

# Aggregates and Clinging Aggregates

## (*Khandhā/Upādānakkhandhā*)

### Part I

The Buddha's Teaching is concerned with a single problem, the problem of *dukkha* or suffering, and the task it imposes is likewise of a single nature—the task, namely, of bringing *dukkha* to an end.

In the standard formulation of the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha defines the truth of *dukkha*, the first Noble Truth, thus:

“What, monks, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha? Birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair are *dukkha*; union with the unpleasant is *dukkha*, separation from the pleasant is *dukkha*, not to get what one wants is *dukkha*; in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*. This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha.” (DN 22)

The five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*) present a complete epitome of *dukkha*, both extensively by way of range and intensively by way of essence. Since this is so, we sometimes find that the formula for the first truth deletes the specific instances of *dukkha* and defines its subject matter directly as the aggregates:

“What, monks, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha? The answer is: the five aggregates of clinging; that is, the clinging aggregate of material form, the clinging aggregate of feeling, the clinging aggregate of perception, the clinging aggregate of volitional determinations, and the clinging aggregate of consciousness. This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha.”<sup>1</sup>

The five clinging aggregates, in their assemblage, constitute *sakkāya*, the “existing body” or empirical personality. Therefore, on the grounds that things, i.e. personality and *dukkha*, equal to

the same thing, i.e. the five clinging aggregates, are equal to each other, the structural formula of the four truths is occasionally stated in terms of *sakkāya* rather than *dukkha* (e.g. MN 44). Again, since all the five aggregates arise in connection with each of the six internal sense bases—the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and conceptual bases—the Noble Truth of Suffering may be explained as the six internal bases (*cha ajjhattikāni āyatanāni*, SN 56:14/S V 426).

In order to reach a proper understanding of the Buddha's Teaching, it is necessary to discover exactly what is meant by the five aggregates of clinging. For these are, as we see, *dukkha*, and it is just *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha* that the Buddha teaches. But our concern here is not to spell out in detail the content of each aggregate. That can readily be gleaned from the suttas, especially the *Khandhasaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*. Our concern, rather, is to determine what precisely is intended by calling the aggregates "the five clinging aggregates," and to see what implications this has for our understanding of *dukkha*. While such an investigation may appear initially as a trifling enterprise, just one more instance of scholastic hair-splitting raising an unnecessary cloud of dust, further thought will show that, to the contrary, an exact determination of the meaning of the term *pañcupādānakkhandhā* is of prime importance in arriving at a correct grasp of the Dhamma. For it is these aggregates, as the categories of *dukkha*, that provide the Dhamma with its irreplaceable point of departure, and their remainderless fading away and cessation that stands as its final consummation.

The take-off point for any inquiry into the significance of the term "clinging aggregates" will naturally be the import of the qualifying attribute "clinging" (*upādāna*). The word *upādāna*, an intensification of the noun *ādāna*, "taking," indicates a mental attitude of firm grasping or holding (*dalhagahaṇa*). When used as a prefix to form the compound term *upādānakkhandha*, it might

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1. SN 56:13/S V 425: *Katamañ ca bhikkhave dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Pañcupādānakkhandhā ti'ssa vacanīyaṃ, seyyathidaṃ rūpupādānakkhandho vedanupādānakkhandho saññupādānakkhandho saṅkhārūpādānakkhandho viññāṇupādānakkhandho. Idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ.*

first be taken to imply that each aggregate is a *form of clinging*, and hence that the five clinging aggregates are the aggregates which are modalities or activities of clinging. But an analytical breakdown of *upādāna* shows that not all the aggregates are forms of clinging, but only two components of the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, the aggregate of volitional determinations or mental formations. According to the *suttas* (MN 9) there are four types of clinging: clinging to sense-pleasures (*kāmuṇupādāna*), clinging to wrong views (*diṭṭhupādāna*), clinging to rules and observances (*śilabbatupādāna*), and clinging to a belief in self (*attavādūpādāna*). The first is a mode of the mental factor of greed (*lobha*), the latter three of the mental factor of wrong views (*diṭṭhi*).<sup>2</sup> Both these mental factors belong exclusively to the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. Hence to regard the aggregates as five forms of clinging cannot be correct.

