *rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññam | viññāṇam yañ ca saṅkhatam | n’eso’ham asmi n’etam me | evaṃ tattha virajjati ||* “Form, the felt, the perceived, | consciousness, and the constructed: | ‘I am not this, this is not mine,’ | thinking thus, one abandons it.” (S 1.4.26/1:112). Such a person is said to be freed of all mental fetters.

¹⁰ 1996:142.

A key point in Boisvert's idea is that consciousness (*viññāṇa*), as the 5th aggregate, completes a cycle by going on to condition the first aggregate by allowing the arising of sense-contact (*phassa*). However, it should be noted that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is always a necessary aspect of existence (*bhava*).

1.2.6 Harvey proposes a simpler explanation for the correlation between the links and the aggregates, thus:¹¹

Conditioning sequence in perceptual process	Khandha
Dependent upon eye and visual form: arises eye- <i>viññāṇa</i> ; the meeting of the three is <i>phassa</i> ; from <i>phassa</i> arises <i>vedanā</i> ; <i>saññā</i> then processes the visual object [1.2.7]; the <i>saṅkharas</i> respond to it; mind- <i>viññāṇa</i> takes in the fully labeled and responded-to object.	<i>rūpa</i> <i>vedanā</i> <i>saññā</i> <i>saṅkhāra</i> <i>viññāṇa</i>

Harvey's explanation is evidently based on Mahā Kaccāna's explanation of the perceptual process in **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), thus:

Conditioning sequence in perceptual process	Khandha
<p>¹²Friends, dependent on <u>the eye and forms</u>, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, there is <u>feeling</u>. What one feels, one <u>perceives</u>. What one perceives, one thinks about.¹³ What one thinks about, <u>one mentally proliferates</u>.¹⁴ What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation¹⁵ <u>impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.</u> [The whole passage repeats mutatis mutandis for the other 5 sense-faculties and their respective sense-objects.] (M 18,16/1:111 f), SD 6.14</p>	<p><i>rūpa</i> <i>vedanā</i> <i>saññā</i> <i>saṅkhāra</i> <i>viññāṇa</i></p>

¹¹ Harvey 1996:96.

¹² *Cakkhuñ ca āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhu,viññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassa,paccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato,nidānaṃ purisaṃ papañca,saññā,saṅkhā samudācaranti atītānagata,paccuppannesu cakkhu,viññeyyesu rūpesu.* A similar passage is found in **Sabb'upādāna Pariññā S** (S 35.60) where, however, the wise noble disciple becomes revulsed (*nibbindati*) at the contact arising from sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness (also using the sentence, *tinnaṃ saṅgati phasso* [16]), and, therefore, "becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*); through dispassion, he is freed (*vimuccati*); through liberation, he understands, 'Clinging has been fully understood by me.'" (S 35.60/4:32 f), SD 6.17. See further SD 6.14 (2).

¹³ "One thinks about," *vitakketi*. On how, when thinking stops, desires do not arise, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.2-/2:277), SD 54.8.

¹⁴ This verse, up to this point, recurs in **(Nidāna) Loka S** (S 12.44/2:71-73), SD 7.5, and **Sabb'upādāna Pariññā S** (S 35.60/4:32 f), SD 6.17, in different contexts.

¹⁵ *Papañca,saññā,saṅkhā*, see SD 6.14 (3).

1.2.7 How does **perception** (*saññā*) recognize a sense-object? Very simply, when we see a face, for example, the mind compares the eyes with all the previous eyes that we can recall having seen; so, too, the nose, compares its present sense-object with all its “stored” smell-experiences; and so on with the other senses. There is, of course, no location for such “stores,” which is actually our memories of things. It is possible, too, that such memories could be “false,” or we could have constructed or imagined them even though we have never really experienced them.

Anyway, once we find a “match,” we **recognize** that sense-object as an experience that is pleasant or unpleasant, depending on how we remember that match stored in our mental database. If we are unable to find any match, we regard the sense-object as being “neither pleasant nor unpleasant,” that is, “neutral.”

When we are attracted to the object deemed as “pleasant,” we feed our latent tendency of lust. When we are repulsed by the “unpleasant” object, we feed our latent tendency of revulsion. When we ignore the “neutral” object, we are likely to be bored; we feed our latent tendency of ignorance.¹⁶ A rule of thumb here is to always mindfully regard all such experiences—including the neutral ones—as being “impermanent.”¹⁷

1.3 THE AGGREGATES AND THE LATENT TENDENCIES

1.3.1 In the delightful **Aññātara Bhikkhu Sutta 1** (S 22.35), the Buddha gives a short teaching to a certain monk, thus:¹⁸

Bhikshu, whatever lies latent (in one), one is reckoned by that. Whatever does not lie latent (in one), one is not reckoned by that. (S 22.35/3:35), SD 31.4

The monk immediately and zestfully retorts, “Understood, Blessed One! Understood, Sugata!” (*aññatam bhagavā; aññatam sugatā ti*). When the Buddha asks him in what way does he understand in detail what has been stated in brief, the monk replies:

If, bhante, one has a latent tendency towards	<u>form</u> ,	then that is what one is.
If one has a latent tendency towards	<u>feeling</u> ,	then that is what one is.
If one has a latent tendency towards	<u>perception</u> ,	then that is what one is.
If one has a latent tendency towards	<u>formations</u> ,	then that is what one is.
If one has a latent tendency towards	<u>consciousness</u> ,	then that is what one is.

(S 22.35/3:35), SD 31.4

Then, he goes on to say, in a parallel manner, that whichever latent tendency one has *not*, that is what one is not. And the Buddha approves of his understanding. In due course, the monk, while on solitary retreat, attains arhathood.

1.3.2 The verbal phrase, “(it) lies latent” (*anuseti*), refers to the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), often listed as **7**, namely, the latent tendency *to sensual lust, to aversion, to views, to doubt, to conceit, to desire for existence and to ignorance*, as found, for example, in **the Anusaya Sutta** (S 45.175).¹⁹ **The Pahāna Sutta** (S

¹⁶ On the latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

¹⁷ For details, see **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

¹⁸ *Yam kho bhikkhu anuseti tena saṅkharāṃ gacchati. Yam nānuseti na tena saṅkharāṃ gacchati.*

¹⁹ S 45.175/5:60 (SD 31.3). See also A 7.12 ad loc. Comy says that a latent tendency is the defilement itself, but is a latent tendency in the sense that it has gained strength (*thama,gata’atthēna*, SA 3:137). The Porāṇa Tīkā adds it

36.3) gives the basic list of 3 latent tendencies, namely, the latent tendencies to lust, to aversion and to ignorance.²⁰

1.3.3 The Aññātara Bhikkhu Sutta (S 22.35) Commentary says that if one has a latent tendency toward form by way of *sensual lust, aversion, views, doubt, conceit, desire for existence and ignorance*, then one is described in terms of that same latent tendency, as being “lustful, hating, deluded.” But when the latent tendency is absent, one is not reckoned thus (SA 2:265).

