

(Dve) Khandhā Sutta

The Discourse on the Aggregates (Two Types)

[The aggregates are the limits of our being]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 22.48/3:47 f)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

[An integrated introduction to the five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) has been done in **the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta**,¹ which should be studied before going into 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. 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 the rest of existence. **Lily de Silva**, in her paper, “Self-identification and associated problems,” gives a very apt contemporary simile for how we view ourselves in terms of the five 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 identified 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)

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 fourth simile is especially relevant here as it refers to name (*nāma*) and identity (*saṅkha*):

And, bhikshus, just as as those great rivers, that is to say, the Gangā, the Yamunā, the Aciravātī, the Sarabhū, and the Mahī,² which, on reaching the great ocean, lose their former names and identities, and are reckoned simply as the great ocean, even so, bhikshus, those of these four 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-

¹ S 22.56/3:58-61 = SD 3.7.

² These 5 major rivers of the Ganges plain today are the Ganges, the Jumna, the Sarayu, the Ghāghra, the Raptī and the Gandak. The first 4 are respectively called Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarabhū, and Aciravātī in the Pali texts. The river Mahī or Mahā Mahī, is a 580-km (360-mi) river of western India which rises 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.

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 five aggregates work together without any 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 ocean. And yet the ocean is not different from the river waters. In the same way, we cannot identify with any or all of the aggregates, but they function together, giving us a false notion of a separate entity (“the ocean”). We will return to this river parable below [6].

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)

1.2 THE AGGREGATES: MEANING AND SEQUENCE. The aggregates (*khandha*) are so called because, amongst other things, an aggregate is a “heap” (*rāsi*). 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 four aggregates (S 22.48).⁴

Two discourses—the (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta Sutta (S 22.56) and the Satt-ṭṭhāna 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)

We, as living beings, are nothing more than the five 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 hoti saddo ratho hoti evaṃ khandhesu santesu hoti satto ti sammuti</i>	Just as by a putting together of parts there is the sound [word] “chariot,” even so when there are the aggregates, there is the convention, “being.”	(S 5.10/1:135) ⁸
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³ S 12.1/ 2:1 f. See **Dependent Arising** = SD 5.16(19c).

⁴ **Khandha S**, S 22.48/3:47 f.

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.

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, eg *dukkha-k, khandha* (M 1:192 f, 200 f; S 2:134, 3:93), *pañña-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 as 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).

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

- (1) *rupa* form;
- (2) *vedanā* feeling;
- (3) *saññā* perception;
- (4) *saṅkhāra* formations; and
- (5) *viññāna* 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.

Boisvert sees the logic of the traditional ordering of the five aggregates as mirroring the order of the links (*nidāna*) of the twelve-link dependent arising cycle, thus:¹⁰

<i>Nidāna</i>	<i>Khandha</i>
<i>viññāṇa</i>	<i>viññāṇa</i>
<i>nāma,rūpa</i>	All the 5 aggregates
<i>salāyatana</i>	<i>rūpa</i>
<i>phassa</i>	<i>rūpa</i>
<i>vedanā</i>	<i>vedanā</i>
	<i>saññā</i>
<i>taṇhā</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>
<i>upādāna</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>
<i>bhava</i>	<i>saṅkhāra</i>

A key point in Boisvert’s idea is that consciousness (*viññāṇa*), as the fifth aggregate, completes a cycle by going on to condition the first aggregate by allowing the arising of sense stimulation or “contact” (*phassa*). However, it should be noted that an important aspect of existence (*bhava*) includes the consciousness (*viññāṇa*). **Harvey** proposes a simpler explanation for the correlation between the links and the aggregates, thus:¹¹

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

⁹ Except in **Patta S** (S 1.4.26), where the sequence is modified due to the metre (*metri causa*): *rūpaṃ vedayitaṃ saññam | viññāṇam yaṅ 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 liberated of all mental fetters.

¹⁰ 1996:142.

¹¹ Harvey 1996:96.