As a second alternative, one might take the compound term “clinging aggregates” to mean “aggregates which are the abode of clinging.” In such a case one would then go on to identify the clinging aggregates with the aggregates of the non-arahat, in whom clinging in some form and to some degree is always present, at least dormant, while the aggregates of the arahat would become bare aggregates but not clinging aggregates, since the arahat has extinguished all clinging. Such a move would imply that the range of dukkha is to be circumscribed by the experience of the non-arahat, and the experience of the arahat to be left fully exempt from the category of dukkha. This interpretation has, at first glance, a presumptive plausibility, especially if dukkha is understood in the sense of experiential suffering; for the arahat, the *suttas* leave no doubt, has gone beyond the possibility of any experience of suffering except bare bodily pain, and even that arouses in him not antipathy. Nevertheless, this interpretation too is not correct. But before going on to examine the issue at a deeper level, let us first fix our definitions of terms.

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2. Dhammasaṅgaṇī (Dhs) §§ 1219–1223 (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana ed.).

The only sutta to our knowledge where two sets of aggregates are explicitly defined, (*not* contrasted, it should be observed), is the Khandha Sutta. The definitions of the two sets, in a condensed translation, are as follows:

(1) The five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*):

“What, monks, are the five aggregates? Whatever material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, consciousness there may be—past, present, or future, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—these are the aggregates of material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, and consciousness. These, monks, are the five aggregates.”

(2) The five clinging aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*):

“And what, monks, are the five clinging-aggregates? Whatever material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, consciousness there may be—past, present, or future, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, that are subject to the cankers, subject to clinging (*sāsavaṃ upādāniyaṃ*)—these are the clinging aggregates of material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, and consciousness. These, monks, are the five clinging aggregates.”<sup>3</sup>

Now because the five clinging aggregates are each individually instances of material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, and consciousness, they are each individually included *in toto* among the five aggregates, in their respective cat-

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3. SN 22:48/S III 47: *Katame ca bhikkhave pañcakkhandhā? Yaṃ kiñci bhikkhave rūpaṃ ... viññāṇaṃ atitānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā pañītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, ayaṃ vuccati rūpakkhandho (... viññānakkhandho). Ime vuccanti bhikkhave pañcakkhandhā. Katame ca bhikkhave pañcupādānakkhandhā? Yaṃ kiñci bhikkhave rūpaṃ ... viññāṇaṃ atitānāgata-paccuppannaṃ ... yaṃ dūre santike vā sāsavaṃ upādāniyaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati rūpupādānakkhandho ... viññāṇupādānakkhandho. Ime vuccanti bhikkhave pañcupādānakkhandhā.*

egories; that is, any material form comprised in the clinging aggregate of material form will necessarily also belong to the aggregate of material form, and so with the rest. But the fact that a differentiation is drawn between the two sets with the phrase *sāsava upādāniya* implies that a genuine difference in range I does exist: that there are, in other words, aggregates of each sort which are *anāsava anupādāniya*. These we may call “the bare five aggregates,” though we will see shortly that this phrase must be qualified in one respect. The question is then: what are these bare five aggregates? One might be tempted, in line with the interpretation sketched above, to equate the bare five aggregates with the arahat’s aggregates in all his experience. But this is an equation which does not find support in a single sutta, and, moreover, even appears to be negated by at least one sutta passage, repeated in two consecutive suttas by the venerable Sāriputta:

“Even the arahat, friend Koṭṭhita, should wisely consider the five clinging aggregates as impermanent, suffering, a disease, a boil, a dart, a flaw, an affliction, as alien, disintegrating, empty, and not-self. For the arahat who has completed his task there is no higher achievement. But these practices, cultivated and developed, conduce to his pleasant abiding in the present state and to mindfulness and clear comprehension.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus the arahat, this text implies, is also composed of the five clinging aggregates. In what sense this is true we will soon see. Here we should note that the “pleasant abiding” referred to is not mundane *jhāna*, for that does not require prior insight work on the aggregates; nor is it the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*), for that cannot be achieved by every arahat whereas the text gives a general prescription. It is, rather, the special attainment, accessible only to the arahat, called the *arahattaphalasamāpatti*, the

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4. SN 22:122/S III 168: *Arahatā pi kho āvuso Koṭṭhita ime pañcupādānakkhandhā, aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato yoniso manasikātabbā. Natthi khvāvuso arahato uttari karaṇīyaṃ, katassa vā paticayo. Api ca ime dhammā bhāvitā bahulikatā diṭṭhadhammasukhavihārāya c’eva saṇvattanti satisampajaññāya ca.*

attainment of the fruit of arahatship, in which the world disappears and Nibbāna remains, yielding the arahat the experience of the bliss of emancipation, the taste of the deathless, even in the midst of this mortal world. And it is in this attainment, we will see, as well as in the other supramundane states of consciousness, that the clinging aggregates cease and the bare aggregates alone stand.