“Additionally,” says **Bodhi**,

we might suppose, one is reckoned not only by way of the defilements, but *even more prominently by way of the aggregate with which one principally identifies*. One who inclines to form is reckoned a “physical” person, one who inclines to feeling a “hedonist,” one who inclines to perception an “aesthete” (or fact-gatherer?), one who inclines to volition a “man of action,” one who inclines to consciousness a thinker, etc. (S:B 1053 n47; emphases added)

1.3.4 The Cetanā Sutta 2 (S 12.39), on the other hand, explains the benefits of overcoming the latent tendencies so that there is no more mental basis that supports consciousness, in these words:²¹

But, monks, when one does not intend, and one does not plan, and one is not driven by latent tendencies, then there is *no mental basis for the support for consciousness*.

When there is no mental basis, there is no support for consciousness.

When consciousness is unestablished [has no support]²² and does not grow, **there is no further arising of rebirth**.

When there is no further arising of rebirth, there ends further birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.39,4/2:66), SD 7.6b

2 The aggregates of clinging

2.1 GRAINS OF EXPERIENCE

2.1.1 Amongst the world’s religions, indeed in the field of human knowledge itself, Buddhism provides the most comprehensive and clearest **analysis of human experience** without the need for mythology or theology. The principal framework the Buddha uses for analyzing the nature of experience is called “**the 5 aggregates of clinging**” (*pañc’upādāna-k,khandha*), that is to say, a human being merely comprises of

the clinging aggregate of form	<i>rup’upādāna-k,khandha,</i>
the clinging aggregate of feeling	<i>vedan’upādāna-k,khandha,</i>
the clinging aggregate of perception	<i>saññ’upādāna-k,khandha,</i>

“has gained strength” by being firmly attached to a being’s mental continuum (*satta,santāne thīra,bhāvūpagama-na,bhāvena*, SAPT:VRI 2:122).

²⁰ S 36.3/4:205 (SD 31.1).

²¹ This section describes the path of arhathood, when the latent tendencies are all abandoned. See Cetanā S 2 Intro (4), SD 7.6b for detailed nn.

²² Bodhi interprets the phrase “when consciousness has no support” (*appatiṭṭhita viññāṇa*) here to refer to “a consciousness without the prospect of a future rebirth through the propulsive power of ignorance, craving, and the volitional formations” (S:B 760 n114). The arhat is said to pass finally away with consciousness “unestablished,” as described in **Godhika S** (S 4.23/1:122), SD 61.16, and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24), SD 8.8, Intro.

the clinging aggregate of formations *saṅkhār'upādāna-k,khandha,*
the clinging aggregate of consciousness *viññāṇ'upādāna-k,khandha.*

These 5 aggregates—so called because they function together—constitute human experience in its entirety: indeed, they *are* all that is really us!

2.1.2 The 5 aggregates are also the “fuel” (*upādāna*),²³ that is, the food or sustenance, for our present existence and future existences. There is clearly no place and no necessity for any conception of an abiding essence or “soul” to be the nucleus of personal identity. Indeed, we are such a rapid series of momentary “identities” that it is meaningless to point to any one and say that *that* is “me.”

2.1.3 The Buddha declares, too, that it is untenable to hold that there is a **self** (or a soul or God): this is because an ending is seen, that is, he is referring to **dependent ending**: “with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance, ... the ending of birth, there ends decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering” (S 12.1).²⁴ It is this impersonal process that we (usually unwittingly) identify as “life.”

Brahmavamso adds:

Moreover, it includes all the ‘usual suspects’ that masquerade as a soul: the body (part of *nāmarūpa*), will (part of the *kamma* formations [*saṅkhārā*], sometimes *taṇhā*), love (part of the *kamma* formations and mostly part of *upādāna*, clinging), consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These usual suspects are clearly seen in the light of Dependent Cessation as transient, insubstantial, granular and fading away soon after they arise. They are all conditioned. They exist as long as they are supported by external causes, which are themselves unstable. When the external supporting causes disappear, so do each of the usual suspects. Because these things do not persist, since they do not continue in being, it is untenable to hold that there is a soul, a self or a God. (2003b:75)

By “granular” here, Brahmavamso means that dependent arising comprises “tiny moments of consciousness, uncountable in number, close together but not touching, and each alone” like the sand on a beach that looks level and continuous, but which on closer examination reveals that the grains are really discrete particles (2003b:72 f).

2.2 NOT ALL AGGREGATES ARE UNWHOLESOME

2.2.1 Relationship between the 2 sets of aggregates

2.2.1.1 In the Suttas, the 5 terms—*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*—are designated both as *khandha* (aggregate)²⁵ and as *upādāna-k,khandha* (aggregate of clinging).²⁶ The 5 terms are sometimes listed without any designation.²⁷ **The (Dve) Khandhā Sutta** (S 22.48)—the present Sutta—distinguishes between 2 kinds of 5 aggregates:

the aggregates of clinging (*pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*) and
the aggregates without clinging (usually simply referred to as *pañca-k,khandha*).

²³ See (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S (S 22.56), SD 3.7 & Bhāra S (S 22.22), SD 17.14 (1).

²⁴ S 12.1/2:1 f. See Dependent arising, SD 5.16(19c).

²⁵ M 1:138; S 3:47, 66, 86, 101 = Vbh 1-61; Dhs, Vbh, Dhk passim.

²⁶ V 1:10; D 3:233, 278; M 1:48, 299, 3:16 = S 3:100; S 3:26, 47, 58, 83, 86-88, 127 f.

²⁷ D 2:35; cf *rūpa,dhātu, vedanā,dhātu* (S 3:9), and also in verse, we have the sequence *rūpa, vedayita, saññā, viññāṇa, saṅkhata* (S 1:112).

2.2.1.2 The aggregates are considered as *upādāna-k,khandha* only when they are accompanied by mental influxes (*s'āsava*)²⁸ and subject to clinging (*upādāniya*).²⁹ The **Visuddhi,magga** quotes this Sutta in its discussion of the difference between the aggregates and the aggregates of clinging.³⁰ The key difference between the two is that the 5 aggregates of clinging are “accompanied by influxes and subject to clinging” (*sāsava upādāniya*).

2.2.1.3 The following diagram shows their relationship. The “5 aggregates of clinging” (*pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*) are included within the “5 aggregates” (*pañca-k,khandha*): all members of the former set are also members of the latter. In other words, all the 5 aggregates of clinging are part of the 5 aggregates, but not all the 5 aggregates are aggregates of clinging.

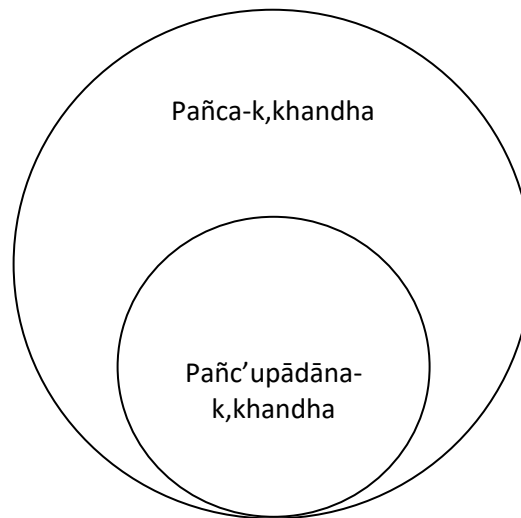


Fig 2.2. Pañca-k,khandha & pañc'upādāna-k,khandha

2.2.2 Clinging and the aggregates

2.2.2.1 At first blush, it may seem that the “bare aggregates,” that is, the 5 aggregates in themselves, are those of the arhat, one who has destroyed the mental influxes (*āsava*)³¹ and clinging (*upādāna*).³² However, according to **the Abhidhamma**, all forms (*rūpa*)—as well as the resultant (*vipāka*) and the functional (*kiriya*) mental aggregates of the arhat—are classified as “with influxes” (*sāsava*) and “with clinging” (*upādāniya*) (Dhs §§1103, 1219). The only aggregates classed as “without influxes” (*anāsava*) and

²⁸ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “cankers”) comes from *ā-savati*, meaning “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as influxes, taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence)—or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 kinds of *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), and (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*oghā*) or “yokes” (*yogā*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the canker of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these influxes is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

²⁹ S 22.48/3:47.