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 six 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></p> <p><i>saṅkhāra</i></p> <p><i>viññāṇa</i></p>

1.3 THE AGGREGATES AND THE LATENT TENDENCIES. In the delightful **Aññatara Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 22.35), the Buddha gives a short teaching to a certain monk, thus:¹⁶

Bhikkhu, 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 form, then that is what one is.
 If one has a latent tendency towards feeling, then that is what one is.
 If one has a latent tendency towards perception, then that is what one is.
 If one has a latent tendency towards formations, then that is what one is.
 If one has a latent tendency towards consciousness, 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.

¹² *Cakkhuñ ca āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhu,viññāṇam, tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso, phassa,paccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato,-nidānam purisam papañca,saññā,saṅkhā samudācaranti atītānagata,paccuppannesu cakkhu,viññeyyesu rūpesu.* A similar passage is found in **Pariññā S** (S 35.60) where, however, the wise noble disciple becomes revulsed (*nibbin-dati*) at the contact arising from sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness (also using the sentence, *tinnam saṅgati phasso* [16]), and as such “becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*); through dispassion, he is liberated (*vimuccati*); through liberation, he understands, ‘Clinging has been fully understood by me.’” (S 35.60/4:32 f). See further SD 6.14 Intro (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).

¹⁴ This verse up to here is also found in (**Samuday’atthaṅgama**) **Loka S** (A 12.44/2:71-73) and (**Sabb’upā-dāna**) **Pariññā S** (S 35.60/4:32 f) in different contexts.

¹⁵ *Papañca,saññā,saṅkhā*, see Intro (3).

¹⁶ *Yaṃ kho bhikkhu anuseti tena saṅkham gacchati. Yaṃ nānuseti na tena saṅkham gacchati.*

The verbal phrase, “(it) lies latent” (*anuseti*), refers to the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), often listed as seven, 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).¹⁷ **The Pahāna Sutta** (S 36.3) gives the basic list of three latent tendencies, namely, the latent tendencies to lust, to aversion, and to ignorance.¹⁸

The Aññātara Bhikkhu Sutta (S 22.35) Commentary says that if one has a latent tendency toward form by way of sensual lust, etc, 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 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)

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 for the support for consciousness, in these words:¹⁹

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]²⁰ 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. 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 five 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>
the clinging aggregate of formations	<i>saṅkhār’upādāna-k,khandha,</i>
the clinging aggregate of consciousness	<i>viññāṇ’upādāna-k,khandha.</i>

¹⁷ 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’aṭṭhena*, SA 3:137). The Porāṇa Ṭikā adds it “has gained strength” by being firmly attached to a being’s mental continuum (*satta,santāne thīra,bhāvūpagamana,-bhāvena*, SAPṬ:VRI 2:122).

¹⁸ S 36.3/4:205 = SD 31.1.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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) and **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:24). See Intro (4) for more details.

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

The five aggregates are also the “fuel” (*upādāna*),²¹ 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 at any one and say that *that* is “me.”

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, he is referring to dependent cessation: “with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance, . . . the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering” (S 12.1).²² It is this impersonal process that we (usually unwittingly) identify as life.

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 *tanhā*), 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.

(Brahmavaṃso 2003b:75)

By “granular” here, Brahmavaṃso means that dependent arising comprises of “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 reveal that the grains are really discrete particles (2003b:72 f).

2.2 NOT ALL AGGREGATES ARE UNWHOLESOME. In the Suttas, the five terms—*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*—are designated both as *khandha* (aggregate)²³ and as *upādāna-k, khandha* (aggregate of clinging).²⁴ The five terms are sometimes listed without any designation.²⁵ The (Dve) Khandhā Sutta (S 22.48)—the present sutta—distinguishes between two kinds of five aggregates:

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

The aggregates are considered as *upādāna-k, khandha* only when they are with mental cankers (*s’āsava*)²⁶ and subject to clinging (*upādāniya*).²⁷ The **Visuddhi, magga** quotes this Sutta in its discussion of the difference between the aggregates and the aggregates of clinging.²⁸ The key difference between the two is that the five aggregates of clinging are “with cankers and subject to clinging” (*sāsava upādāniya*). The

²¹ See (Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S (S 22.56) = SD 3.7 & Bhāra S (S 22.22) = SD 17.14 Intro (1).

