

Life is the five aggregates, it's not 'me.'

The very first thing we need to know about is *dukkha*, if we don't know about *dukkha* it will be a waste of time listening to the *Dhamma*, to a teaching which is about the quenching of *dukkha*. The second thing we need to be aware of is that the ending of excessive selfishness is the ending of *dukkha*. The third thing we need to know is that the *pancakhandha*, the five aggregates, form the base from which that selfishness arises, and that, when these aggregates are properly understood, when they're not taken to be 'self,' then there's none of that selfishness either, and when there's no excessive selfishness there's no *dukkha*, so recognize the connection: understand *dukkha*, and understand that the ending of selfishness is the ending of *dukkha*, hence, understanding the aggregates properly, as being 'not-self,' is what will put an end to *dukkha*.

So, we'll take a look at the '*pancakhandha*,' the 'five aggregates,' which are important, one of the most important things in Buddhism.

In the Buddha's teaching the five aggregates are understood as being *anattā*, that is, they're understood as being 'not-self.' Buddhism from its beginnings dealt with *anattā*, with this highest of truths. Even so, we have to use language, and we have to use the words 'self,' 'me,' 'mine,' in order to communicate, if we don't it causes problems. But the 'self' isn't a reality, even though people generally will feel that they have such a thing, it arises from an instinctual sense and becomes strongly established in the mind.

Hence in ordinary, everyday speech we have to use the word 'self,' we have to speak as if there really is a 'self.' The Buddha did too, even he had to use the word when talking with people generally. But the deep, the *Dhamma*, understanding was, and is, that the aggregates are 'not-self.'

Remember this point, otherwise it will be confusing as to just why the Buddha said, on occasion, that there wasn't a 'self,' then said things like 'let the 'self' be the refuge of the 'self,' and so on. We need to make a distinction: there's a 'self' in the worldly sense, but on the level of ultimate truth there isn't. Grasp this from the start then we won't be confused.

Now we'll take a look at *anattā*, at 'not self,' and especially at the five aggregates as being so.

The five aggregates are what live life, are what make up the body and the mind. Life is composed of a body working in conjunction with a mind. As long as these two are together there'll be life. The mind is composed of four aggregates, the body is composed of just one, which is known as the *rūpākhanda*, the aggregate of 'form.'

The mind is divided into four because it does four operations, that is, it feels pleasant and unpleasant, which is called *vedanā*, it remembers, recognizes, which is called *saññā*, when it thinks about anything that's called *sankhāra*, and when it knows clearly by way of the six senses that's called *viññāna*. This is the basic reality of the mind. There's just one kind of form, one *rūpa*, but the mental can be divided into four: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāna*. These are called the five aggregates.

These five are enough, there's no need for a sixth, for a 'self.' That's an illusion, a *māyā*, not anything real, although it can be felt. People without real knowledge will believe that they have a 'self' which makes life operate in this, that, and other ways, but according to truth there's no need for such a thing, there's just the body with the mind, just the five aggregates, and they can do everything, they can think, feel, perceive, be aware, etc. There's no need for a sixth component. But people tend to think that there is such a thing, they understand that there's something more than just the aggregates and that this something is the owner of them.

In Buddhism it's taught that there's only mind and body, those two components being enough, there's no need for a third thing called 'self.' First up, grasp this properly.

Here, let's not forget the instinctual, as in the survival instinct, which is something one just 'feels,' there's no need for anyone to come and teach it, it's hard-wired into life, comes packaged with life as instinctual knowledge which must assert itself. OK, call it wrong knowledge, because, in conjunction with the sort of ignorance which is naturally present during life, it will cause problems, will cause *dukkha*. That ignorance, however, while the child is still in the womb, is yet to appear. However, once born from the womb it does appear, and then, because the child must experience the world it's a part of ignorantly, it will soon come to believe that it's 'me,' 'me' who wants to eat, to drink, etc. And, further, that child will project this misunderstanding onto its experiences, so

that, when it meets with anything it will see whatever it's meeting with as being a 'self' too, a 'self' which is, perhaps, doing something to 'me.' For example: the child bumps into a chair and feels anger, feels that the chair has done something to 'me,' so it sees the chair as being a 'self' too, then it might kick it in anger.

Think about it: the feeling of being a 'self' isn't real, it appears because of ignorance, at its root it's instinctual, so know its origins, it's an instinct hard-wired into life which, because of ignorance being present, causes the feeling of being 'me' to arise. When born from the womb contacts with those around us - our parents, brothers and sisters, nurse, or whatever - so that, over time, there comes to be 'my' father, 'my' mother, 'my' house, 'my' doll, etc. Children have an increasing feeling of 'self,' which usually persists throughout life.