³⁰ Vism 14.214 f/477 f.

³¹ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. See above 2.2n.

³² On *upādāna*, see (**Upādāna**) **Parivatta S** (S 22.56), SD 3.7 (5).

“without clinging” (*anupādāniya*) are the 4 mental aggregates occurring in the cognitive moments of the 4 supramundane paths and fruits (Dhs §§1104, 1220).³³

2.2.2.2 It is important to understand the definition of the terms here: the phrase *sāsava upādāniya* does not mean “accompanied by influxes and by clinging,” but “capable of being taken as the objects of the influxes and of clinging,” and the arhat’s mundane aggregates can be taken as objects of the influxes and clinging by *non-arhats* (DhsA 347).³⁴ As such, the (Dve) Khandha Sutta Commentary says:

Among the 5 aggregates, the form aggregate is of the sense-base, the other 4 aggregates are of the four planes [the sense-base, the form base, the formless base, the supramundane]. With influxes (*sāsava*) means that which becomes a condition for the influxes by way of object; and that can be clung to (*upādāniya*), too, that which becomes a condition for clinging.

(SA 2:270)

2.2.2.3 In the *Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta* (M 109 = S 22.82), we find the Buddha questioned by an unnamed certain monk on this point, and the Buddha answers, thus:

“Bhante, is that clinging the same as the 5 aggregates of clinging, or is it different from the 5 aggregates of clinging?”³⁵

“Bhikkhu, that clinging is neither the same as these 5 aggregates of clinging, nor is it different from the 5 aggregates of clinging. It is the desire and lust³⁶ for the 5 aggregates of clinging that is the clinging there.”³⁷ (M 109,6/3:16 = S 22.82.6/3:100 f),³⁸ SD 17.11

2.2.3 Are clinging and the aggregates the same or not? The Majjhima Commentary on the question here says that because clinging is only one part of the aggregate of formations (defined here as greed), it is not the same as the 5 aggregates, and because clinging cannot be altogether disconnected from the aggregates, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates (MA 2:359).

The Saṃyutta Commentary on the same Sutta further explains:

“[C]linging is neither the same as these 5 aggregates of clinging”³⁹ because the aggregates are not merely desire and lust. It is said, “nor is it different from the 5 aggregates of clinging”⁴⁰ because *there is no clinging apart from the aggregates* either as connascent (*sahajāta*) or as object (*ārammaṇa*). For, when a mind-moment (*citta*) associated with craving (*taṇhā, sampayutta*) occurs, the form arising from (*samuṭṭhāna*) that mind-moment is the form aggregate, and

³³ See esp Bodhi, “Aggregates and clinging aggregates (*Khandha/Upādānakkhandha*),” 1971. Academic scholars are not always clear on this point, as in Boisvert 1996:22, reviewed by Harvey 1996:92.

³⁴ For a detailed study, see Bodhi 1976.

³⁵ As at *Cūḷa Vedalla S* (M 44,6/1:299 f). Cf *Sīla S* (S 22.122/3:168 f).

³⁶ “Desire and lust,” *chanda, rāga*, a dvandva, “desire” (*chanda*) is weak lust (*dubbala rāga*), and “lust” (*rāga*) is strong lust (*balava rāga*): see DA 1:115-117 @ SD 25.3.63-64. However, it can be taken as karmadharaya (qualifier + noun): “lustful desire,” ie a negative desire. *Chanda* is itself a neutral term, meaning simply “desire,” and often has a wholesome connotation, as the first of the 4 paths of accomplishment (*iddhi, pāda*) (D 3:213 = M 1:103 = 2:111; D 3:221; Vbh 216).

³⁷ *Yo kho bhikkhu pañc’upādāna-k, khandhesu chanda, rāgo, taṃ tattha upādānan ti*, lit “Whatever, monk, is lustful desire in the 5 aggregates affected by clinging, that is the clinging there.”

³⁸ Cf 3:166 f.

³⁹ *Na kho bhikkhu tañ, ñeva upādānaṃ te pañc’upādāna-k, khandhā ti*.

⁴⁰ *Nāpi aññatra pañcahi upādāna-k, khandhehi upādānan ti*.

the remaining formless states [*arūpa, dhammā*, ie mental aggregates], except for craving, belong to the other 4 aggregates. Thus, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates as connascent. [Craving is excepted because it is what clings to the aggregates, and a mental factor cannot cling to itself.]⁴¹ When clinging arises, it takes one of the aggregates, such as form, as object: so, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates as object. (SA 2:307)

2.2.4 The aggregates as a noble truth

2.2.4.1 This succinct statement on the aggregates made by the Buddha in the Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta is given in full in **the Upādānīyā Dhammā Sutta** (S 22.121), thus:

<u>Form</u> , bhikshus, is a thing that can be clung to.	The desire and lust for it is the clinging there.
<u>Feeling</u> is a thing that can be clung to.	<i>The desire and lust</i> for it is the clinging there.
<u>Perception</u> is a thing that can be clung to.	<i>The desire and lust</i> for it is the clinging there.
<u>Formations</u> are things that can be clung to.	<i>The desire and lust</i> for them is the clinging there.
<u>Consciousness</u> is a thing that can be clung to.	<i>The desire and lust</i> for it is the clinging there.

(S 22.121/3:167)

In other words, the aggregates themselves, too, act as their own **fuel** (*upādāna*).⁴² **Clinging** (*upādāna*), then, is neither the same nor different from the aggregates. In other words, the aggregates are self-sustaining like a kinetic perpetual-movement gadgets. The forces that keeps them going are, of course, ignorance and craving. However, when one end, so does the other—and with their ending, the aggregates end their clinging process.

2.2.4.2 On a deeper level of wisdom, it is **the 5 aggregates** that are seen to constitute the 1st noble truth (that is, suffering or unsatisfactoriness), because they are all *impermanent*, and as such, are the bases for pain and discontent, the full formula is found, for example, in **the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), thus:

Now this, bhikshus, is the noble truth that is suffering:

birth is suffering,
 decay⁴³ is suffering,
 [disease is suffering],⁴⁴
 death is suffering;
 grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair are suffering;⁴⁵
 to be with the unpleasant⁴⁶ is suffering;
 to be without the pleasant⁴⁷ is suffering;
 not to get what one desires is suffering,
 —in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging are suffering. (S 56.11/5:421), SD 1.1

⁴¹ This is based on Bodhi's n (S:B 1077 n140).

⁴² On *upādāna* as "fuel," see (**Upādāna**) **Parivatta S** (S 22.56), SD 3.7 (5).

⁴³ *Jarā*, old age, aging.

⁴⁴ Only in the Vinaya & Saṃyutta versions; not mentioned in Comys.