²² S 12.1/2:1 f. See **Dependent Arising** = SD 5.16(19c).

²³ M 1:138; S 3:47, 66, 86, 101 = Vbh 1-61; Dhs, Vbh, Dhk passim.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ “Mental cankers,” *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 cankers of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (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 cankers (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 cankers is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

²⁷ S 22.48/3:47.

²⁸ Vism 14.214 f/477 f.

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

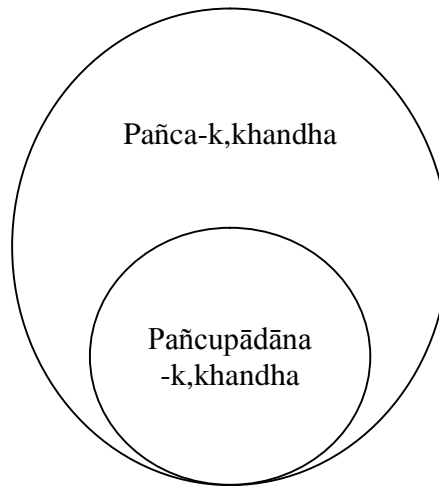


Fig 2.2. *Pañca-k,khandha* & *pañc’upādāna-k,khandha*

At first blush, it may seem that the “bare aggregates,” that is, the five aggregates in themselves, are those of the arhat, one who has destroyed the mental cankers (*āsava*)²⁹ and clinging (*upādāna*).³⁰ 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 cankers” (*sāsava*) and “with clinging” (*upādāniya*) (Dhs §§1103, 1219). The only aggregates classed as “without cankers” (*anāsava*) and without clinging” (*anupādāniya*) are the four mental aggregates occurring on the cognitive moments of the four supramundane paths and fruits (Dhs §§1104, 1220).³¹

It is important to understand the definition of the terms here: the phrase *sāsava upādāniya* does not mean “accompanied by cankers and by clinging,” but “capable of being taken as the objects of the cankers and of clinging,” and the arhat’s mundane aggregates can be taken as objects of the cankers and clinging by non-arhats (DhsA 347).³² As such, the (Dve) Khandha Sutta Commentary says:

Among the five aggregates, the form aggregate is of the sense-sphere, the other four aggregates are of the four planes [the sense-sphere, the form sphere, the formless sphere, the supra-mundane]. With cankers (*sāsava*) means that which becomes a condition for the cankers by way of object; and that can be clung to (*upādāniya*), too, that which what becomes a condition for clinging. (SA 2:270)

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

²⁹ “Mental cankers,” *āsava*. See above 2.2n.

³⁰ On *upādāna*, see (**Upādāna**) **Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56) = SD 3.7 Intro.

³¹ Academic scholars are not always clear on this point, as in Boisvert 1996:22, reviewed by Harvey 1996:92.

³² For a detailed study, see Bodhi 1976.

“Venerable sir, is that clinging the same as the five aggregates of clinging, or is it different from the five aggregates of clinging?”³³

“Bhikkhu, that clinging is neither the same as these five aggregates of clinging, nor is it different from the five aggregates of clinging. It is the desire and lust³⁴ for the five aggregates of clinging that is the clinging there.³⁵ (M 109.6/3:16 = S 22.82.6/3:100 f)³⁶ = SD 17.11

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 five aggregates, and because clinging cannot be altogether disconnected from the aggregates, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates (MA 2:359). The Sāmyutta Commentary on the same Sutta further explains:

