

The Five Aggregates

(Panchupādanakkhanda)

The main purpose of all Buddhist teachings is to show the path of happiness or liberation. The Supreme Buddha kindly spent his whole life day and night during 45 years as a Buddha to point out the way of suffering and the way that leads to get rid of suffering. He, who wants to overcome suffering and achieve happiness, should know the process of suffering and its cessation.

First, the Buddha explains all kinds of sufferings in the primary level. They are birth (*Jati* - ජාති පද්ධතිය), aging (*Jara* - ජරා පද්ධතිය), sickness (*Vyadhi* - ව්‍යාධි පද්ධතිය), death (*Marana* - මරණ පද්ධතිය), union with what is displeasing (*Appiyasampayoga* - අප්පියයෝගී සම්පයෝගී පද්ධතිය), separation from what is pleasing (*Piyavippayoga* - පියවිප්පයෝගී විප්පයෝගී පද්ධතිය) and not to get what one wants (*Yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkham* - යම්පිච්ඡං න ලබති තම්පි දුක්ඛං). These are the unpleasant situations those we dislike in our life. When they come to our life, we suffer, worry, upset, lament or get angry. According to Buddhism, all of these sufferings depend on ignorance about five aggregates. That is why, finally, the Buddha says "In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering" (*Samkittenapancupadanakkhanda dukkha* - සංඛිත්තේන පඤ්චුපාදානක්ඛන්ධා දුක්ඛං). First seven things are not difficult to understand as suffering. Anybody, who is wise, can understand that they cause suffering. The especial reason of suffering that is never understood without a Buddha's advice is the nature of five aggregates.

The five aggregates are;

1. The corporeality group or matter (*Rupakkhanda*)
2. The feeling group (*Vedanakkhanda*)
3. The perception group (*Sannakkhanda*)
4. The mental- formation group (*Sankārakkhanda*)
5. The consciousness group (*Vinn ānakkhanda*)

Understanding of five aggregates leads to understanding of all suffering as it is. Matter means four fundamental elements and its 24 derived corporeal phenomena which depend on four primary physical elements. Feelings mean sensation which arises according to six senses. Perception which recognizes feelings also arises according to six senses. Mental formation means creating volitions according to six sense experience. Consciousness means knowing the experience.

According to Buddhism the five aggregates is all our experience in our whole life. These five things are discussed together because they cannot be divided. These five arise together and cease together. Therefore we get it as one. Buddhism says that the main reason of suffering is unknowing of these five aggregates and attachment or clinging to it. That is why Buddhism has discussed lots about this and how to overcome it. All Buddhist doctrines focus on understanding of five aggregates which causes to overcome suffering.

We get all experience in our life through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. We have no experience except through those six senses. If we have some sort of experience as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or knowing objects, it means five aggregates arise. When we see something, hear something, smell something, taste something, touch something or think of something, it means not only five aggregates arise together but they cease together at the moment.

According to the conventional truth there are persons, things etc., but according to the ultimate truth we have only these five things which is the world reality. This is also not permanent. Every moment it arises and ceases, but because of ignorance we think as they are permanent. When we experience something through our senses, we may think before we experience it was here and after experience it will remain. This misconception causes suffering. If a person can understand as it is, he can overcome suffering. To overcome suffering he has to develop mindfulness and wisdom.

Mindfulness can be divided into four as

1. Contemplation of matter (*Kāyanupassanā*)
2. Contemplation of feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*)
3. Contemplation of consciousness (*Cittānupassanā*)
4. Contemplation of mental formation (*Dhammānupassanā*)

When we concentrate our mind according to these four, we can understand the nature of our all experience about mind and matter as arising and disappearing. With concentrated mind we can reflect all things as impermanent, suffering and egoless. Then we can decrease the attachment, clinging, craving or desire about the world. And gradually we can overcome anger and delusion too. This real understanding causes to get rid of suffering. It means we are on the way of real happiness which is the bottom line in our lives. Buddhism explains this message to all persons in every level, because this is the most important topic in Buddhism.

Understanding of the dependent origination (*Patīccasamuppāda*) depends on understanding of the five aggregates. If we have some sort of experience through our

senses, it means five aggregates arise together and they cease together at the same moment. It is instant. As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. This is the highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence. If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. When we experience through our senses about the world, these five aggregates arise together. They can't be separated. As the result of arising these five things, we have an experience. These five aggregates suddenly arise and also cease instantly. When we experience something, they have not only arisen but ceased also. When we experience something through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue or body, these five senses can't get pleasure or pain. As soon as those experiences ceased instantly, we get pleasure or pain in the sense of mind as a past experience. However, we think that we experience in the present because of ignorance. That is why we suffer. If we can understand that these five aggregates arise and cease at the moment with the condition, we are able to understand its impermanence. Then we know we have nothing to desire or hate. It means we have overcome suffering. As much as we have this understanding and reflecting on it in every moment, we have liberated from unsatisfactoriness.

As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence" (Ahutvā sambhutam hutvā na bhavissati - අනුත්වා සම්භූතං නුත්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. This is the main teaching that the Buddha realized, discovered and preached to the world to get rid of suffering. The Buddha has explained this theory in various ways in his teachings like this;

When this is, that is (*Asmin sati idam hoti*)
 This arising, that arises (*Imassa Uppādā idam uppajjati*)
 When this is not, that is not (*Asmin asati idam na hoti*)
 This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*)

Understanding of Buddhism depends on how far we have understood this theory, the dependent origination. If someone has clear knowledge, he is knowledgeable about suffering. Understanding of suffering causes us to understand the four noble truths. If someone knows suffering as lack of knowledge of this theory, listening to what the

Buddha taught he tries to understand the dependent origination, five aggregates and four noble truths as much as he can. And also he always tries to practice the path to get rid of suffering. Here he has to practice three disciplines. They are;

1. Virtue (*Seela*)
2. Tranquility (*Samādhī*)
3. Wisdom (*Paññā*)

First of all, he disciplines his physical and verbal actions with the knowledge of the dependent origination. Having a good discipline in speech and behavior, he gradually trains his mind in tranquility by practicing concentration meditation. Because of his clear knowledge about the process how suffering arises with concentrated mind, he reflects on impermanence. Here he always reflects on arising and ceasing of the five aggregates. As far as he examines this impermanence, his ignorance gradually decreases. Simultaneously, arising of other parts of dependent origination of his life also decreases. As the result of practicing this path, suffering gradually decreases. He always tries to live with virtue and concentration, seeing insight as impermanence. Also, he is aware of the present moment. This is the way how ignorance ceases and other phenomena with ignorance gradually decrease.



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

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