The 'self' arises because the *saññākhanda* is combined with ignorance. We need to see that the 'self' is an illusion arising out of misperception, it's a misunderstanding, that is, one particular aggregate, the *saññākhanda*, perceives in ignorance and the 'self' appears. *Saññā* regularly misperceives in this way, hence we always have the feeling of being 'me.' But this is illusion, even so it has influence, in that it causes *dukkha*.

First up, take an interest, then we'll look at this in detail until it can be seen that it's a matter of ignorance giving rise to a certain mental reaction involving desire and attachment, which causes the feeling of being 'me' to arise. Hence we need to know about the five aggregates.

To sum up: life consists in the five aggregates, there's *rūpa* which represents the material side of things, and there are *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāna*, representing the *nāma*, or mental, side. If there are just the five aggregates operating in accord with Nature then ignorance doesn't turn them into a 'self' and there aren't any undue problems, but, as of now, ignorance does bring the 'self' and problems do arise.

For instance: a knife cuts a finger and it hurts, this is really the *rūpakhandā*: the external *rūpakhandā* is the knife, the internal is the flesh, there's cutting and there's pain. It should be understood that the knife cutting the flesh represents the external and internal forms of the *rūpakhandā* meeting together, if it's understood in this way then it's just the aggregates, but usually it won't be understood like that, it will be the knife cutting 'me,' not cutting the finger, not the metal cutting into the flesh, it will be the knife cutting 'me,'

the ‘me’ just arises, and for a little thing like a cut finger. It arises in many more than that, too, all of which will involve the feeling of being ‘me.’ When this happens it’s not just the five aggregates anymore, it’s the ‘clinging’ aggregates, the *upādānakhandhas*. If it’s just the aggregates as in Nature then there’s no problem, there’s no ‘me’ to experience the pain, to experience the *dukkha*, but on them becoming ‘me,’ on the aggregates becoming ‘mine’ then it’s ‘my’ pain, ‘my’ *dukkha*.

If we would know about *dukkha* then we have to understand this: the aggregates are Nature, when ignorance covers them they become the clinging aggregates, they become ‘me.’ At first the aggregates operate quite naturally, but then there’s ignorance in the moment that *saññā* perceives, there’s misperception, and there’s a ‘self’ who’s happy or not depending on what’s being experienced. Problems arise because of ignorance, ignorance creates them, ignorance creates the ‘self.’

Now, we need to know how to differentiate; if we really want to know the *khandhas* then we have to understand how it feels when it’s just the aggregates, and how it feels when the ‘clinging aggregates’ arise. The names are different: the aggregates are just the aggregates, but if it’s the ‘clinging aggregates’ then they aren’t just the aggregates anymore, they’re the aggregates being clung to as ‘self,’ or as a possession. The five aggregates are just the aggregates as they are, without any clinging, the aggregates that clinging has taken hold of and turned into a possession are the ‘clinging aggregates.’ Understand the difference, if we don’t they’ll be seen as being the same thing and won’t be properly understood.

The *rūpakhandha* is the material, the physical side of things, it’s the body which is divided into and composed of the great elements of earth, water, fire, and air, these together make up the body. It’s wonderful that in the physical body there’s also awareness in the form of a nervous system, so it’s not just the body, as with a stone, it’s the body which has the ability to feel via its nervous system too. It’s this system which is able to receive contacts via all five physical senses, via the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body itself. The body has five such systems which serve as the base for the clinging which gives rise to the feeling of being ‘me,’ if the nerves experience and ignorance is in charge of the mind then it’s going to be ‘me’ who feels.

Think about it, the nerves themselves feel quite naturally but then ignorance enters and there's the assumption that this is 'me,' 'I' am feeling, those nerves, along with the body that they're a part of, are taken to be 'me,' the *rūpakhandhā* is clung to, possessed, and becomes the 'clung-to' aggregate, that is, it becomes 'me.'

Whether it's the aggregate without clinging or with clinging it will still be the *rūpakhandha*. The *rūpakhandha* 'as is,' or the *rūpakhandha* affected by clinging, although for most of the time we'll be talking about the *upādānakhandha*, the 'clinging aggregate.' Know the *rūpakhandha* as the body, a combination of the four elements with a nervous system which can feel, this is the *rūpakhandha*, the first of the aggregates.