“[C]linging is neither the same as these five aggregates of clinging”³⁷ because the aggregates are not merely desire and lust. It is said, “nor is it different from the five aggregates of clinging”³⁸ because there is no clinging apart from the aggregates either as conscent (*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 the remaining formless states [*arūpa, dhammā*, ie mental aggregates], except for craving, belong to the other four aggregates. Thus, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates as conscent. [Craving is excepted because it is what clings to the aggregates, and a mental factor cannot cling to itself.]³⁹ 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)

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

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

(S 22.121/3:167)

In other words, the aggregates themselves, too, act as their own fuel (*upādāna*).⁴⁰ As such, clinging (*upādāna*) is neither the same nor different from the aggregates. The aggregates, as such, are self-sustaining.

On a deeper level of wisdom, it is the five aggregates that are seen to constitute the first 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-p, pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), thus:

³³ As at **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.6/1:299 f). Cf **Sīla S** (S 22.122/3:168 f).

³⁴ “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 (quailfier + 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).

³⁵ *Yo kho bhikkhu pañc’upādāna-k, khandhesu chanda, rāgo, tañ tattha upādānan ti*, lit “Whatever, monk, is lustful desire in the five aggregates affected by clinging, that is the clinging there.”

³⁶ Cf 3:166 f.

³⁷ *Na kho bhikkhu tañ, ñeva upādānam te pañc’upādāna-k, khandhā ti*.

³⁸ *Nāpi aññatra pañcahi upādāna-k, khandhehi upādānan ti*.

³⁹ This is based on Bodhi’s n (S:B 1077 n140).

⁴⁰ On *upādāna* as “fuel,” see **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56) = SD 3.7 Intro (5).

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

birth is suffering,
 decay⁴¹ is suffering,
 [disease is suffering],⁴²
 death is suffering;
 grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair are suffering;⁴³
 to be with the unpleasant⁴⁴ is suffering;
 to be without the pleasant⁴⁵ is suffering;
 not to get what one desires is suffering,
 —in short, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. (S 56.11/5:421 = SD 1.1)

2.3 KHANDHA AND UPĀDĀNA. It is clear that the Suttas regard clinging as a characteristic of the aggregates. In the Suttas, we see 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)

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 (*tanhā*), and before existence (*bhava*) and birth (*jāti*) [Table 2.3].⁴⁶ Indeed, a number of *khandha* formulas in the Suttas link directly into the dependent arising chain at *upādāna*. In **the (Upādāna) Samādhi Sutta** (S 22.5), for example, the arising of the five 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.

⁴¹ *Jarā*, old age, aging.

⁴² Only in the Vinaya & Saṃyutta versions; not mentioned in Comys.

⁴³ Found in most MSS but not in Be and Ce.

⁴⁴ “The unpleasant,” *appiya*, also tr “what one loves not.”

⁴⁵ “The loved,” *piya*, also tr “what one loves.”

⁴⁶ See **(Kāya) Na Tumha S** (S 12.37) = SD 5.14 & **(Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2) = SD 5.15.

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)

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 blamed for it?’
23 He understands thus:
 ‘There is nothing in the world that I could cling to without being blamed for it.
 For, if I were to cling, it is only form that I would be clinging to, only feeling, only perception, only formations, only consciousness that I would be clinging to.
 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 28.9

Here we see the Buddha connecting clinging, which arises on the basis of the mere five 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)**:

24 “So, too, Māgandiya, if I were to teach you the Dharma thus:
 ‘This is that health; that 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 five aggregates of clinging might be abandoned. Then, this might occur to you:
 ‘Indeed, I have long been tricked, cheated, and fooled by this mind.⁴⁷ 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**” (*veva*) 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 stream-winning, 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.

⁴⁷ *Dīgha, rattam vata bho aham iminā cittena nikato vañcito paladdho.*

<i>phassa</i>	contact (sense-stimulus)
↓	
<i>vedanā</i>	feeling
↓	
<i>taṇhā</i>	craving
↓	
<i>upādāna</i>	clinging
↓	
<i>bhava</i>	existence
↓	
<i>jāti</i>	birth
↓	
...	

