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(Khandha) Samādhi Sutta

The (Aggregate) Discourse on Mental Stillness | S 22.5

Theme: Understanding the 5 aggregates with a still mind ends suffering

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Key word

1.1 The (Khandha) Samādhi Sutta (S 22.5)—as in **the (Khandha) Paṭisallāna Sutta** (S 22.6), which follows it in the Khandha Saṃyutta (S 22)—is about the benefit of a still mind (one that experiences samadhi). It will see true reality, that is, the real nature of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness), that is, our body-mind existence. In other words, we will awaken to some level spiritual liberation.

1.2 These two Suttas are practically identical for the most part, differing only two ways. The first is in the Buddha's opening remark on the Sutta's theme [§2]. Here, in the (Khandha) Samādhi Sutta, the theme is: **“Cultivate mental stillness [concentration]”** (*samādhim bhāvētha*) [§2], that is, practise meditation for the arising of wisdom—a true understanding of the 5 aggregates (our existence and the nature of life)—and so gaining liberation.

1.3 The second difference is in the key word. Here, in the (Khandha) Samādhi Sutta, the key word is **“mental stillness”** or **“mental concentration”** (*samādhi*), which a word for meditation that includes the experience of dhyana (*jhāna*).¹ In the (Khandha) Paṭisallāna Sutta, the emphasis is on mental solitude (*paṭisallāna*), which is another word for meditation, including samadhi and dhyana. The two terms are practically synonyms in this case.

2 Related suttas

2.1 In his article, “From Brahmanism to Buddhism,”² Christian Lindtner hypothesizes that the Buddha

...probably knew the image of the Cosmic Tree when he introduced the five *skandhas* to identify *duḥkham*. This also suggests, if true, that in his times, the image of *duḥkham*, having to do with flowing, may already have been somewhat faded. (Lindtner 1999:19)

Lindtner, as such, thinks that “mostly likely *duḥkhasandha* does not mean ‘mass of suffering,’ but rather ‘the branching that is *duḥkham*.’” (1999:18). This is an interesting, but speculative, attempt at Buddhist etymology, but it is another matter when it comes to Buddhist usage. It is clearly more coherent to speak of a “mass” or aggregate that contributes to suffering rather than in terms of a “branch” or “branching”.

2.2 The central teaching of this Sutta is a stock meditation formula on the 5 aggregates found in the 2 **Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas**³ and in several places in the **Saṃyutta Nikāya**.⁴ Here, the arising (*samudaya*) and the passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of the aggregates are explained from the standpoint of diachronic (“across time” or distal) conditionality (that is, over many lives). In **the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56)⁵

¹ On samadhi, see **Samādhi**, SD 33.1a. On *jhāna*, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

² *Asian Philosophy* 9,1 1999:5-36.

³ D 22,14/ 3:301 f = M 10,38/1:61.

⁴ S 12.21, 12.23, 22.78, 22.89, 22.101.

⁵ S 22.56/3:58-61 @ SD 3.7.

and **the Satta-ṭ,ṭhāna S** (S 22.57)⁶ the aggregates are examined from the standpoint of a synchronic (“a point in time” or proximal) conditionality at (ie within a single life-time).

2.3 There are two ways of examining the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*):⁷ within the same life-time (synchronic or proximal model) and over many lives (diachronic or distal model).⁸ Here, in the (Upādāna) Samādhi Sutta, we shall examine the diachronic model of the aggregates. The other model, the synchronic, is found in **the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭā Sutta** (S 22.56)⁹ and **the Satta-ṭ,ṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57).¹⁰

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(Khandha) Samādhi Sutta

The (Aggregate) Discourse on Mental Stillness

S 22.5

[3:13]

1 Thus have I heard. At Sāvattihī.

Meditating on the aggregates

2 There the Blessed One said this:

“Bhikshus, **cultivate mental stillness [concentration]**.¹¹ A monk who is mentally concentrated understands things as they really are.¹²

THE THESES

3 And **what does he understand as they really are?**¹³ It is the arising and passing away of form, and the arising and passing away of feeling, and **[14]** the arising and passing away of perception, and

*rūpa*¹⁴

vedanā

*saññā*¹⁵

⁶ S 22.57/3:61-65.

⁷ See **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48), SD 17.1a.

⁸ See S:B 1049 n30.

⁹ See SD 3.7.

¹⁰ S 22.57/3:61-65. See SD 3.7 (3).

¹¹ “Cultivate stillness,” *samādhim bhāvettha*.

¹² Qu at Vism 11.121/371.

¹³ *Kiñ ca yathā,bhūtaṃ pajānāti*, alt tr: “And what is the true reality that he understand?” The following is a stock meditation formula on the 5 aggregates found in the 2 **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22,14/ 3:301 f = M 10,38/1:61) and in the **Samyutta** (S 12.21, 12.23, 22.6, 22.78, 22.89, 22.101). Here this sutta (S 22.5), the arising (*samudaya*) and the passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of the aggregates are explained from the standpoint of diachronic (“across time” or distal) conditionality (ie over many lives), and at **Parivaṭṭā S** (S 22.56/3:58-61) & **Satta-ṭ,ṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65), from the standpoint of synchronic (“a point in time” or proximal) conditionality (ie within a single life-time).

¹⁴ *Rūpa*, defined as ‘the 4 great elements and form derived from them’ (S 22.56). In the term *rūpa,kāya*, both components can be translated as “body”, but while *rūpa* is material, especially visible, form, *kāya* is body as an aggregate, as in “a body of form, a body of men”. Often contrasted with *nāma,kāya*, that is, the mental component of the term *nāma,rūpa*, “mind and body”. See BDict: kāya.