Now, *nāma*, or mind, has four components: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāna*. This is basic and easily remembered. *Vedanā* is feeling arising towards something, it's the nature of the mind to perform this function. The *vedana*, or feeling, arising from a sense impact will differ depending on the object, it can be *sukavedana*, pleasant feeling, *dukkhavedanā*, unpleasant feeling, or *adukkhamasukavedanā*, neither unpleasant nor pleasant feeling; if *vedanā* is seized by ignorance then it will be 'me' who feels, it's no longer feeling happening naturally, it's not just the mind experiencing the feeling, now ignorance has entered and covered the mind with clinging so that it's now 'me' doing the feeling, and the *vedanākhanda* has become the *vedanūpādānakhandha*.

Recognize that there are always two kinds of aggregate: *rūpakhandha*, *rūpūpādānakhandha*, *vedanākhanda*, *vedanūpādānakhandha*, *saññākhanda*, *saññūpādānakhandha*, *sankhārahanda*, *sankhārūpādānakhandha*, *viññānakhandha*, *viññānūpādānakhandha*; the word *upādāna* is added to indicate the 'clung-to' aggregates. Now, the second mental aggregate is *saññā*, perception. It's the mind itself doing the perceiving, it doesn't need any help to perform this operation. When the mind receives feeling arising from something impacting the senses, like a form impacting the eye, for instance, then there'll be *saññā* to perceive, to recognize whatever is being experienced, as with, for instance, a tree, a flower, a stone, or whatever, *saññā* will perceive the experience as being such and such a thing. *Saññā* does this naturally, there's no need for a 'me,' for a 'perceiver,' but, usually, with people lacking knowledge they'll feel that there is a 'me' who perceives. The mind can do the perceiving, but when clinging enters and dominates it the mind will assume that there's a 'me,' a 'perceiver,' it may take itself

to be ‘me,’ or may assume that there’s a ‘me’ overseeing things, whatever, the result will be the same, the ‘self’ will arise, the *saññākhandha* will become the *saññūpādānakhandha*.

Saññākhandha is classified according to the object being experienced, thus forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, mind objects, all have a particular form of *saññā* associated with them, hence *saññā* is of six kinds and differs according to whatever happens to be impacting the senses.

The third mental function is *sankhāra*, the *sankhārakhandha*. *Sankhāra* is thinking, which is something that the mind does quite naturally, clinging causes the mind to become the ‘me’ who thinks, then it’s not a natural function anymore, it’s ‘me,’ and the thinking might then become ‘mine.’ The *sankhāra* can be skilful, unskillful, or neutral depending on whatever’s impacting the senses.

The *viññānakhandha* is the fourth mental component, the fifth overall. When there’s awareness, that is, clear knowledge of those objects which impact the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body, it’s the *viññānakhandha* operating. Because the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body all possess nervous systems the *viññānakhandha* can be aware of everything and anything which comes to impact the physical senses. The mind knows it’s own experiences too but it’s not referred to as having a nervous system, it’s just referred to as the mind. This is the *viññānakhandha*, it can know, be aware quite naturally, and all by itself, until ignorance intervenes and causes clinging to it as ‘me,’ then, when the eye sees a form it’s ‘I’ see, when the ear hears a sound and it’s ‘I’ hear, then ‘I’ smell, ‘I’ taste, ‘I’ touch, down to the mind knowing its object, at which time it’s ‘me’ who does the knowing.

There’s a form of *vinñāna* peculiar to each of the inner senses, thus: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousnesses. Observe, also, how each aggregates is differentiated, except on the case of *rūpa*, where mentioning *rūpa* alone is sufficient, if, however, it’s *vedanā* there’s differentiation into *sukha*, *dukkha*, and *adukkhamasukhavedanā*, if *saññā*, it’s differentiation into form, sound smell, taste, touch, and mental *saññā*, *sankhāra* is differentiated by quality, thus into skilful, unskillful, and neither nor *sankhāras*, and *viññāna* is differentiated as above.

Know these four mental operations as the mind: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, *viññāna*; these, plus *rūpa*, are the five aggregates. When not clung to they're just the five aggregates, when they are clung to they're the 'clinging aggregates.'

The truth of the aggregates is with us all of the time but we don't know it, so get to know them, get to really know what the *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññānakhandhas* are, when they arise just as they are in Nature then be aware of that, if they arise as 'me' then be aware of that too.

If it's just the aggregates involved then there's no *dukkha* in the full sense, there's just the natural form, the 'characteristic' of *dukkha*, which arises because of the aggregates being prone to change and transformation. But if it's the *upādānakhandhās* then the mind gets 'bitten' immediately, and it's the *dukkha* of the four noble truths. Hence *dukkha* has two meanings: one, the 'characteristic' of being *dukkha* can be seen as something hard to bear with, cling to that with *upādāna* and it becomes: two, the *dukkha* of mental pain, the biting *dukkha* of the noble truths.