⁴⁵ Found in most MSS but not in Be and Ce.

⁴⁶ "The unpleasant," *appiya*, also tr "what one loves not."

⁴⁷ "The loved," *piya*, also tr "what one loves."

2.3 KHANDHA AND UPĀDĀNA

2.3.1 It is clear that the Suttas regard clinging as a characteristic of the aggregates in an unawakened being. In this connection, we see in the suttas a close connection between *khandha* (the aggregates) and *upādāna* (clinging). A few well-known examples of such usages in the Suttas attest to this *khandha-upādāna* link, especially in connection with the definition or description of birth, death or the nature of existence:

<i>khandhānaṃ pātubhāvo</i> (birth)	D 2:305; M 1:49, 62, 3:249; S 2:3;
<i>khandhānaṃ bhedo</i> (death)	D 2:305; M 1:50, 62, 3:249; S 2:3, 42, 44, 57;
<i>khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ</i> (impermanence)	S 2:15; Dh 374; It 1:20; Tha 23; Thī 96;

and also in the context of dependent arising (M 1:49, 50).

As **Gethin** notes:

Since the term *upādāna* is used in such close association with the *khandha* analysis, and since that analysis is used in the *nikāyas* especially as a way of looking at existence and experience at the level of the apparently stable individual being, the notion of *upādāna* and the significance of its relationship to the *khandhas* can, I think, be summed up as follows. As grasping, *upādāna* is the greed which is the fuel and basis for the manifestation and coming together of the *khandhas* in order that they might constitute a given individual or being. This is, of course, exactly the truth of the arising of *dukkha* ... But in particular *upādāna* seems to be seen as greed of a degree and intensity that is able to support the reappearance and coming together of the *khandhas* from one existence to the next. (1986:39)

2.3.2 In other words, when **craving** reaches the level of **clinging**, then the aggregates inevitably arise again in the form of a being. This is precisely why *upādāna* as a link is found after feeling (*vedanā*) and craving (*taṇhā*), and before existence (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*) [Table 2.3].⁴⁸ Indeed, a number of *khandha* formulas in the Suttas link directly into the dependent arising chain at *upādāna*.

In the **(Khandha) Samādhi Sutta** (S 22.5), for example, the arising of the 5 aggregates is explained as follows:

5 Here, bhikshus, he seeks pleasure in, approves of, goes on grasping. And what is it that he seeks pleasure in, approves of, goes on grasping?

6 He seeks pleasure in **form**, ... in **feeling**, ... in **perception**, ... in **formations**, ... in **consciousness**, approves of it, goes on grasping it. From his finding pleasure in form, ... in feeling, ... in perception, ... in formations, ... in consciousness, approving of it, going on grasping it, delight arises.

Delight in form is clinging.

Conditioned by clinging, there is existence.

Conditioned by existence, there is birth.

Conditioned by birth, there is decay and death: sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain [displeasure] and despair comes to be.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. (S 22.5/3:14), SD 7.16

⁴⁸ See **(Kāya) Na Tumha S** (S 12.37), SD 5.14, & **(Nidāna) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2), SD 5.15.

2.3.3 A similar passage appears in **the Māgandiya Sutta** (M 75) and **the Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.80), thus:

22 “There are, bhikshus, these two views: the view of existence and the view of extinction. Therein, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple reflects thus:

‘Is there anything in the world that I could cling to without being blameworthy?’

23 He understands thus:

‘There is nothing in the world that I could cling to without being blameworthy.

For, if I were to cling, it is only to form that I would be clinging, only to feeling, only to perception, only to formations, only to consciousness that I would be clinging.

With that clinging of mine as condition, there would be existence.

Conditioned by existence, there would be birth.

Conditioned by birth, there would be decay and death:

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain [displeasure] and despair would come to be.

Such would be the arising of this whole mass of suffering.’” (S 22.80/3:93 f), SD 28.9a

2.3.4 Here, we see the Buddha connecting clinging, which arises on the basis of the mere 5 aggregates mistakenly held to as a self. Then, with clinging as the point of departure, continues with the last portion of the dependent arising formula. In this way, present clinging is shown to be the supporting cause for the continuation of cyclic life.

A parallel passage is found in **the Māgandiya Sutta** (M 75), thus:

24 “So, too, Māgandiya, if I were to teach you the Dharma thus:

‘This is that health; this is that nirvana,’ you might know health, you might see nirvana.

Along with the arising of vision [the eye], your desire and lust for the 5 aggregates of clinging might be abandoned. Then, this might occur to you:

‘Indeed, I have long been tricked, cheated, and fooled by this mind.⁴⁹ For,

when clinging, I have been clinging *merely* to form,

when clinging, I have been clinging *merely* to feeling,

when clinging, I have been clinging *merely* to perception,

when clinging, I have been clinging *merely* to formations,

when clinging, I have been clinging *merely* to consciousness.

With that clinging of mine as condition, there would be existence.

Conditioned by existence, there would be birth.

Conditioned by birth, there would be decay and death:

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain [displeasure] and despair would come to be.

Such would be the arising of this whole mass of suffering.’” (M 75,24/1:511 f), SD 31.5

Here, “**merely**” (*yeva*) is an emphasis, implying that he is clinging to form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, wrongly viewed as “I,” “mine” and “my self.” The earlier phrase, “**with the arising of vision**” (*cakkh’uppādā*) is a metaphor for streamwinning, by which the self-identity view is destroyed, and he understands the aggregates to be merely empty phenomena without any selfhood that he had erstwhile attributed to them.

⁴⁹ *Dīgha,rattarāṃ vata bho ahaṃ iminā cittena nikato vañcito paladdho.*

The pattern of the 5 aggregates in terms of dependent arising can be seen in this diagram:

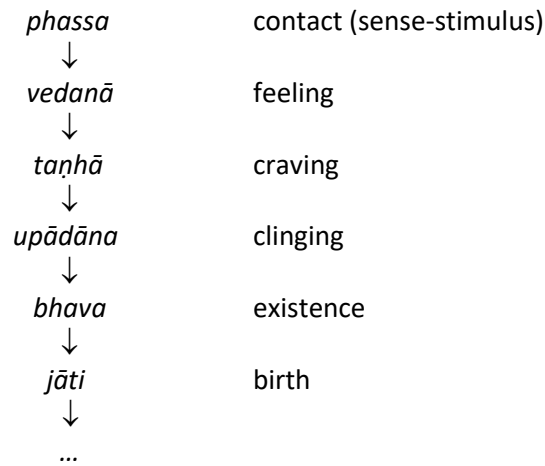


Table 2.3. The dependent arising formula (present and future)

2.3.5 A deeper training of the true disciple on the Buddhist path must, sooner or later, include a proper understanding of the 5 aggregates. The kind of aggregates that comprise the unawakened is known as “**the 5 aggregates of clinging.**” This is what we need to understand before we can be truly liberated. **The (Khandha) Sotāpanna Sutta** (S 22.109) states that an understanding of these 5 aggregates of clinging leads to streamwinning.

SD 17.1a(2.3)

(Khandha) Sotāpanna Sutta

The Discourse on the Streamwinner (the Aggregates) | **S 22.109/3:160** f⁵⁰

Traditional: Saṃyutta 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃyutta 3, Upari Paṇṇāsaka 1, Anta Vagga 7

Theme: Understanding the aggregates leads to streamwinning

1 At Sāvaththī.

2 Bhikkhus, there are these **5 aggregates of clinging.**

What are the five?