In order to discover the denotations of the two terms “the five clinging aggregates” and “the bare five aggregates” we must first determine the exact meanings of the two terms that distinguish them, *sāsava* and *upādāniya*. The latter term is used in the suttas in connection with the aggregates to mean “subject to clinging,” in the sense that the things they denote are capable of being taken as the objects of clinging or *upādāna*. For example, the *Upādāniya Sutta* says: “Material form, ... feeling, ... perception, ... volitional determinations, ... consciousness, monks is a state subject to clinging. The desire-and-lust for that, that is the clinging to it.”<sup>5</sup> The word *sāsava* is not, to our knowledge, used specifically in relation to the five aggregates in the suttas, except in the *Khandha Sutta*, but one may assume it to be the equivalent to *upādāniya* in terms of the *āsavas* or cankers; that is, to denote things capable of being taken as the objects of the *āsavas*. This assumption is borne out by the commentary to the above sutta. The commentary says: “*Sāsava*: a condition for the cankers as an object. *Upādāniya*: a condition of the same type for the clingings. The meaning of the term *sāsava* is a state occurring in conjunction with the cankers which take it as their object.”<sup>6</sup>

To find an exact and detailed breakdown of the two groups, *sāsava dhamma* and *upādāniya dhamma*, we must turn to the first book of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, which sets itself the special task of fully spelling out in terms of ultimate, actually existent states, the precise denotations of such technically

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5. SN 22:121/S III 167: *Rūpaṃ, ...vedanā, ... saññā, ... saṅkhārā, ... viññā-  
ṇaṃ upādāniyo dhammo, yo tattha chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānaṃ.*

6. Spk II 270: *Sāsavaṇ ti āsavānaṃ ārammaṇabhāvena paccayabhūtaṃ. Upādāniyaṇ ti tatheva ca upādānānaṃ paccayabhūtaṃ. Vacanattho panettha ārammaṇaṃ katvā pavattehi saha āsavehīti sāsavaṇ. Upādāttabban ti upādāniyaṇ.*

significant expressions. According to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (§ 594), all material form (*rūpa*) is *sāsava* and *upādāniya*, since all material form may become the object of the cankers and clingings. Thus the contents of the aggregate of form (*rūpakkhandha*) and the clinging aggregate of form (*rūpupādānakkhandha*) completely coincide. There is no bare aggregate of material form. When, henceforth, we speak of a “bare five aggregates,” it is only figurative, for there at most four aggregates which are *anāsava* and *anupādāniya*. But more important, according to the same work (§ 1108, 1225, 1467, 1555), the immaterial aggregates of the arahat which are resultant (*vipāka*) as well as active (*kiriya*) in the mundane sphere, either sensuous or jhānic, are also *sāsava* and *upādāniya*. This is so not in the sense that they are still pregnant with the cankers and clinging, for it is plain that all defilements are abandoned by the arahat, but in the sense that they can become the objects of the defilements of others. Any feeling, perception, volitional determination, or consciousness, internal or external (*ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā*), that can become the object of the cankers and clinging is *sāsava upādāniya*. And further, since all *sāsava upādāniya* aggregates are clinging aggregates (*upādānakkhandha*), this means that the arahat’s mundane experience is still five clinging aggregates, though of course no clinging will be found therein. There is actually no such thing as “one’s own aggregates” or “the aggregates of others,” differently classifiable according to the perspective. There are only aggregates internal and external, and all aggregates internal or external that can become objects of the cankers and clingings are to be classified as the five clinging aggregates. The bare aggregates, then, will be those aggregates which cannot become objects of the defilements either internally or externally. And what are those aggregates? They are, in the classification of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (§ 1109, 1226, 1468, 1556), the immaterial aggregates—feeling, perception, volitional determinations, and consciousness—of the supramundane states of consciousness, the ariyan paths and fruits; for these states of consciousness cannot be apprehended by a mind defiled with the *āsavas* and *upādāna* due to their sublime purity, a purity flowing from the absolute purity of their object, Nibbāna.