These are the five aggregates. People knew the *khandhas* before the Buddha's time, knew them but didn't understand them properly. The Buddha taught just what they were all about. The *khandhas*, pre-Buddhism, weren't looked on as being *anattā*. People always looked on them as being *attā*, as being 'self.' That there was knowledge of the aggregates before the Buddha's time can be easily deduced from the fact that when the Buddha taught the five ascetics (the first five disciples) he didn't teach them what *rūpā*, what form actually was, what feeling was, what perception was, etc. he didn't go into detail because there wasn't any need, they already had that sort of knowledge. In the *anattālakhanasutta* it's stated that the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, thought, and consciousness aren't 'self,' but at the time that sutta was being spoken it wasn't felt necessary to say precisely what form was, what feelings were, etc. because the aggregates were already known about even if they weren't fully understood.

Now, the aggregates are said to arise when they do their respective duties; we need to understand that the five aggregates arise and quench, arise and cease, and that they're said to 'arise' when they do their respective duties. Hence, when the *rūpakhandha* does its duty, as when the eye sees a form or the ear hears sounds, etc. the *rūpakhandha* is then said to have arisen, if it's not engaged in doing its duty it's then said to have quenched, or

ceased, at which time it's not called the *rūpakhandha*, it's then the *rūpādhātu*, the element of form, that which will become the *rūpākhandha*. *Vedanā* is the same, when doing the duty of feeling it's the *vedanākhandha*, when not doing its duty it's a *dhātu*, a natural element. Some won't understand the elements in this way because they won't have heard this sort of an explanation before, only having heard about the elements of earth, water, fire, and air, those, however, collectively are the *rūpakhandha*, it's only when they aren't doing their duties as such that they're referred to as elements. *Vedanā*, when yet to do the duty of feeling, is called the *vedanādhātu*, the element of feeling, then there are the *saññādhātu*, *sankhāradhātu*, and *viññānadhātu*, all natural elements until they do their duties as aggregates. And know that the aggregates don't die, they don't need to, they can dwell in the natural elementary state when not engaged in performing their functions as aggregates.

Now we come to observe how the aggregates do their duties. It's already been said that they're the aggregates only when performing their duties, now we observe to see clearly just how they do that via the six doors, that is, via the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind.

First is the *rūpakhandha*, the form aggregate. The eye is a natural element complete with its nervous system, that's the 'inner' *rūpakhandha*, it meets with a form, that's the 'outer' *rūpakhandha*. The inner form aggregate is the eye, the outer form aggregate is the form the eye sees. When the eye and the form meet together the *rūpakhandha* arises fully as both inner and outer *rūpakhandhas*, at which time the nervous system performs its function and consciousness arises to clearly know the form being experienced. This is the way it operates: when the inner senses meet their outer sense objects the *rūpakhandha*, the form aggregate, is fully arisen, and, because the senses have come together then consciousness, the *viññānakhandha*, the consciousness aggregate, arises as a result. Consciousness is the second aggregate to arise even though it comes fifth in the usual order; in the texts it's set out quite clearly that, because the eye and a form meet together *caksu-vinnāna*, eye-consciousness, arises; the eye and form are the *rūpakhandha*, eye-consciousness, is the *viññānakhandha*.

Don't just hear the words here, try to think about the truth of sense impacts: when the eye meets a form then seeing happens, that 'seeing' is the *viññānakhandha* doing its duty.

Now there has to be recollection, recognition, of what that form is, subsequently it will be perceived as being such: a tree, a stone, some soil, a person, a woman, a man, an animal, whatever, there's recognition, then, a little later, the object is perceived as really being such and such a thing, here, however, we're concerned with the *saññākhandha* functioning just as recollection, as recognition. One then feels the result of that sense contact, something perceived as being pretty will cause comfortable, pleasant feelings to arise, something perceived as being ugly will cause uncomfortable, unpleasant feelings to arise. This is the *vedanākhandha*, the aggregate of feeling, operating. First comes *saññā* to recognize, then comes the *vedanākhandha*. There's now a further act of perception, of something as being this or that way, of, for instance, feelings as being of a certain kind, of the object being experienced as male, as female, as being 'self,' or whatever. This is the *saññākhandha* powerful enough to actually perceive something to be what we would normally conceive it to be, so it isn't just recognizing, or remembering anything here. Then arise the various kinds of thought concerned with the object, concerned with the feeling, the *vedanā*, regarding how to respond, which is concocted thinking, the *sankhārakhandha* operating, which is also the cause of any subsequent *kammic* activity. If we can grasp this then we'll understand when it's said that the form aggregate arises, then the consciousness aggregate arises to know clearly, then arises the perception aggregate to recognize the object, then arises knowledge of the result of that contact, which is the feeling aggregate, then perception operates again to perceive the both object and feeling arising from it as being of a certain kind, which is the perception aggregate operating on the deep level, then arises mind consciousness to know the feeling, then arises thinking.