3 They are, namely,

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| (1) the form | aggregate of clinging, |
| (2) the feeling | aggregate of clinging |
| (3) the perception | aggregate of clinging |
| (4) the formations | aggregate of clinging |
| (5) the consciousness | aggregate of clinging |

rūp’upādāna khandha
vedan’upādāna khandha
saññ’upādāna khandha
saṅkhārūpādāna khandha
viññāṇ’upādāna khandha

4 When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple understands, as they really are,

- the arising,
- the ending, **[161]**
- the gratification,
- the dangers [disadvantages],
- the escape,

samudaya
attha,gama
assāda
ādīnava
nissaraṇa

⁵⁰ This sutta’s teaching is identical to that in **(Rādha) Sotāpanna S** (S 23.7/3:192 f), where it is addressed to the monk Rādha.

regarding these 5 aggregates of clinging,
that noble disciple,⁵¹ bhikshus, is called a **streamwinner**, no longer bound for the lower world,⁵² sure of going over to self-awakening.

— evaṃ —

2.4 THE AGGREGATES IN THE ABHIDHAMMA

2.4.1 The early Abhidhamma texts also state that the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k, khandha*) is always considered to be having mental influxes (*s'āsava*) and subject to clinging (*upādāniya*). The only time when the 4 formless aggregates (feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) are not accompanied by influxes (that is, in Sutta terminology, not “aggregates of clinging”), is in connection with the path and fruits (Dhs 196, 246).

The Nakula, pitā Sutta (S 22.1) first declares how both the body (*kāya*) and mind (*citta*) can be sick (*atura*)—that is, through regarding the aggregates in terms of a self. Then, it states how only the body is sick, but not the mind—that is, by not regarding any of the aggregates in terms of a self.⁵³

Rupert Gethin, in discussing how exactly early Buddhist thought conceives of *upādāna*, notes:

... we find that the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* by way of explanation of greed (*lobha*) lists a whole series of terms including passion (*rāga*), craving (*taṇhā*) and *upādāna* [Dhs 189]. It does not appear that these terms are intended to be understood as mere equivalents either in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* or in the *nikāyas*. Within the *nikāyas* each of these terms is characteristically employed in particular contexts with more or less fixed terms of references. Thus the *khandhas* are not designated the *lobhakkhandhas* or the *taṇhakkhandhas*, for example. It seems to follow from this that the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* intends *rāga*, *taṇhā* and *upādāna* to be understood as particular manifestations of greed in general. (1986:38 f)

2.4.2 The early Abhidhamma texts categorize the relationship of clinging (*upādāna*) to the aggregates under 3 main headings, that is,

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| (1) active clinging, | <i>upādāna</i> |
| (2) subject to clinging, and | <i>upādāniya</i> |
| (3) the product of clinging. | <i>upādīṇṇa</i> |

⁵¹ On the streamwinner being addressed as “noble disciple” (*ariya, sāvaka*) and the arhat as “monk” (*bhikkhu*), see SD 56.16 (3.2.2)

⁵² *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of ruin/suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*), esp as *niraya, tiracchāna, pettivisaya, asura-kāyā* (Khpa 189,12 = DA 2:496,11 (on D 2:55,27) = SA 2:97,5 (on S 2:92,16); Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 33,2.1(4)/3:234; A 9.68/4:459) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tiracchāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*petti-* or *pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see A:ÑB 1999:14-19. See *Pañca, gati* S (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20. On a late work, *Pañca, gati, dīpana*, ed L Feer (JPTS 1884:152 ff); tr Feer, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 5, 1883:514-528: sv Nara-ka, kaṇḍa, Tiracchāna~, Peta~, Manussa~, Deva~.

⁵³ S 22.1/3:1-5 @ SD 5.4.

Active clinging is confined to the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*), especially as “basis,” “fuel” or “food” for existence.⁵⁴ However, all the 5 aggregates are potentially **subject to clinging** (*upādāniya*): they conduce to, or are associated with, attachment, and have the characteristic of “feeding” existence.⁵⁵ Similarly, all the 5 aggregates are said to be in some way **the products of clinging** (*upadiṇṇa*): one tends to be attached to the aggregates, grasp at them, cling to them.⁵⁶ In summary, then, the aggregates that are clinging evidently have the following range of characteristics:

<i>upādāna</i>	basis, fuel, food (S 4:399, 400) ⁵⁴
<i>upādāniya</i>	conducing to, associated with attachment, “feeding” (S 2:84=87=92, 3:47, 167, 4:89);
<i>upadiṇṇa</i>	attached, grasped at, clung to, “taking up,” “grasping” (S 3:114, 115; Vbh 44, 56).

2.4.3 In summary, it should be noted that the term *upādāna-k,khandha* refers to the general manner in which the aggregates (*khandha*) are bound up with clinging (*upādāna*). The term *khandha* by itself is used—generally in the Suttas, and specifically in the Abhidhamma—as a neutral term, used for explaining the relationship of the specific aspects of, for example, clinging, to the aggregates.

3 Universality of the aggregates

3.1 THE AGGREGATES IN THE SUTTAS

3.1.1 There are at least 4 reasons, says **Bodhi**, why an examination of the 5 aggregates is crucial in the Buddha’s teaching (S:B 840):

- (1) The 5 aggregates are the ultimate referents of the 1st noble truth, that is suffering, as pointed out in **the (Ariya,sacca) Khandha Sutta** (S 56.13).⁵⁷ Since all the noble truths revolve around suffering, understanding the aggregates is essential for understanding the four noble truths as a whole.
- (2) The aggregates are the objective range of clinging (when we direct our tainted mind to a sense-object), and as such, contribute to the causal arising of future suffering.
- (3) The removal of clinging is necessary for the attainment of release, and clinging must be removed from the objects around which its tentacles are wrapped, namely, the 5 aggregates.
- (4) Clinging is removed through wisdom, and the kind of wisdom needed is precisely clear insight into the real nature of the aggregates.

3.1.2 Early Buddhism as represented in the Nikāyas is concerned with “only suffering and the ending of suffering,”⁵⁸ that is to say, it is an experientially liberative teaching. To understand experience, one has to understand the 5 aggregates; for they are inseparably connected. In fact, the aggregates, says Bodhi,

are at once the constituents of sentient existence and the operative factors of lived experience, for within the thought world of the Nikāyas existence is of concern only to the extent that it is implicated in experience. Thus the 5 aggregates simultaneously serve the Buddha as a scheme of categories for analyzing human identity and for explicating the structure of experience.

(S:B 840)

⁵⁴ S 4:399, 400.

⁵⁵ S 2:84 = 87 = 92, 3:47, 167, 4:89.

⁵⁶ S 3:114, 115; Vbh 44, 56, 67.

⁵⁷ S 56.13/5:425 f.

⁵⁸ Anuradha S (S 22.86/3:119).

3.2 THE TOTALITY FORMULA

3.2.1 The word *khandha* (Skt *skandha*) means, amongst other things, a heap or mass (*rāsi*). The 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*) are so called because “they each unite under one label a multiplicity of phenomena that share the same defining characteristic” (S:B 840). This defining characteristic is called “the totality formula,” mentioned, for example, here in **the (Dve) Khandha Sutta** (S 22.48), and encompassing all the aggregates—“whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near.”⁵⁹ The formula is explained in detail in **the Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **the Visuddhi,-magga**.