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

2.4 THE AGGREGATES IN THE ABHIDHAMMA. The early Abhidhamma texts also state that the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k, khandha*) is always considered to be with cankers (*s'āsava*) and subject to clinging (*upādāniya*). The only time when the four formless aggregates (feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) are not such, (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 term of a self), and then how only the body is sick, but not the mind (not regarding any of the aggregates in terms of a self).⁴⁸

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)

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

- (1) active clinging (*upādāna*),
- (2) subject to clinging (*upādāniya*), and
- (3) the product of clinging (*upādiṇṇa*).

Active clinging is confined to the aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*), especially as “basis,” “fuel,” or “food” for existence.⁴⁹ However, all the five aggregates are potentially subject to clinging (*upādāniya*): they conduce to, or are associated with, attachment, and have the characteristic of “feeding” existence.⁵⁰ Similarly, all the five aggregates are said to be in some way the products of clinging (*upa-*

⁴⁸ S 22.1/3:1-5 = SD 5.4.

⁴⁹ S 4:399, 400.

⁵⁰ S 2:84 = 87 = 92, 3:47, 167, 4:89.

diṇṇa): one tend to be attached to the aggregates, grasp at them, cling to them.⁵¹ In summary, then, the aggregates that is clinging evidently have the following range of characteristics:

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

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 Totality of the aggregates

3.1 THE AGGREGATES IN THE SUTTAS. There are at least four reasons, says **Bodhi**, why an examination of the five aggregates is crucial in the Buddha’s teaching (S:B 840):

- (1) The five aggregates are the ultimate referent of the first noble truth, that is suffering, as pointed in **the (Ariya,sacca) Khandha Sutta** (S 56.13).⁵² 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, 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 five aggregates.
- (4) Clinging is removed through wisdom, and the kind of wisdom needed is precisely clear insight into the real nature of the aggregates.

Early Buddhism as represented in the Nikāyas is concerned with “only suffering and the ending of suffering,”⁵³ that is to say, it is an experientially salvific teaching. To understand experience, one has to understand the five aggregates; for they are inseparably connected. In fact, the aggregates

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 five aggregates simultaneously serve the Buddha as a scheme of categories for analyzing human identity and for explicating the structure of experience.

(Bodhi, S:B 840)

3.2 THE TOTALITY FORMULA. The word *khandha* (Skt *skandha*) means, amongst other things, a heap or mass (*rāsi*). The five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) are so called because “they each unite under one lable 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.”⁵⁴ The formula is explained in detail in **the Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **the Visuddhi,magga**. Briefly, they are as follows:⁵⁵

“internal”	(<i>ajjhatta</i>)	=	physical sense-organs;
“external”	(<i>bahiddhā</i>)	=	physical sense-objects; ⁵⁶

⁵¹ S 3:114, 115; Vbh 44, 56, 67.

⁵² S 56.13/5:425 f.

⁵³ **Anuradha S** (S 22.86/3:119).

⁵⁴ S 22.48/3:47 f. Also **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59/3:66-68) = SD 1.2.

⁵⁵ Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7. See Gethin 1986:40 f.

⁵⁶ As regards the terms “internal” (*ajjhatta*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else

“gross”	(<i>oḷārika</i>)	= that which impinges (the physical internal and external senses, with touch = 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”).

“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).

As regards the terms “**internal**” (*ajjhatta*) and “**external**” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications:⁵⁷

- (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.”⁵⁸

Just as the body or the 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, hardness, 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.

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 as referring to this universe and any other universe.⁵⁹

Two suttas in the Khandha Saṃyutta—the **(Upadāna) Parivaṭṭa Sutta** (S 22.56)⁶⁰ and the **Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta** (S 22.57)⁶¹—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:

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.

⁵⁷ On “internal” and “external” as referring to “oneself” and “others” respectively, see SD 13.1 Intro (3.7a-g). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48.