If we can't grasp this then we won't understand, we won't know the complete matter, so it's important to study this properly and not be content to just hear the words, then we'll be able to see that the five aggregates do operate in this way.

The *viññānakhandha* does the first part of its duty then comes to do its duty again. The *saññākhandha* is the same, it does its duty first as remembrance, as recognition, then perceives again to know the object as actually being such and such a thing with such and such a meaning. Both the *viññānakhandha* and the *saññākhandha* arise more than once during the course of any event. This causes difficulties with the sequencing of the

khandhas wherein consciousness is usually placed last, but that's so because consciousness arises to accompany any and all events.

Continuing on with the sound group: the ear is the inner sense sphere, or *āyatana*, the sound is the outer *āyatana*, on them meeting together to do their duties the *rūpakhandha* arises. Because they do their duties it's said that the senses 'arise,' there 'arises' the ear with the sound. When the inner and outer *āyatana* are just natures yet to do their duties they're referred to as elements - the ear element and the sound element - but when they do their duties they arise as the *rūpakhandha*. When the ear meets a sound then arises ear consciousness, *sotaviññāna*, then *saññā* arises to recognize the sound, then arises *vedanā*, feeling, which is comfortable or not, there's a further perception concerning the sound, when it's perceived as being what we conceive it to be, the sound of a woman, or of a man, of someone one likes, or of someone one doesn't, then, as before, mind consciousness will contact the feeling arising, and *sankhāra*, thinking, will occur.

All five aggregates are involved but some operate in two ways, or rather more than two ways, depending on how we look at this. But at the very least all five aggregates will be involved.

Remember that when the inner and outer senses meet it's the arising of the *rūpakhandha*, the fruit of which is *viññānakhandha* to know clearly, then there arises *saññā* to recognize the sound, and *vedanā*, either pleasing or otherwise, arises, there's a further act of perception regarding the object, feelings are perceived as being this or that kind of feeling, and thinking occurs concerning them. This is the sound group.

Now, smelling, this is the same again: the nose is the inner form aggregate, the outer form aggregate manifesting as a smell meets it, and nose consciousness arises, *saññā* recognizes the smell, which is the *saññākhandha*, there's the *vedanākhandha*, feelings of satisfaction or the opposite, then there's perception of what it's the smell of, that related to gender, the scent of a woman, of a man, then the mind contacts any feeling involved, and the *sankhārakhandha* arises to think about the smell.

The tongue is the inner *rūpakhandha* and the taste which contacts it is the outer *rūpakhandha*, arises tongue consciousness to know the feeling arising from that taste, which is the *viññānakhandha*, the perception aggregate arises and recognizes, perceives what the taste is, that's the *saññākhandha*, the subsequent feelings of satisfaction or

dissatisfaction are the *vedanākhanda*. There's another act of perception, and mind consciousness arises, then the *sankhārakhandha* arises to consider what to do about the taste, what to do if it's satisfying, what sort of effort to make, how to buy it, and so on, following which arise various activities.

Now, touches, those things that impact the body surface. The body is the inner aggregate of form and has a nervous system, the touches that come to impact it are the outer form aggregate, when they impact then the consciousness aggregate arises to clearly know via the nervous system about the thing impacting the body surface, which involves the *viññānakhandha*. There's *saññā* to recollect, to recognize what's impacting, or touching the skin, then arise feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which is the *vedanākhanda*, then *saññā* contacts once more, mind consciousness experiences the subsequent feelings, and there's the *sankhārakhandha*, there's thinking about the touch, about what *saññā*, what perception labels it as being, more than usual thinking will occur if sex is involved, because then there will be more meaning. The *sankhārakhandha* thus does a lot of thinking until action of some sort comes about.

Now we come to the last one: *dharmāramana*, mind objects, and the mind. This one is different because it's not form, it's mind, *nāma*, but it must depend on form, must rely on the *rūpakhandha*. All mind objects come from forms, smells, sounds, tastes, and touches which have already happened and which are thought about and felt again, so although there's a new feeling it's arising from a past event. Hence there's the form aggregate coming from the past to be a present object of *mano*, a present mind object, although it's *nāma* it derives from some past *rūpakhandha*, then comes consciousness, *viññāna*, to know the object, then *saññā* to recognize it, to label it, perceive it as being this or that, with this or that meaning, then arise feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, then *saññā* operates again, and mind consciousness contacts the consequent the feelings being experienced, after which occurs thinking, the *sankhārakhandha*, and any deliberated activity.