This point is not made explicitly in the suttas, but it is implied by a number of passages (MN 22, AN 9:9/A V 324, etc.) showing the inability of the gods to discern the consciousness of the arahat when he is in the *phalasangāhī*, as also by the texts urging the arahat to contemplate the unsatisfactoriness of the five clinging aggregates in order to withdraw from them and “abide pleasantly in this present state.” In the *Atthasālinī*, however, the commentary to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the issue is directly confronted. In order to explain why the Abhidhamma text classifies the mundane aggregates of the arahat as *upādāniya* and the aggregates of the noble paths, fruits, and Nibbāna as alone *anupādāniya*, the commentator writes: “Although the aggregates of the arahat who has destroyed the cankers become conditions for clinging in others, when they say, for example, ‘Our senior uncle the Thera! Our junior uncle the Thera!’ the noble paths, fruits, and Nibbāna are not grasped, misapprehended, or clung to. Just as a red-hot iron ball does not provide a resting-place for flies to settle, so the noble paths, fruits, and Nibbāna, due to their abundant spiritual sublimity, do not provide a condition for grasping through craving, conceit, and wrong views.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus the mundane aggregates of the arahat, no less than those of a worldling, pertain to the five clinging aggregates. The five aggregates will include all states, those subject to clinging and those not subject to clinging; the five clinging aggregates will include only those subject to clinging, i.e. the potential objects of clinging; and the “bare aggregates” will refer to the immaterial aggregates of the supramundane paths and fruits which elude the grasp of clinging.

It may be objected that our conclusion drawn from the Dhammasaṅgaṇī is contradicted by the Cūḷavedalla Sutta (MN 44), where we read in the Pali: *Yo kho āvuso Visākha pañcupādānakkhandhesu chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānaṃ*. This text one

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7. As 347: *Upādiṇṇattike kiñcāpi khīṇāsavassa khandhā ‘amhākaṃ mātulattothero amhākaṃ cūḷapituttothero’ti vadantānaṃ paresaṃ upādānassa paccayā honti, maggaphalanibbānāni pana aggahitāni aparāmaṭṭhāni anupādiṇṇāneva. Tāni hi, yathā divasaṃ santatto ayoguḷo makkhikānaṃ abhinisīdanassa paccayo na hoti, evameva tejussadattā taṇhāmānadiṭṭhivasena gahaṇassa paccayā na honti.*



might be tempted to translate: “The desire-and-lust that is in the five clinging aggregates, that is the clinging therein.” Such a translation, however, is quite incorrect and leads to a wrong construction of the meaning of the passage and consequently of the concept of *dukkha*. In Pali grammar the objects of desire are generally set in the locative case—whether nominal or pronominal—and this principle is exemplified in the above statement. It is not the desire-and-lust contained *within* the five clinging aggregates that is the clinging *therein*, (though clinging will surely be present at least incipiently in all non-arahats). Rather, it is the desire-and-lust *for* the five clinging aggregates that is the clinging *to* them. The Upādāniya Sutta cited above should be recalled, where it is said: “Material form ... consciousness is an *upādāniya dhamma*,” and *yo tattha chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānaṃ*, “the desire-and-lust for that, that is the clinging to it.” Clinging is not contained within the form, feeling, perception, and consciousness aggregates, but only within part of the aggregate of volitional determinations, the *saṅkhārakkhandha*. But the desire-and-lust *for* form, *for* feeling, *for* perception, *for* the volitions, *for* consciousness, that is the clinging *to* them. And each aggregate is itemized separately in relation to clinging, leaving no suspicion that a collective meaning (“the clinging within the set of five”) might be intended. Other suttas teach the same lesson with regard to other categories of states, as for example: *Cakkhum, bhikkhave, upādāniyo dhammo, yo tattha chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānaṃ*: “The eye, monks, is a state subject to clinging; the desire-and-lust for that, that is the clinging to it” (SN 35:110/S IV 89). Again, desire-and-lust, or clinging, is certainly not contained within the eye, but takes the eye as its object; and so with the remaining sense-faculties and their objects. In the same way, clinging is not necessarily contained within the five clinging aggregates, (though it very well may be), but it takes the five clinging aggregates, either internally or externally, as its object. The meaning of the phrase “there is no clinging apart from the five clinging aggregates” (*na pi aññatara pañcupādānakkhandhesu upādānaṃ*) is that there is no clinging that does not have the clinging aggregates as its objective reference.