⁵⁸ Boisvert, however overlooks these applications (1995:43, 47).

⁵⁹ 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).

⁶⁰ S 22.56/3:58-61) = SD 3.7. This sutta presents the aggregates in synchronic manner (within the same life).

⁶¹ S 22.57/2:61-65.

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

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

4 Name and form

The five 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 nondual 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** (mental proliferation) is used.⁶² 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**),⁶³ “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).

In the Buddha’s system, *rūpa* refers to the four great elements, both internal (as the body) and external (as another’s body and as nature).⁶⁴ The Pali 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*).⁶⁵ 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 four 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.”⁶⁶ It should be noted that in the Nikāyas *nāma,rūpa* does not include *viññāna* (consciousness), which is actually its condition, and the two are mutually dependent, like two sheaves of reeds leaning against one another.⁶⁷

In other words, when name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*) is correlated with the five aggregates, name is identified with the three name aggregates (*nāma-k,khandha*) of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and

⁶² See eg **Madhu,piṇḍika S**, M 18 = SD 6.14 Intro (2).

⁶³ S 12.19/2:24.

⁶⁴ See eg **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-12) = SD 3.11; also **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7/ 3:59) = SD 3.7 n (The four great elements).

⁶⁵ S 12.2.12/2:3.

⁶⁶ Harvey 1993:11 digital ed.

⁶⁷ See **Nala,kalapiya S**, S 12.67/2:114; also **Mahā Nidāna S** (M 12.21-22/2:63) = SD 5.17. See also S:B 48 & SD 5.17 Intro (5).

mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and form is identified with the aggregates of physical form (*rūpa-k,khandha*).⁶⁸ **The Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2)⁶⁹ gives this definition of name-and-form:

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

Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention—this is called name. And the four great elements and the material form derived from the four 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)

Form (*rūpa*), as seen here in the Vibhaṅga Sutta, is invariably defined as the four great elements (*mahā-bhūta*),⁷⁰ earth, water, fire, and wind (that is, extension, cohesion, heat/decay, and motion).⁷¹ Consciousness (*viññāna*), although inseparably linked with the three mental aggregates, is not included here as *it is the condition for name-and-form*.⁷²

6 True nature of the aggregates

The five 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:	<u>the physical organs</u> , or “bases or means,” through which the processes occur;
Feeling:	the level of <u>accepting, rejecting or ignoring</u> an experience;
Perception:	the level of <u>recognizing</u> an experience, that is, sorting it into a mental pigeonhole;
Formations:	the level of doing something about an experience, that is, <u>the karmic process</u> ;
Consciousness:	the level of simple <u>cognizing</u> , that is, the “naming” of experiences as entities or events, and the rudimentary dynamic undercurrent generated by the various mental processes.

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 five 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)

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

The five-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*). As such, it is, however, an incomplete model of awakening, unlike the four noble truths⁷³ or the twelve-link dependent arising.⁷⁴ The five aggregates as a model of awakening is only complete when it is reviewed, for example, in connection with three characteristics (*ti,lakkhaṇa*), that is, that the aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ See SD 5.11.

⁷⁰ **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-424) = SD 3.11, esp Intro (4); **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28/1:185-191) = SD 6.16, esp Intro (3); also D 1:214.

⁷¹ Vism 443; Abhs ch = Abhs:BRS 234-238, Abhs:SR 154 f, Abhs:WG 215-218.

⁷² On consciousness (*viññāna*), see SD 17.8a.

⁷³ See **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:420-424) = SD 1.1.

⁷⁴ See “Dependent arising” = SD 5.16.