This is different from the *rūpakhandha* where the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, meet their objects in present time, but when it's a matter of *mano* the mind's objects come from the past, from a past *rūpakhandha*, even so the complete aggregate of form will still be involved.

Let's sum up: The aggregates will arise whenever any of the senses meet their objects, hence the inner and outer senses are important, the heart of Buddhism, and should be understood, if we don't understand them we'll see them as 'self' instead, and must experience *dukkha*, if, however, we can contact their 'not-self' quality then we'll be in accord with Buddhism, and without *dukkha*. So, review it again and again, examine it step by step: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind, how do each of the senses give rise to the five aggregates.

Now, how do the *upādānakhandhas*, the 'clinging aggregates' arise? The aggregates as they are in Nature, how do they become the clinging aggregates? It's because ignorance, *avijjā*, lets clinging arise, clinging to the aggregates as being 'me,' then it's no longer a natural affair. Originally it is natural, it's just the aggregates operating as in Nature, but then ignorance, which comes from the *saññākhandha*, causes the feeling that 'I' am the 'doer' to arise.

Excessive selfishness is the cause of *dukkha*. Know that the five aggregates arise when any of the six senses do their duties, but that ignorant clinging then comes in and turns the aggregates into a 'me' and 'mine' affair. As with this body: when it does anything the body is taken to be 'me,' what it does, the 'doing,' is taken to be 'mine.' *Atta* is 'me,' *attaniya* is 'mine.' If anyone wants to remember the *Pali* then remember these two words: *atta* which means 'me,' and *attaniya* which means 'mine,' as when taking the body to be 'mine' in dependence on ignorance being present and something we meet with provoking a certain kind of thinking. We can think of this body as being 'me,' or we can think of it as being 'mine,' whatever, it leads to the same result, to *dukkha*.

As long as there's no clinging it's just the aggregates as they are in Nature, when there's clinging they become the 'clinging aggregates.' If the feelings of 'me' or 'mine' haven't yet arisen then it's still just the aggregates without any additional meaning, there's the appropriate form of *dukkha* but it's not the distressful variety. When there's 'me' and 'mine' then things become heavy, then there's pressure, there's biting, there's heat, there's *dukkha* of the distressful kind. Hence, when it's just the aggregates there's just that *dukkha* which is their natural characteristic, but the clinging aggregates bring the *dukkha* of distress, of dis-ease.

We'll consider this a little more: the eye sees a form, arises the *rūpakhandha*, but then ignorance also arises so that it's 'me' who sees the form, which is very different, if there's just the feeling of the eye seeing the form then it's not about 'me,' but in this case it is 'me' seeing the form. On the ear hearing a sound it's 'me' who does the hearing, when the nose smells, which it does naturally, then it will be 'me' who does the smelling, then there arises the meaning of something being 'mine,' which can be very troublesome. The tongue tastes but it's not the tongue tasting a flavour, it's 'me,' the body receives a touch, but it's not the body receiving the touch, it's 'me,' and the mind experiences a mind object but it's 'me' who experiences it.

Remember these words '*khandha*' and '*upādānakhandha*,' at first there's no clinging, and no biting, then the clinging aggregates arise, we get bitten, and there's *dukkha*. Come to know the difference between the aggregates and the clinging aggregates.

If we really see this then we'll know in ourselves that there isn't a 'me,' neither is there a 'mine,' it's all just Nature, but when there's ignorance, *avijja*, then there's clinging, *upādāna*, and the feeling of being 'me' or of something being 'mine' appears, the aggregates then change from being just the aggregates into the clinging aggregates and there's biting, when it's just the aggregates operating that doesn't happen. So remember that when it's still just the aggregates there's no biting, no *dukkha*, while on the arising of the *upādānakhandas*, the 'clinging' aggregates, we get immediately bitten, things become heavy. Here, consider, for a moment, a stone: a stone, when it's lying on the ground isn't heavy, but when it gets picked up and carried around it becomes so. In the same way, these aggregates, if they're just the aggregates, aren't heavy, but if they become 'me' then they are, because then they have to be borne with, have to be carried around.