Whatever can be clung to is classified within the five aggregates of clinging. Thence there is no contradiction between the designation of the arahat as five clinging aggregates and the recognition of his freedom from clinging: the term “five clinging aggregates” denotes the aggregates that provide the objective range for clinging, not the aggregates that contain clinging.<sup>8</sup>

## Part II

The conclusion reached above—that the five clinging aggregates are to be construed as the potential objects of clinging rather than as the abode of clinging—paves the way to a correct understanding of the statement of the first Noble Truth: “in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*.” The Four Noble Truths are formulated with a specific purpose in view. They are taught as a practical and deliberate course of instruction designed to lead onward, by the very pattern of their arrangement, to the achievement of a particular end. The end they are designed to lead to is the end of the Buddha’s Dispensation itself—disenchantment, detachment, cessation, peace, comprehension, enlightenment, and Nibbāna.<sup>9</sup> Now, the primary impediment to the realization of Nibbāna is craving (*taṇhā*). In the metaphorical language of the suttas, craving is the seamstress that binds the evolving consciousness to the round of repeated existence, obstructing the entrance to the courseway to liberation. To reach deliverance, therefore, craving must be abandoned. When craving intensifies, it turns into clinging (*upādāna*), which springs up and thrives upon an objective field provocative of clinging. This objective field, potentially identical with the mundane world in its totality, can be classified for pedagogical purposes into five basic categories, namely, the five aggregates of clinging. To remove

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8. See Vism XIV.215: “Aggregates that are the resort of clinging are aggregates of clinging” (*upādānagocarā khandha upādānakkhandhā*), translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification*, (Kandy, 1975), p. 543.

9. See e.g., MN 63/M I 431: *‘Idaṃ dukkhan’ti. ... ‘ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā’ti. ... etaṃ ... nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati.*

clinging, and its underlying root, craving, the mind must be made to turn away from the objective field of clinging. Such an inward revulsion can only come about when the objective field of clinging, always beckoning with the lure of gratification, is seen in true perspective, as essentially suffering. Thence the Buddha's reduction of the mundane world to the five aggregates of clinging, and the equation of the aggregates themselves with dukkha.

The Buddha's aim, then, in formulating the first Noble Truth in the way stated is to lead people to deliverance by getting them to put away craving for all things capable of arousing craving, that is, for the five aggregates. The *puthujjanā*, the common people of the world, are impelled by their desire and false thinking to perceive pleasurableness in the aggregates, internal and external. Thence, with their perception, thought, and outlook twisted by the perverse apprehension of pleasure in what is truly suffering, they relish the aggregates and cling to them with desire-and-lust. Through their clinging they generate a chain of *kammic formations* that fetters them to the round of repeated births, and entering into birth they reap all the suffering consequent upon birth.

“When one dwells, contemplating gratification in things subject to clinging (*upādāniyesu dhammesu assādānupassino viharato*), craving increases; conditioned by craving, clinging comes to be; conditioned by clinging, existence; conditioned by existence, birth; conditioned by birth, decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering. It is just as if, monks, a great mass of fire were to be blazing upon ten, twenty, thirty, or forty loads of fire-wood, and a man were from time to time to throw upon it dry grass, cowdung, and logs. That great mass of fire, with such nutriment, with such a stock of fuel, would continue blazing for a long, long time.” (SN 12:52/S II 84)

In order to help the common people get free from this mass of suffering, the Buddha must induce them to give up their desire for the objects provocative of desire with which they are enthralled; for it is this desire—craving nourished by ignorance—that turns the wheel of the round. To get people to

give up desire, the Buddha points out that the things they take to be pleasurable, i.e. the five clinging aggregates, are really unpleasurable, dukkha, when seen with right understanding as they really are—as impermanent, insecure, perilous, masterless, coreless, and egoless. Whatever can be seized upon with desire as pleasurable must now be contemplated with insight (*vipassanā*) as unpleasurable. Thus the five aggregates which are the range of clinging are also defined, implicitly in the suttas and explicitly in the commentaries, as the aggregates which are the soil of insight.<sup>10</sup> When the people to be guided hear the Dhamma, acquire faith, undertake the training, develop insight, and reach the noble path, they see with right view for themselves that all the objects of desire, potential and actual, are dukkha. Equipped with this right view, they are able to cut through their confusion, extinguish the fire of craving, and achieve deliverance from birth-and-death.