Briefly, they are as follows:⁶⁰

“internal”	(<i>ajjhatta</i>)	=	physical sense-organs;
“external”	(<i>bahiddhā</i>)	=	physical sense-objects; ⁶¹
“gross”	(<i>oḷārika</i>)	=	that which impinges (the physical senses, internal and external; with touch, viz, earth, wind, fire);
“subtle”	(<i>sukhuma</i>)	=	that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water);
“inferior”	(<i>hīna</i>)	=	undesirable physical sense-objects (form, sound, smell, taste, and touch);
“superior”	(<i>paṇīta</i>)	=	desirable physical sense-objects (form, etc);
“far”	(<i>dūre</i>)	=	subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”);
“near”	(<i>santike</i>)	=	gross objects (“easy to penetrate”).

3.2.2 “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41).

Regarding the terms “**internal**” (*ajjhatta*) and “**external**” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have 2 applications:⁶²

- (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them, and anything else is “external”;
- (2) the sense-organs (*āyatana*) are “internal,” but their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.”⁶³

Just as the body or sense-organs cannot exist or function in themselves, so, too, the aggregates do not exist in themselves. They are aspects of our being, all functioning together. These aspects are identified merely as a conventional means for us to understand the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self of the whole process of what we regard as our “self.” It is like a stick: it has size, weight, hard-

⁵⁹ S 22.48/3:47 f. Also **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,17/3:66-68), SD 1.2.

⁶⁰ Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7. See Gethin 1986:40 f.

⁶¹ Regarding the terms “internal” (*ajjhatta*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have 2 applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995:43, 47), however, overlooks these applications: see Harvey 1996:93.

⁶² On “internal” and “external” as referring to “oneself” and “others” respectively, see SD 13.1 (3.7a-g). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48.

⁶³ Boisvert, however overlooks these applications (1995:43, 47).

ness, length and colour. One cannot take only one of these aspects to be the stick. They all function together giving one the conception of a “stick.” In other words, when there is one aspect, the others are also present for the concept, “stick,” to arise.

3.2.4 The pair, “**inferior**” and “**superior**” can also refer to the sense-world (*kāma,loka*), and the form and formless worlds, respectively. In fact, I think this interpretation makes more practical sense in terms of understanding the aggregates. The pair, “**far**” and “**near**” can be taken in a literal sense of space, that is, nearby (within clear sight) or distant (difficult to see or beyond normal vision), which could also be said to refer to this universe or any other universe.⁶⁴

3.2.5 Two suttas in the Khandha Sāmyutta—the (**Upadāna**) **Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56)⁶⁵ and the **Satta-ṭ, -ṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57)⁶⁶—analyze the aggregates into their components, in a simpler way than in later analyses, such as those found in the Visuddhi, magga and the Commentaries. They break down the aggregates as summarized here in this table:

Aggregate	Contents	Condition
form	<u>the 4 primary elements</u> and forms derived from them	food (nutriment)
feeling	<u>the 6 classes of feeling</u> : feeling born of contact through eye, through ear, through nose, through tongue, through body and through mind	contact
perception	<u>the 6 classes of perception</u> : of forms, of sounds, of smells, of tastes, of touches and of mental phenomena	contact
formations (volitional activities)	<u>the 6 classes of volition</u> : volition regarding forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental phenomena	contact
consciousness	<u>the 6 classes of consciousness</u> : eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness	name-and-form

Table. The 5 aggregates according to the Suttas (based on S 22.56-57) (Following Bodhi, S:B 841)

4 Name and form

4.1 NĀMA, RŪPA. The 5 aggregates are often spoken of in terms of “name-and-form,” *nāma,rūpa*, which is a pre-Buddhist term, used in the early Upaniṣads to denote the differentiated manifestation of Brahman, the non-dual reality. This multiple manifestation is apprehended by the senses as diversified appearances and forms, and by thought as diversified names or concepts. In this latter context, the term *papañca*

⁶⁴ See Abhibhū S (A 3.80,3/1:227 f) & Kosala S 1 (A 10.29,2/5:59), SD 16.15, where the Buddha refers to parallel universes. For a Sutta interpretation of the other characteristics, see SD 17.13(4.2).

⁶⁵ S 22.56/3:58-61 (SD 3.7). This sutta presents the aggregates in synchronic manner (within the same life).

⁶⁶ S 22.57/2:61-65 (SD 29.2).

(mental proliferation) is used.⁶⁷ In the Buddhist sense, *nāma,rūpa* refers to the physical and cognitive sides of individual existence. In the expression, *bahiddhā nāma,rūpa*, “external name-and-form” (for example, in **the Bāla,paṇḍita Sutta**),⁶⁸ “we seem to find a vestige of the original meaning—the world distinguished according to its appearance and names—but divested of the monistic implications” (S:B 48).

4.2 RŪPA. In the Buddha’s system, *rūpa* refers to the 4 great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—both internal (as the body) and external (as another’s body and as nature).⁶⁹ The term *nāma* is rendered “name,” but should *not* merely taken in the literal sense. “*Nāma* is an assemblage of mental factors involved in cognition: feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra*).⁷⁰ These are called “name” because they contribute to the process of cognition by which objects are subsumed under the conceptual designations” (S:B 48).

In other words, while *nāma* is centred on the mind (*citta*) and *rūpa* is centred on the 4 primary elements, as Harvey points out, “there is no dualism of a mental ‘substance’ versus a physical ‘substance’: both *nāma* and *rūpa* each refer to clusters of changing, interacting processes.”⁷¹ It should be noted that in the Nikāyas, *nāma,rūpa* does not include *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which is actually its condition, and the two are mutually dependent, like two sheaves of reeds leaning against one another.⁷²

4.3 THE MIND AND MENTAL FACTORS

4.3.1 *Nāma,rūpa*

4.3.1.1 In **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k.khandha*)⁷³—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—**form** (*rūpa*) refers to our physical body, both as the 5 physical senses (*pañc’indriya*) as well as the 4 primary elements (*mahā,dhātu*).⁷⁴ Thus, in **the (Paṭicca,samuppda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2), form is defined as the 4 primary elements (*mahā,bhūta*),⁷⁵ earth, water, fire and wind (that is, extension, cohesion, heat/decay, and motion respectively).⁷⁶ This is the physical aspect of our being, that is, the conscious body (*sa,viññāṇaka kāya*).⁷⁷

4.3.1.2 The first 3 mental aggregates—feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and formations (*sañ-khārā*)—are mental factors (*cetasika*). Hence, **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2) defines name-and-form as follows:

⁶⁷ See eg Madhu,piṇḍika S, M 18 @ SD 6.14 (2).

⁶⁸ S 12.19/2:24.

⁶⁹ See eg **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62,8-12), SD 3.11; also **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56,7/ 3:59), SD 3.7 n (The 4 great elements).

⁷⁰ S 12.2.12/2:3.

⁷¹ Harvey 1993:11 digital ed.

⁷² See **Nala,kalapiya S**, S 12.67/2:114; also **Mahā Nidāna S** (M 12,21-22/2:63), SD 5.17, esp (5); also S:B 48.

⁷³ See SD 17.