Sometimes Pali words invite doubt, usually when some poetic intent is involved, as when the aggregates are mentioned but the 'clinging aggregates' are actually implied. If language is used poetically then the words will be arranged for the sake of euphony, it's then that the aggregates can actually mean the 'clinging aggregates.' Take, for instance, something we (Monks) chant every day: *bharahavepancakhanda*, which means: 'the five aggregates are heavy loads.' These are the clinging aggregates, not just the aggregates, and are 'heavy' because of being clung to as 'mine.' *Bharahavepancakhanda* - the five aggregates are heavy loads; *bharaharocapuggalo* - the person clings to them as 'me' and

has to bear their weight; *bharadanamdukkhamloke* - carrying such weight is *dukkha*; *bharanikepanamsukham* - tossing away that weight is bliss. It was the Buddha who cast off all that weight, didn't pick up any more, and thus quenched *dukkha* completely. There's poetic useage involved here, because whilst only the aggregates are mentioned, the clinging aggregates are being implied. Remember this, otherwise there might be confusion.

The same thing happens with the word '*dukkha*,' which sometimes means the characteristic of being *dukkha*, which is the form that doesn't bite, and sometimes means the form that does bite, which oppresses, which scorches the mind. Hence *dukkha* can indicate the characteristic of being *dukkha*, the sort which doesn't bite, the *dukkha* which is everywhere, even trees and stones display it, but can also refer to the *dukkha* which does bite.

Now, the 'self' is an illusion based on a misunderstood instinctual sense. The 'self' is an illusion, not a reality, ignorance, the defilements, craving and clinging, create it. A child, when born from the Mother's womb, doesn't know anything; the Buddha said as much, the child when it emerges from the womb doesn't have knowledge of deliverance of the mind through wisdom, which means that the child in the womb and at the time of its birth doesn't know about *dukkha* and its quenching, hence it must let life go along as it will, and must, therefore, fall into the sort of thinking that will be *dukkha*, because it must, sooner or later, take that instinctual sense of 'self' to be 'me.'

It's necessary that we know that at birth there's just instinctual knowledge, of how to feed, and so on, and, eventually, how to procreate, which is naturally arisen knowledge, there's also instinctual knowledge of 'self,' there's an instinctual sense of 'self,' it's natural that life includes a survival instinct, a basic feeling of being 'self,' if that wasn't so there'd be no struggle for survival: trees struggle to survive, animals struggle to survive, human beings struggle to survive because of this instinctual sense, otherwise there'd be no struggle for life, in fact there'd be no life, no possibility of sustaining life. This 'self' sense is the necessary basis on which the preservation of life depends, but there's the problem of it being clung to as 'me,' it's then that the mind gets bitten. Thus it's necessary to know that this instinct isn't really 'me' at all, that just happens because

of ignorance, so, change the ignorant ‘self’ into a wise ‘self,’ build knowledge until we know that this ‘self’ isn’t really ‘me’ at all, it’s the ‘self’ which isn’t a ‘self,’ it’s not-self.’ We’ve arrived at the scientific age, the present age is the age of the atom, of science, in which Nature is becoming more and more clearly understood. We can understand *anattā*, understand this ‘not self’ phenomenon, in a scientific way too, to that end we’ll take an example for study, one we’ve already looked at so that we’ll be, to some extent, repeating ourselves: a knife cuts into a finger, if we look at that scientifically then we’ll say that one kind of element, or one kind of *rūpākhandha*, that is, the knife, passes through another element, or, another *rūpākhandha*, that is, the flesh, and the flesh being equipped with a nervous system, feels it. If looked at in this way then it’s just Nature cleaving Nature, there’s no knife and there’s no finger either, we assume that there’s a knife and a finger, but in reality there’s only that Nature we call ‘knife’ cleaving through another Nature we call ‘flesh,’ or ‘finger.’ Looked at scientifically then it’s one kind of Nature cleaving through another kind. If we were to follow the usual understanding then it would be a knife cutting a finger, but even then it still wouldn’t be cutting ‘me.’ However, all ignorant people would say that the knife has cut ‘me,’ they’ll feel that the knife has cut ‘me,’ because they’ll feel that they are ‘me.’ They’ll see the knife as being a ‘self’ too, so, as a response, they might throw the knife down, try to break it, to damage it, to punish it in some way, which would mean that the knife had acquired the meaning of being a ‘self,’ the ‘self’ which has cut ‘me.’ Ignorance extends that far. Letting the knife become a ‘self,’ and even become ‘my’ enemy, doesn’t represent knowledge.

We practice to be able to see that it’s Nature, it’s the aggregates, the elements, it’s the iron element cleaving through the flesh element, it’s not ‘me’ doing the cutting.

This is something we really need to know, that the aggregates aren’t ‘me,’ whenever they’re taken to be so then there’s biting, much biting, cling to anything as ‘mine’ to whatever extent and there’s the appropriate *dukkha*. If the knife cuts the finger there’s just the basic *dukkha*, but if the knife cuts ‘me’ it’s as if the knife cuts into the heart. Be careful, don’t let it go that far. The Buddha mentioned the example of the two arrows: when an arrow pierces the body it just hurts, but if we think it’s piercing ‘me’ then it hurts much more. If a knife cuts the hand, don’t let it be ‘me’ who gets cut, see it as

being just elements doing their natural duties, one element cleaving through another element possessed of a nervous system which allows it to feel.