“But when, monks, one dwells contemplating the unsatisfactoriness in things subject to clinging (*upādānīyesu dhammesu ādīnavānupassino viharato*), craving ceases. With the cessation of craving, clinging ceases, with the cessation of clinging, existence, ... birth, ... decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering. It is just as if, monks, a great mass of fire were to be blazing upon ten, twenty, thirty, or forty loads, of firewood, and nobody would throw dry grass, cowdung, and logs, upon it from time to time. That great mass of fire, due to the exhaustion of its original stock of fuel and the non-acquisition of any more fuel, devoid of nutriment, would be extinguished” (SN 12:52/S II 85)

Now, because the arahat’s mundane aggregates can be made into objects of desire-and-lust, they too enter into the five

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10. “The states subject to the cankers are designated the ‘clinging aggregates’ for the purpose of pointing out the soil of insight” (*vipassanābhū-misandassanattham pana sāsavā vā upādānakkhandhā ti*). *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, p. 229 (Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana ed.).

aggregates of clinging. They cannot be clung to by the arahat himself, for in the arahat all clinging has been uprooted, made of a nature never to arise again. But they can be clung to and evoke clinging in others. Only the immaterial aggregates of the supramundane states of consciousness, the ariyan paths and fruits, together with Nibbāna, cannot be taken as objects by the defilements: these, therefore, alone constitute the “bare aggregates.” The arahat’s aggregates in his mundane experience, however, are still five clinging aggregates. They are still *sakkāya* and still *dukkha*. They can no longer cause any mental sorrow or suffering in the arahat, for they are totally devoid of any subjective significance for him. But they remain *dukkha* for others in the sense that they can lead to suffering when held to with desire-and-lust, and for the arahat in the deeper sense that they are felt as inherently unsatisfactory compared to their temporary cessation in the *phalasaṃpatti*, when the arahat experiences the bliss of Nibbāna, and compared especially to their final cessation in the *anupādisesanibbānadhātu*, the Nibbāna-element without residue, when the aggregates will cease, never to arise again.

Thus the arahat understands that all the disturbances due to the *āsavas* have finally ceased for him; but a measure of disturbance (*darathamatta*), subjectively indifferent, continues, dependent only on the body with its six sense-faculties which remain intact until the end of his life-span (MN 121/M III 108). So long as the arahat remains alive, so long his sense-faculties operate and so long he experiences, by means of his sense-faculties, feelings that are pleasant, painful and neutral. But “whatever is felt, that is included in *dukkha*.”<sup>11</sup> The feelings are impermanent, and “whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*” (SN 12:32/S II 53). The great arahat disciple Sāriputta compares the oppression he feels from his own body to the oppression of snakes and corpses, and the maintenance of his body to that of fatty excrescences (AN 9:11/A IV 376). And the Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhammapiṭaka (Vibh IV,2, § 190/p. 98), in confirmation of

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11. MN 136/M III 208, SN 12:32/S II 53, SN 36:11/S IV 216: *Yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmin ti*.