⁷⁴ On the primary elements, see *Rūpa*, SD 17.2a (2).

⁷⁵ See **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-424), SD 3.11, esp Intro (4); **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:185-191), SD 6.16, esp Intro (3); also D 1:214.

⁷⁶ See **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-424), SD 3.11, esp Intro (4); **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:185-191), SD 6.16, esp Intro (3); **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-424), SD 3.11, esp Intro (4); **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:185-191); also D 1:214; Vism 443; Abhs ch = Abhs:BRS 234-238, Abhs:SR 154 f, Abhs:WG 215-218..

⁷⁷ SD 17.8a (12.3).

And what, bhikshus, is name-and-form?

Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention—this is called name. And the 4 great elements and the material form derived from the 4 great elements—this is called form. Thus, this is name and this is form—this is called name-and-form. (S 12.2,12/2:3), SD 5.15

The 5th aggregate, **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), is the mind (*citta*)⁷⁸ itself.⁷⁹ Although it is inseparably linked with the 3 mental aggregates (feeling, perception and formations), *consciousness* is not included amongst the mental aggregates since *it is the condition for name-and-form*.⁸⁰

4.3.1.3 Broadly, *citta* as “mind,” is synonymous with both mentality (*mano*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). When differentiated, **mind** is designated as *citta* because it “builds up” (*cinoti*) wholesome and unwholesome states; as **mentality** it is called *mano* because it measures, examines, knows (*manate*,⁸¹ *manatīti*,⁸² *munātīti*⁸³) and as **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*), because it discriminates (*vijānāti*) among sensory stimuli.⁸⁴ Hence, in some contexts, *citta* is “thought,” *mano* “mind,” and *viññāṇa* “consciousness.”⁸⁵

4.3.2 Citta and cetasika

4.3.2.1 In the Abhidhamma, consciousness (*citta*, also “mind, thought”), is present in all conscious activity, and is synonymous with “name” (*nāma*) in the dvandva *nāma,rūpa*. The mind as “consciousness” refers to **the 6 consciousnesses** (*viññāṇa*): the 5 sensory consciousnesses of visual shapes and colours (*cakkhu viññāṇā*), sounds and vibrations (*sota viññāṇa*), smells (*ghaṇa viññāṇa*), tastes (*jivhā viññāṇa*), and touches (*kaya viññāṇa*), along with mental consciousness (*mano viññāṇa*).

4.3.2.2 The term *cetasika*, “mental, related to the mind,” appears as an adjective in the suttas. In the Abhidhamma, it takes the sense of the noun, **mental factors** (*cetasika*) which are mental concomitants that accompany, in various combinations, the mind and its 6 sense-consciousnesses⁸⁶ [4.3.2.1]. In terms of the “mind-body” (*nāma,rūpa*) process, the mind is “name (naming process)” (*nāma*) and our physical “body” (that is, the 5 physical senses) is *rūpa*.⁸⁷

According to the Pāli **Abhidhamma**, there are **52 mental factors**, of which 25 are either karmically wholesome or neutral, 14 are karmically unwholesome, and 13 are simply neutral. Out of the 52 types of mental factors, 7 are invariably associated with all moments of consciousness—consciousness cannot arise without these 7 all being present: (1) sensory contact (*phassa*), (2) feeling (*vedanā*), (3) perception

⁷⁸ For an intro to Abhidhamma teachings on form, mind and mental factors, see Bodhi (ed), *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Kandy, 1999: *rūpa* (ch 6), *citta* (ch 1) and *cetasika* (ch 2). Free download (4th rev ed 1979): http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/abhidhamma.pdf.

⁷⁹ Vism 17.187/644 f. On some technical difficulties regarding this term, see Bodhi 1984:18 n1, Harvey 1993: 3-5 (digital ed) & Hamilton 1996a ch VI, esp 124-127.

⁸⁰ On consciousness (*viññāṇa*), see SD 17.8a.

⁸¹ ItA 1:99; PmA 1:85.

⁸² NcA 72; DhsA 123; VbhA 45.

⁸³ NmA 1:168; PmA 1:79.

⁸⁴ M 1:292; S 3:87; S 2:381; UA 41; ItA 2:64; NmA 1:23, 2:291; NcA 72; PmA 1:79, 89; DhsA 141; VbhA 135.

⁸⁵ The terms as synonyms, see **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61,4+8 with monkey simile), SD 20.2; **Assutava S 2** (S 12.61,-4+7), SD 20.3. The 3 discerned, see SD 17.8a (12), esp (12.5.4) summary.

⁸⁶ On the 6 senses, see **Sa|āyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137/3:216-222), SD 29.5.

⁸⁷ On the physical body, see **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

(*saññā*), (4) volition (*cetanā*), (5) concentration (*samādhī*), (6) vitality (*jīvita*), and (7) attention (*manasikāra*), that is, the advertence of the mind toward an object.⁸⁸

5 True nature of the aggregates

5.1 The 5 aggregates may be understood as **levels of knowing**, or how we experience the world and react to it, and how we become the result of our own processes:

Form: the physical organs: “bases or means” (*āyatana*) by which the processes occur;
 Feeling: the level of accepting, rejecting or ignoring an experience;
 Perception: the level of recognizing an experience, that is, sorting it into a mental pigeonhole;
 Formations: the level of doing (mental, verbal and bodily), that is, the karmic process;
 Consciousness: the level of simple cognizing, that is, the “naming” of experiences as entities or events, and the rudimentary dynamic undercurrent generated by various mental processes.

5.2 The true purpose of the *khandha* model is the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the viewpoint of the experiencer. Form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, are 5 aspects of an individual’s experience of the world. As **Gethin** observes,

[E]ach *khandha* is seen as representing a complex class of phenomena that is continuously arising and falling away in response to processes of consciousness based on the six spheres of sense. They thus become the five *upādānakkhandhas*, encompassing both grasping and all that is grasped. As the *upādānakkhandhas* these five classes of states acquire a momentum, and continue to manifest and come together at the level of individual being from one existence to the next. (1986:49 f)

Hence, we are nothing other than the 5 aggregates: they define the limits of our world and are our world, as clearly shown in **the (Dve) Khandha Sutta**.

5.3 The 5-aggregate model is often used by Buddhist teachers of our times to explain the nature of human life by way of an analysis of mind (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). However, it is an incomplete model of awakening, unlike the 4 noble truths⁸⁹ or the 12-link dependent arising.⁹⁰ The 5 aggregates as a model of awakening is only complete when it is reviewed, for example, in connection with **the 3 characteristics** (*ti, lakkhaṇa*), that is, that the aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self—as expounded, for example, in **the Anatta, lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59). The Sutta, in fact, climaxes with this statement:

Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of form, ... feeling, ... perception, ... formations, ... consciousness, ... whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near⁹¹—all ⟨aggregates⟩ should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” (S 22.59/3:66-68), SD 1.2⁹²

⁸⁸ On the 52 mental factors (*cetasika*). See Abhs ch 2 (tr Abhs:BRS 76-110)

⁸⁹ See Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1.

⁹⁰ See Dependent arising, SD 5.16.

⁹¹ See [3.2] above.

⁹² See also Prayudh 1995:53-60.