We can sum this up in these words: '*sankitena pancupādānakhandā dukkha*,' which means that the five aggregates mixed with clinging are *dukkha*, ergo, if there's no clinging there's no *dukkha* either, if the aggregates aren't clung to as 'me' or as 'mine' then it's just a knife cutting into flesh, it's not 'my' concern so it's not *dukkha*. But, because of ignorance, it doesn't feel like that, it's the knife cutting 'me,' and 'I' might die as a consequence.

The Buddha said that removing the perception of 'self' is the highest *sukha*, the ultimate happiness. This 'ultimate' happiness isn't happiness of the everyday sort, which is a deceptive form of the genre arisen because of clinging to the idea that it's me who's comfortable, who's delighted, who's stimulated. The highest happiness isn't like that, it's above both *sukha* and *dukkha*. Take out the 'self' perception and there'll be genuine happiness as a result. If we still don't have real knowledge of the aggregates then getting rid of the 'self' percept can't be done and there must be *dukkha*. So, understand the aggregates properly, stop turning them into 'me' and 'mine.'

So, to sum up: the five aggregates are most important in that they either do or don't allow *dukkha* to arise; if we don't understand them properly there must be *dukkha* over and again because there'll be clinging to them, to forms, feelings, perceptions, thinking and consciousness, now by way of the eye, by way of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, now by way of the mind. If, however, we have proper knowledge then we'll know them as being 'just like that,' as just natures, as just appropriate reactions arising from sense experience, and not 'me' or 'mine,' then there won't be any undue *dukkha*. That would be the result of having acquired knowledge and of being able, therefore, to defend against the arising of clinging. Hence, paraphrasing the Buddha: the five aggregates mixed with clinging are *dukkha*, clinging to the aggregates as 'me' or 'mine' is *dukkha*, don't carry on like that and *dukkha* there won't be.

So, we want to let everyone know that the most important thing in Buddhism is the fact that the aggregates aren't 'self,' aren't 'me,' which is a very brief statement, how many words is that: the aggregates are not 'me'? just five or six, but that's the heart of Buddhism. Think about the five aggregates, about form, feeling, perception, thinking,

and consciousness, about them arising all the time, by day and by night, every time we do anything. When the eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour, the body receives a touch on the skin, the mind thinks about anything, then the aggregates must arise, in this, that, or the other ways, and continually, and, whenever they're taken to be 'me' they bite and there's *dukkha*.

Acquire sufficient knowledge of the aggregates, have enough mindfulness and clear comprehension, then, when they arise, don't allow them to become the clinging aggregates, maintain them as just the aggregates and they'll quench away, they'll arise and they'll quench away. When the clinging aggregates arise they bite us: a child's arrow doesn't cause much pain, but if it's a poisoned arrow then it can kill, or can almost kill. It's the same with the aggregates, if they aren't mixed with the poison of clinging to 'self,' then they don't do any real damage.

Recently someone came to give a big packet of Durian jam in order to make merit, and to help them mend a broken leg and get rid of the pain quickly. Think about that: making merit to mend a broken leg? I told them that they should make use of the Buddha's medicine by acknowledging the fact that the broken leg isn't 'yours,' 'you' aren't the owner of the leg, then the problem will be gone immediately. That's the magic of *anattā*; it can take care of every kind of illness, not just the physical, but the mental too. So, use the medicine of *anattā* to take care of any and all illnesses, no matter what, be they bodily or mental, treat them with *anattā*, cure them by seeing the truth.

Or, cure them through seeing *tathatā*, 'just like that,' whatever arises keep it to being 'just like that,' just what it is, don't let it become a 'me' and 'mine' affair then it will gradually dissolve away and there'll be no *dukkha*. It sounds like a joke: '*tathatā*,' 'just like that,' but this is the highest truth the Buddha had to teach: see *tathatā*, see 'thusness,' see things as they really are, then we'll be *tathāgata* (Buddha).

Basically the five aggregates are what live life. There's a body and a mind, the mind being divisible into four, so there are five aggregates, this is the life which we still barely understand, we know just the feeling of being the 'me' who's alive, who eats, etc., we cling to life and it bites us. So don't cling to being alive, don't cling to the five aggregates, then there won't be any biting, everything will be fine, any pain in the legs

will just be in the legs, in the hand it will just be in the hand, or, better, in the elements,
then the matter will be at an end.