


Destroying The Five Aggregates



Sayādaw U Paññadipa



Destroying the Five Aggregates

Dhamma Discourse on How To Destroy
the Five Aggregates

Destroying the Five Aggregates

Sayādaw U Paññadipa

(Beelin Sayādaw)

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato,
Sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Blessed One, the Perfect One,
The Fully Enlightened One.

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BIOGRAPHY

Sayādaw U Paññadipa
Sāsana dhaja Siripavara
Dhammacariya
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Sayādaw was born on March 16, 1933 at Hninpalei village, Beelin township in lower Myanmar; therefore he is called Beelin Sayādaw. His father was U Kyaw Hmu and his mother was Daw Hla Thin.

He began his elementary education at the village monastery at the age of eight and was ordained as a sāmaṇera (novice) at the age of twelve. He culminated his early academic work at Hitlikaryi Buddhist Studies School in Thaton and passed with honors the Tipiṭaka study program there. He became a Dhamma teacher (Sāsana Dhaja Siripavara Dhamma Cariya).

Post graduate work was completed in Yangon and in Mandalay.

In 1967 he went to Mahāsi Yeikthā in Yangon and practiced intensive vipassanā meditation under Sayādaws U Paṇḍita, U Janaka and U Sanwara. The following year he was sent to Gyopintha Sāsana Yeikthā near Prome as a meditation teacher, where he taught for seventeen years.

Then he was recognized as Nāyaka Kammatṭhāna Cariya (Senior Meditation Teacher) by Venerable U Paṇḍitabhivamsa and was asked to teach at Mahāsi Center in Yangon, which he did for six years.

Sayādaw has traveled extensively to other parts of the world including Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore and Australia

Beelin Sayādaw next served at Mahāsi Meditation Center near Wigan in the U.K. when the members of that community requested a Sayādaw skilled in paṭipatti (practice of meditation) and pariyatti (study of scriptures)

He was next invited to serve at Tathāgata Meditation Center in San Jose, California in December of 1999. There his strong and serene presence has contributed to the growth of Dhamma in yet another part of the world.

He was recently awarded the title of Agga Mahā Sadhamma Jotika Dhaja for his Dhamma Dhuta work abroad.

Destroying The Five Aggregates

This Dhamma topic is based on the Satta Sutta, a discourse taught by the Buddha. It is found in the Saṃyutta collection.

1. The Aggregate of Material Phenomena (Rūpakkhanda)

A monk called Āyasmā Rādha once approached the Buddha, who was staying at Jetavana, the monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika, the millionaire. After paying respects to the Buddha and sitting down at one side, Āyasmā Rādha said there was a question he would like to have answered.

“Oh glorious Buddha, there is a word called ‘*satta*’ in this world. How can something be explained and evaluated as “*satta*” in this world?” he asked.

The Buddha answered, “My dear son Rādha, *satta* is a being, one who may have a desire, an attachment or an affection for material phenomena [rūpakkhanda].

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Attaching to material phenomena is also called *satta*.”

Here the objects of the first *satta*, a being, include the varying degrees of desire, lust, affection and attachment, all of which are synonymous.

The second *satta* is a verbal form meaning “attached to”. Whether one is pleurably attached to matter or is simply attached to matter, it is called *satta* and it is due to ignorance.

What shall we find if we wisely analyze the material forms of the physical body? The body of a person is composed of a number of body parts. The first group of five parts, called the “skin-ended collective,” consists of head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. The second group of five, the “kidney-ended collective,” comprises flesh, sinews, bone, bone marrow and kidneys. Heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen and lungs are in the third collective of five. The colon, small intestine, fresh food, old food and brain make up the fourth collective.

These four groups of five collectives, altogether twenty body parts, are materialized by the element of earth, *paṭhavī-dhātu*. In whichever form they are manifested, all phenomena classified as earth element are characterized by hardness, softness and solidity. Why are these twenty body parts said to be the element of earth? It is because they all possess the predominant characteristic of hardness.

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The other three primary elements also exist in each of these twenty body parts, but as they are not distinct they do not predominate. These three elements are the element of water, *āpo-dhātu*; the element of fire, *tejo-dhātu*, and the element of wind, *vāyo-dhātu*.