5.4 The threefold **non-self formula**—“this is not mine” (*n’etaṃ mama*), “this I am not” (*n’eso’ham asmi*), “this is not my self” (*na mēso attā ti*)—is the contrary of “**the 3 graspings**” (*ti, vidha gāha*)⁹³ or “factors of mental proliferation” (*papañca, dhammā*),⁹⁴ that is, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*), and are here applied to the 5 aggregates. An even shorter version, found in **the Mahā Hatthi, -padōpama Sutta** (M 28),⁹⁵ but applied to the 4 primary elements (*dhātu*), runs thus:

There can be no considering that (element) as “I” or “mine” or “I am.”
Ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā. (M 28,6/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22)

These 3 considerations represent, respectively, the 3 kinds of **mental proliferation** (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*) and of conceit (*māna*).⁹⁶

5.5 The aggregates may be compared to **an onion** that you can peel layer after layer, suffering teary eyes, and after all the layers have been peeled off, there is nothing found. Similarly, an onion is a good analogy of the aggregates: they go *ON* and *ON* with an *I* right in the middle of it all: ON + I + ON!⁹⁷

6 The word is not the thing

6.1 On a higher spiritual level, **the parable of the 5 rivers** (V 2:239) [1] flowing into the waters of the great ocean, refers to the breaking of social, personal, psychological and, we might say, *all* barriers, even religious ones. In the ultimate analysis, even religions are only tools for man’s evolution into true spiritually liberated beings. All religions that are language-based and word-centred will experience the death of the word if they are unable or unwilling to rise above the limits of language.⁹⁸

6.2 If a **religion** is unable to rise beyond these limitations, it will always be bound by dogma and human weakness, creating God and gods in its own image, and inducing its followers and subjects to bow before it, and to be intolerant of those perceived as different.

The highest truth could be anything to anyone, depending on who defines the truth and whether we are really free to seek it. **Reality** is never in black and white: it is a colourful range of shades and hues depending on how the light shines in our eyes. Those who pontificate, “If you are not with us you are against us,” fail to see the grey areas between the black and white of reality, and the depth and hues of spiritually.

6.3 In **the Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20)⁹⁹ and **the Addhā Sutta** (It 53 f), the Buddha explains the aggregates in a most profound way, relating them to how we think and create our own worlds:

46 *Akkheyya, saññino sattā
akkheyyasmim patitṭhitā
akkheyyam apariññāya
yogam āyanti maccuno.*

Beings who perceive what can be expressed
are stuck in what can be expressed.
Not having fully understood what can be expressed,
They go¹⁰⁰ under the yoke of death.

⁹³ MA 2:111, 225.

⁹⁴ Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f.

⁹⁵ Also at Pārileyya S (S 22.81/ 3:94-99), SD 6.1 (5).

⁹⁶ Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f. See also Rāhula S (A 4.177/2:164 f).

⁹⁷ Quoted by Brahmavamso from an unnamed source in Mahā Puṇṇama S (M 109) study, Perth, 25th July 2004.

⁹⁸ See Language and discourse, SD 26.11.

⁹⁹ In this Sutta, the stanzas (S 46-47) are addressed to an unnamed yaksha.

47 *akkheyyañ ca pariññāya
akkhātaram na maññati
taṃ hi tassa na hotī ti
yena naṃ vajjā na tassa atthi.*

But having fully understood what can be expressed,
one does not think in terms of “one that expresses.”
For, “there is no *that*” for him,
That by which anything could be said of him.¹⁰¹

(S 46 f/1.20 /1:11,23; cf It 3.2.4/53 f)¹⁰²

From words come worlds. We are **the creators of worlds**, and only through direct wisdom can we penetrate into their true nature and be truly liberated. We must first understand that the word is *not* the thing.

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(Dve) Khandhā Sutta

The Discourse on the (2 Kinds of) Aggregates

S 22.48

- 1 At Sāvattthī.
- 2 There the Blessed One said:
- 3 “Bhikshus, I will teach you **the 5 aggregates** and **the 5 aggregates of clinging**.
Listen to it.

The 5 aggregates

- 4 And what, bhikshus, are **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k,khandha*)?
- 5 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **form** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near¹⁰³—this is called the form aggregate.
- 6 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **feeling** there is, *whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—this is called the feeling aggregate.
- 7 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **perception** there is *whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—this is called the perception aggregate.

¹⁰⁰ “They go,” *āyanti*, pres 3 pl of *āyāti*, meaning (1) “he comes, arrives, approach, reach, attain, return” (V 1:30; D 3:19; S 1:43); sometimes contextually = *gacchati*, “he goes” (SnA 2:480,16 ad Sn 669; *gacchāma*, SnA 2:463,7 ad Sn 116). The imp often means “goes” rather than “comes,” eg, imp 1 pl *āyāma*, “come, let us go!” (V 3:10; D 16 §1.13/2:81, §1.15/2:81, §1.19/2:84, §2.1/2:90, §2.5/2:91, §4.5/2:123 (x4), §4.13/2:126, §4.38/2:134, §5.1/2:137). (2) “he gets into, passes into, falls into, meets with, becomes” (*kodho vo vasam ~ātu*, S 1:140,1*; *ākāsam indriyāni saṅkamati ~anti*, S 3:207,4). In fact, CPD gives S 1:11,23 (v46) here as an example of (2). Bodhi takes this literally: “They come under the yoke of Death” (S:B 99). I have rendered it idiomatically.

¹⁰¹ It 3.2.4/53 f. Lines cd here, lit: “For that is not for him | By what that exists that could be said of him.” Bodhi: “For that does not exist for him | By which one could describe him.” (S:B 99).

¹⁰² It 53 f has S 46 but only S 47ab, which instead reads *phuṭṭho vimokkho manasā | santi,padam anuttaram* (“When the mind is touched by liberation, there is the peerless state of peace”), and an additional stanza: *sa ve akkheyya,sampanno | santo santi,pade rato | saṅkhāya sevī dhammaṭṭho | saṅkham nopeti vedagū ti* (“Indeed, he is accomplished in what can be expressed | at peace, delighting in the state of peace | standing in truth, he makes use of reckoning (*saṅkha*) | (but) one accomplished in true knowledge cannot be reckoned”). See Pubba Sambodha S 1 (S 35.13), SD 14.9 for more details.

¹⁰³ This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in Vibhaṅga and briefly in Visuddhi,magga: on the meanings of the terms, see (3.2) above.

8 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **formations** there are *whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—they are called the formations aggregate.

9 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, *whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—this is called the consciousness aggregate.

10 These, bhikshus, are called **the 5 aggregates**.

The 5 aggregates of clinging

11 And what, bhikshus, are **the 5 aggregates of clinging**?

12 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **form** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental influxes*,¹⁰⁴ *subject to clinging*:¹⁰⁵ this is called the form aggregate of clinging.

13 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **feeling** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental influxes, subject to clinging*: this is called the feeling aggregate of clinging.

14 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **perception** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental influxes, subject to clinging*: this is called the perception aggregate of clinging.

15 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **formations** there are, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental influxes, subject to clinging*: these are called the formations aggregate of clinging. **[48]**

16 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental influxes, subject to clinging*: this is called the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

17 These, bhikshus, are called **the 5 aggregates of clinging**.

— evaṃ —

Bibliography, see SD 17.17 & SD Guide

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¹⁰⁴ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. See 2.2n above.

¹⁰⁵ “That is tainted, that can be clung to,” *sāsavaṃ upādānīyaṃ*.