¹⁵ *Saññā*, defined as “distinguishing a thing by its marks” (S 22.79).

the arising and passing away of mental formations, and
the arising and passing away of consciousness

*saṅkhārā*¹⁶
*viññāṇa*¹⁷

The arising of the aggregates

4 And, bhikshus,
what is the arising of form?
What is the arising of feeling?
What is the arising of perception?
What is the arising of mental formations?
What is the arising of consciousness?

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**, approves of it, goes on grasping it.

From his finding pleasure in form,
approving of it, going on grasping it, arises delight.
Delight in form is clinging.
Conditioned by clinging, there is becoming.
Conditioned by becoming, there is birth.
Conditioned by birth, there is decay and death:
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental
pain [displeasure] and despair come to be.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

7 He seeks pleasure in **feeling**, *approves of it, goes on grasping it*.

From his finding pleasure in feeling,
approving of it, going on grasping it, arises delight.
Delight in feeling is clinging.
Conditioned by clinging, there is becoming.
Conditioned by becoming, there is birth.
Conditioned by birth, there is decay and death:
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental
pain and despair come to be.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

8 He seeks pleasure in **perception**, *approves of it, goes on grasping it*.

From his finding pleasure in perception,
approving of it, going on grasping it, arises delight.
Delight in perception is clinging.
Conditioned by clinging, there is becoming.
Conditioned by becoming, there is birth.

¹⁶ *Saṅkhāra*, one of the difficult Buddhist terms to translate as it is polysemous. Here it applies to the group of mental formations. The Abhidhamma traditionally lists 50 of them, embracing various factors, the most important of which is volition (*cetanā*), that is, karma itself. Formations include what we call “emotions” (ie expressed or social feelings). See D:W n293.

¹⁷ *Viññāṇa*, “consciousness”, divided into six, namely, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness.

Conditioned by birth, there is

decay and death:

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair come to be.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

9 He seeks pleasure in **mental formations**, approves of them, goes on grasping them.

From his finding pleasure in mental formations,

approving of them, going on grasping them, arises delight.

Delight in mental formations is

clinging.

Conditioned by clinging, there is

becoming.

Conditioned by becoming, there is

birth.

Conditioned by birth, there is

decay and death:

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair come to be.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

10 He seeks pleasure in **consciousness**, approves of it, goes on grasping it.

From his finding pleasure in consciousness,

approving of it, going on grasping it, arises

delight.

Delight in consciousness is

clinging.

Conditioned by clinging, there is

becoming.

Conditioned by becoming, there is

birth.

Conditioned by birth, there is

decay and death:

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair come to be.

—Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

11 This, bhikshus, is the arising of

form.

This is the arising of

feeling.

This is the arising of

perception.

This is the arising of

mental formations.

This is the arising of

consciousness.¹⁸

The ending of the aggregates

12 And, bhikshus,

what is the ending of form?

What is the ending of feeling?

What is the ending of perception?

What is the ending of mental formations?

What is the ending of consciousness?

¹⁸ The closing section [§10] is a summary of dependent arising. The phrase “he seeks pleasure in, approves of, goes on grasping” (*abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati*) refers to craving (*taṇhā*). The pleasure (*nandi*) gained is clinging (*upādāna*), from which the remaining links of the series continue. The passage thus shows how craving for the present 5 aggregates (internal and external) is the efficient cause for the arising another round of 5 aggregates in the next life. The following section on “the ending” should be understood in the converse manner: when craving for the present aggregates ends, one has destroyed the efficient cause for the further arising of the 5 aggregates. See S:B 1049 n30.

Here, bhikshus, **he does not find pleasure in, does not approves of, does not go on grasping.**
And what is it that he does not find pleasure in, does not approve of, does not go on grasping?

13 He does not find pleasure in **form**, does not approve of it, does not go on grasping it.

From his not finding pleasure in form,

not approving of it, not going on grasping it,

With the ending of delight,

With the ending of clinging,

With the ending of becoming,

With the ending of birth, decay and death ends:

delight in form ends.

clinging ends.

becoming ends.

birth ends.

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain
[displeasure] and despair do not come to be.

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

14 He does not find pleasure in **feeling**, *does not approve of it, does not go on grasping it.*

From his not finding pleasure in feeling,

not approving of it, not going on grasping it, [15] delight in feeling ends.

With the ending of delight,

clinging ends.

With the ending of clinging,

becoming ends.

With the ending of becoming,

birth ends.

With the ending of birth, decay and death ends:

*sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and
despair does not come to be.*

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

15 He does not find pleasure in **perception**, *does not approve of it, does not go on grasping it.*

From his not finding pleasure in perception,

not approving of it, not going on grasping it,

delight in perception ends.

With the ending of delight,

clinging ends.

With the ending of clinging,

becoming ends.

With the ending of becoming,

birth ends.

With the ending of birth, decay and death ends:

*sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and
despair does not come to be.*

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

16 He does not find pleasure in **mental formations**, *does not approve of it, does not go on grasping it.*

From his not finding pleasure in mental formations,

not approving of them, not going on grasping them,

delight in mental formations end.

With the ending of delight,

clinging ends.

With the ending of clinging,

becoming ends.

With the ending of becoming,

birth ends.

With the ending of birth, decay and death ends:

*sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and
despair does not come to be.*

—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

17 He does not find pleasure in **consciousness**, *does not approve of it, does not go on grasping it.*

From his not finding pleasure in consciousness,

not approving of it, not going on grasping it,

delight in consciousness ends.

With the ending of delight,

clinging ends.