our conclusion that the arahat's experience is still *dukkha*, incorporates the resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) aggregates which comprise the totality of the arahat's mundane experience in each one of its diverse expositions of the *dukkhasacca*. Thence when the arahat does pass finally away, one with right view understands: "Material form, feeling, perception, volitional determinations, and consciousness are impermanent. What is impermanent is dukkha. It is dukkha that has ceased, *dukkha* that has come to an end."<sup>12</sup> And the Buddha himself certifies the *parinibbāna* of the arahat disciples with the words: "He cut off craving, severed the fetters, and by fully penetrating conceit, he has made an end to dukkha."<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the arahat's mundane experience is also to be comprised within the range of dukkha implies that the term *dukkha* has a deeper, more difficult to grasp meaning than is suspected even by those who have overcome the hurdle of identifying dukkha with experienced suffering. The word *dukkha* seems to be used in four distinct yet intertwined senses in the suttas. In one sense it is physical pain, or painful feeling arisen through bodily contact, and as such is contrasted with *domanassa*, mental pain, or painful feeling arisen through mind contact. In a second sense *dukkha* embraces all unpleasant feeling, both physical and mental, *dukkha* and *domanassa*, as well as the broader experiences these feelings dominate—sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, etc. These first two senses together constitute *dukkha-dukkhatā* or experiential suffering. In a third sense *dukkha* indicates whatever is capable of issuing in suffering; that is, various things and experiences which, though pleasurable in their immediacy, may lead to suffering as their consequence, when they change or become otherwise. This is the meaning of *vipariṇāma-dukkhatā*, suffering due to change, which signifies not the suffering following upon change (this is already included under *dukkha-dukkhatā*), but the pleasurable experience itself, in

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12. SN 22:85/S III 112: ... *viññānaṃ aniccaṃ. Yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ; yaṃ dukkhaṃ taṃ niruddhaṃ tadatthaṅgatan ti.*

13. SN 36:3/S IV 205: ... *acchecchi taṇhaṃ, vivattayi saṃyojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisamayā antamakāsi dukkhassā ti.*

its concrete immediacy, as a potential source of suffering. The fourth—the deepest and most philosophical meaning of *dukkha*, completely divorced from any overtone of felt suffering whether actual or potential—is *dukkha* as inherent unsatisfactoriness. This is the *saṅkhāra-dukkhatā*, the *dukkha* that inheres in all the conditioned phenomena of mundane existence. This aspect of *dukkha* takes in all phenomena included in the three planes of becoming; it lays claim to the experience of the arahat no less than that of the worldling. *Dukkha* in this last sense is a philosophical, not a psychological, category. It is a world-embracing thought, the ultimate pronouncement made on the world of conditioned experience by one who has escaped from the world and gained access to the unconditioned. It is this meaning of *dukkha* that is intended by such statements as “all formations are *dukkha*,” “whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*,” “whatever is felt is included in *dukkha*,” and by the statement of the first Noble Truth: “in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*.” *Dukkha* here derives its significance entirely from its contrast with what is not conditionally produced, not impermanent, not subject to arising and passing away, i.e. with *Nibbāna*, the unconditioned element. That is why it is only the ariyan disciple who has seen *Nibbāna* for himself with the eye of noble wisdom, who can understand through direct penetration this last meaning of *dukkha*. For he alone has accessible to his vision a reality transcendent to the aggregates that are *dukkha* with which he can contrast them and see for himself that “in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha*.”

# **Investigating the Dhamma**

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# Abbreviations

Unless marked otherwise, all references to Pāli texts are to the editions published by the Pali Text Society. Canonical references are to sutta number, followed by volume and page of the Pali Text Society Pāli edition. In essay 7 these are in turn followed by title and page number of the translations of the “Teachings of the Buddha” Series of Wisdom Publications.

A	Aṅguttara Nikāya (PTS page number)
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya (Sutta number)
As	<i>Atthasālinī, Dhammasaṅgaṇī-aṭṭhakathā</i>
CDB	<i>Connected Discourses of the Buddha</i> (Bhikkhu Bodhi, Boston 2000)
D	Dīgha Nikāya (PTS page number)
DN	Dīgha Nikāya (Sutta number)
LDB	<i>Long Discourses of the Buddha</i> (Maurice Walshe, Boston 1995)
MLDB	<i>Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha</i> (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, Boston 1995)
M	Majjhima Nikāya (PTS page number)
MN	Majjhima Nikāya (Sutta number)
Mp	<i>Manorathapuraṇī, Aṅguttara-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>
NDB	<i>The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha</i> (Bhikkhu Bodhi, Boston 2012)
Paṭis	Paṭisambhidāmagga
Pp	Puggalapaññatti
PTS	Pali Text Society
SĀ	Saṃyuktāgama
S	Saṃyutta Nikāya (PTS page number)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya (Sutta number)
Sn	Suttanipāta (Verse number)
Spk	<i>Sāratthapakāsinī, Saṃyutta-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>
T	Taishō Chinese Tripiṭaka (CBETA edition)
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>