

Khandha — The Aggregates

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:48

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So the word is *khandha*. We'll do the *khandha*, which is the Buddha's way of understanding the psychosomatic, psychophysical organism. *Khandha*, K-H-A-N-D-H-A. It's translated as aggregate or heap.

So it's like concrete for instance. A bit of cement, a bit of sand, a bit of stone, a bit of water and it creates something solid. That's the point. We experience ourselves as solid entities, human beings. And what the Buddha was always doing is deconstructing our experience. So in dependent origination, he deconstructs it in a timeline as to how we create the world one moment after another. But in the aggregates, it's more like a slice, a slice of life. And if you look at the human being as a psychophysical organism, he divides it into these five parts. And over the next few weeks I'll go into the five parts in more detail.

So we do that with everything in the world. We create a concept, we have a designation, and we concretise things into things. So very simply, a tree. When you look at a tree, you see a tree. You call it a tree and you see it as a whole, as an entity, you might say. But we're well aware that the tree is made up of leaves, branches, and so on. And when you go into the leaves and branches and so on, you get molecules, and molecules you get subatomic particles, you just get energy. So it's that way of deconstructing things. But all that still remains is a concept. I mean science tells us that everything is just pure energy, but we don't experience it like that. We experience things as things, quite solid.

When you fall over and bang your head on a rock like I did, you don't think this is subatomic particles meeting subatomic particles. It's doing that. And the image that the Buddha uses as a way of, he's always using metaphors, is a cart. So in his day, a cart, it looks like a cart, but of course it's made up of wheels, axles, the main body of it, and so on. And it's the same with things that we own, like a car or a television. The mind is able to create solidity, substance. That's the point.

And of course this comes very close to us when it comes to our own bodies. So this designation that we give to ourselves, this concept where we draw all our experience together as it were and create me, a me, the solid that's what he is trying to deconstruct, the self, a person. And he does it in five modes.

So the first part of it is corporeality, the body. Then there's all the business of perceptions which go really from just the original percepts that come into the senses to conceptual thinking. It's that whole business of

how the mind creates, how the mental part of our experience is created. Then there's all the feelings which are both physical feelings coming from the body but also feelings coming from the mind that we normally call emotions or moods, but they're actual feelings in the body.

Then there's this whole business of, translated as volitional conditioning. So that, you might say, is our thought and emotional life. But it's where the will comes in, it's where we create things. Our conditionings which we then split into those things where we feel unhappy and those things where we feel happy. That's basically how we experience life.

And finally there's the act of cognition. I'll go into it in a bit more detail. It's the point where all this information is gathered on a screen. It's a primary knowing. If you think of a television and all the things that actually move within the television coming from outside, all the radio waves, television waves and all that, and it's all hitting the TV and inside the TV there's all this mentation going on, and what you've got is a screen in front which collects it all into an image that you then know. So it's the same with the mind. There's something that gathers it all together and presents it as an image, as an act of cognition. And all this, of course, you can actually experience. I mean it's not as though these things are in themselves some sort of idealism or something.

But let me just quote from the scriptures where he points something out to us there insubstantiality. He says: "Suppose that a man who's not blind were to behold the many bubbles in the Ganges as they are driving along and he should watch them and carefully examine them. After carefully examining them, however, they will appear to him empty, unreal and insubstantial. In exactly the same way does the meditator behold all the corporeal phenomena, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness, whether they be of the past, present or future, far or near, and he watches them and examines them carefully. And after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, unreal, and insubstantial."

You can do an exercise where you can make at least some of these different *khandhas* clear to yourself. So now it's spring. There's the daffodils out. So when you see a daffodil, it's immediately put into the context of all the daffodils and all the flowers you've experienced. So you don't actually see that daffodil. It's always that daffodil in comparison with all of the daffodils. So to actually see that daffodil, you have to put your attention right on it.

Now as you put your attention right on it to as it were close down the mentation around it and all the comparisons and all that past experience, you can repeat a simple word like "looking" – not "daffodil" because that brings all the other stuff in – but the action of looking. So just by saying "looking, looking" it as it were collapses the thinking mind. So the thinking mind can only think in words, remember, words and images. So as you say "looking, looking" and that begins to close down, your attention just goes on to the flower itself, on to the actual what it is you're actually perceiving.

And the more and more you do that, you'll see that, you may experience, hopefully, that the door of

perception is being cleansed and the yellowness of the flower begins to appear more yellow. The shape of the flower, the little filigrees and all the little shapes that go into the flower become more obvious as you begin to just focus in, just on the flower as flower.

Now as you do that and you become aware just of its yellowness or of its shape, that's you're experiencing perception. That's the perceiving mind. And then as it were you've come from that and you stay perceiving, you may also feel that with the perception a feeling arises. In other words, your relationship to that flower. So there may, hopefully, there'll be a sense of joy, right? A sense of feeling towards it. So there's that, and even colours have a feeling, don't they? Often I, maybe it's a regression, but often I find if I see a real beautiful green or a blue, somehow it takes me back to being around about three, four or five when you play with these blocks that are blue and green. It's a funny sort of thing. And people get that with music as well, don't they? Sounds.

So you may actually feel a feeling come up as you experience just the perception of yellowness. Then as it were as you come out of that mode of just pure perception and you come away from it and you stop saying "knowing," then suddenly you get that sort of different level of perception where memory comes in in a sense of its comparison with all the other daffodils and flowers you've seen, and then you see the judging coming in that it's not such a good daffodil, it's a bit corrupt, or the yellow, or you prefer this yellow to that yellow. Now presupposed on all that process is the act of cognition, the act of just that primary knowing.

So these are little exercises where you can actually see how the mind is building up the world. And in your meditation you may even perceive that in terms of a pain. So while you're sitting, you get pain in the knee. So that's your conceptual idea: pain in the knee. As you go into the pain and really experience the pain as pain, not just pain in the knee – knee is a concept – as you go into it you might just experience tightness, heat, little stabby pains and whatnot. And at that point you lose the perception of pain. It's just pure feeling. And as you back off that, suddenly you get the concept come in: pain. And with pain you get the reaction.

So, these things, these little exercises and the process of *vipassanā* are just ways of breaking down the solidity of how we experience ourselves. And remember that whenever we're doing that, something is, as it were, emerging out of it, is the point. The whole point of breaking down the idea of the self is to discover who we really are. And that which is emerging out of it and getting to know all this as objects and getting to know it as process, that's this *satipaṇṇā*. And it's beginning to recognise what this *satipaṇṇā* is as opposed to all the mentation that we experience, which is the process of liberation, detachment.

So that's the *khandha*, the five *khandhas*: the body, corporeality, I'll go into that in more detail next week; all our perceptions, memory included in that; all our feeling, the feeling base of our experience which is both mental and physical coming from the body, coming from the mind; all the things that we create through an act of will – and those are our emotional thought life; and then finally this, the act of cognition,

the sort of primary knowing of things.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated sooner rather than later.
God bless you.

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