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 near⁷⁵—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 1.2⁷⁶

The threefold not-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*)⁷⁷ or “factors of mental proliferation” (*papañca,dhammā*),⁷⁸ that is, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*), and are here applied to the five aggregates. An even shorter version, found in **the Mahā Hatthi,-padōpama Sutta** (M 28),⁷⁹ but applied to the four 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 three considerations represent, respectively, the three kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*) and of conceit (*māna*).⁸⁰

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!⁸¹

6 The word is not the thing

On a higher spiritual level, the parable of the five rivers (V 2:239) [1] flowing into the waters of the great ocean, refers to the breaking of social, personal, psychological and, one might say, *all* barriers, even religious ones. For 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.⁸²

If a religion is unable to rise beyond these limitations, they will always be bound by dogma and human weakness, creating God and gods in their own image, and inducing their followers and subjects to bow before them 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 one is really free to seek it. Reality is never in black and white: it is a colourful range of shades and hues. Those who pontificate that “if you are not with us are against us” fail to see even the grey areas between the black and white of reality, and are spiritually colour blind.

In **the Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20)⁸³ and **the Addhā Sutta** (It 53 f), the Buddha explains aggregates in a most profound way, relating them to how we think and create our own worlds:

46 *Akkheyya,saññino sattā*
akkheyyasmim patiṭṭhitā

Beings who perceive what can be expressed
 are stuck in what can be expressed.

⁷⁵ See (13) above.

⁷⁶ See also Prayudh 1995:53-60.

⁷⁷ MA 2:111, 225.

⁷⁸ Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f.

⁷⁹ Also at **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/ 3:94-99) = SD 6.16 Intro (5).

⁸⁰ Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f).

⁸¹ Based on a comment by Brahmavamso made in his group study of **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109), Perth, 25th July 2004.

⁸² See **Language and Discourse** = SD 26.11.

⁸³ In this sutta, the stanzas (S 46-47) are addressed to an unnamed yaksha.

*akkheyyam apariññāya
yogam āyanti maccuno.*

Not having fully understood what can be expressed,
They go⁸⁴ under the yoke of death.

47 *akkheyyañ ca pariññāya
akkhātaram na maññati
tam hi tassa na hoti ti
yena nam 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.⁸⁵
(S 46 f/1.20 /1:11,23; cf It 3.2.4/53 f)⁸⁶

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

— — —

⁸⁴ “They go,” *āyanti*, pres 3 pl of *āyati*, 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 sañkamati ~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.

⁸⁵ 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).

⁸⁶ 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 | sañkhāya sevī dhammaṭṭho | sañkham 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 (*sañkha*) | (but) one accomplished in true knowledge cannot be reckoned”). See **Pubba Sambodha S** (S 35.13) = SD 14.9 for more details.

The Discourse on the (Two Kinds of) Aggregates

(S 22.48/3:47 f)

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

The five aggregates

- 4 And what, bhikshus, are **the five 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 near:*⁸⁷ this is called the form aggregate.
- 6 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **feeling** there is...: this is called the feeling aggregate.
- 7 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **perception** there is...: this is called the perception aggregate.
- 8 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **formations** there are...: they are called the formations aggregate.
- 9 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, present, 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 five aggregates.

The five aggregates of clinging

- 11 And what, bhikshus, are **the five aggregates of clinging**?
- 12 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **form** there is, whether past, present, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, *with mental cankers,*⁸⁸ *subject to clinging:*⁸⁹ this is called the form aggregate of clinging.
- 13 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **feeling** there is,...with cankers, subject to clinging: this is called the feeling aggregate of clinging.
- 14 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **perception** there is,...with cankers, subject to clinging: this is called the perception aggregate of clinging.
- 15 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **formations** there are,...with cankers, subject to clinging: they are called the formations aggregate of clinging.
- 16 Bhikshus, whatever kind of **consciousness** there is, whether past, present, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, with cankers, subject to clinging: this is called the consciousness aggregate of clinging.
- 17 These, bhikshus, are called the five aggregates of clinging.

— evaṃ —

⁸⁷ 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 Intro 3.2.

⁸⁸ “Mental cankers,” *āsava*. See 2.2n above.

⁸⁹ “That is tainted, that can be clung to,” *sāsavaṃ upādānīyaṃ*.

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