Even a hair, when you observe it, contains all four primary elements. However, the predominant characteristic of hair is hardness, the characteristic of earth. Therefore it is generally called the element of earth, *paṭhavī-dhātu*. The remaining nineteen body parts in the four groups of five collectives are similarly generalized as the element of earth, because they all possess its predominant characteristic.

A meditator who is able to sense the hardness is experientially seeing the earth element. Similarly, the fire element will be experienced if warmth or heat is observed. The element of air will be perceived when the characteristics of tension and vibration are obvious at the moment of mindfulness. And when the element of water is in a predominant state, moisture or cohesiveness will be noticed.

A meditator should not dwell on the concept of four primary elements. He should be aware of only the natural characteristics, such as hardness, softness, warmth, heat, tension, vibration, moisture and cohesiveness. It is necessary that he not go beyond the scope of natural characteristics.

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Why? Because instead of observing the natural phenomena, a meditator might get lost in observing concepts such as women, men, women's head hair, men's head hair, etc. During the practice of vipassanā meditation, it is essential not to get caught up in body concept and person concept. It is very important to see just the natural phenomena of the four primary elements.

Besides the previously stated body parts, there exist twelve other body parts that have the predominant characteristics of the element of water. They are: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, solidified fat, tears, clear fatty fluid, saliva, nasal mucus, joint lubricant, and urine. All of them have the characteristics of flowing out and of cohesiveness. Therefore they are generally known as the element of water. The remaining three primary elements are also present in these body parts, though indistinctly.

There are four different types of fire element, *tejo-dhātu*. The normal temperature of the body is called *jīraṇa tejo*. This body temperature creates the aging process, causing people to become old. But when the temperature exceeds normal body temperature and the thermometer measures higher than 98.4 degrees Fahrenheit, that type of heat is called *santāpana tejo*. The intolerable temperature that makes a person complain "too hot" is called *dahana tejo*. The fourth kind of heat is called *paccakā tejo*, and is the gastrointestinal heat that digests food. All four kinds of heat have the nature of warmth

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and coldness. They do not represent a woman or a man. There is no ego-entity, but just an element of heat.

There are six different types of wind element, *vāyodhātu*, in the body. They are: (1) upward directed wind, (2) downward directed wind, (3) wind inside the gastrointestinal tract, (4) wind in the abdominal cavity, (5) air involved in breathing and (6) air spreading throughout the entire body. Every physical activity—bending, stretching, sitting, standing, walking, etc.—is conditioned by the last kind of air, called *angamanganusāri*. All six types of wind element have the characteristics of tension and vibration. There is no ego-entity in them; neither a woman, nor a man, nor a self-entity can be found in them.

Thus far I have given an outline of the four primary elements, their manifestation in the body and their subdivisions: twenty different kinds of earth element, twelve different types of water element, four varieties of fire element and six kinds of wind element. Though the summary is brief, when considered carefully it becomes evident that the physical body is composed of only four primary elements.

When the primary elements are established in the appropriate areas of the body, the collective physical body appears to be a self-entity. Without understanding this through vipassanā penetrative knowledge, an ordinary person will perceive this collection of primary elements

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as either “my body...his body...a woman’s body...or a man’s body.” Due to this perception, attachment toward that physical body arises in his mind.

In reality, the physical body can be compared to foam, the collections of bubbles one sees on rivers and streams. The existence of the bubbles is due to the supporting air inside. When many of them group together, some of these collections of massed bubbles are as big as a fist, others as big as a head, and others even bigger. Seen through ordinary eyes, they can appear to be permanent. However, if one wisely investigates them, their impermanent nature becomes obvious. They cannot be used to make furniture or to build houses.

In the same way, this physical body looks permanent to an ordinary eye visualizing the collective appearance of the head, body and feet. The body also appears to possess a personal entity as a man or a woman, etc. It seems to be permanent, and can look attractive, even beautiful. The view of an existing living entity appears to those who see with ordinary eyes.

But to one who has vipassanā vision, the physical body is similar to a mass of bubbles—there is no inherent essence. It is just a collection of thirty-two repulsive body parts: head hair, body hair, fingernails, toenails, teeth, skin, sinews, bones, etc. There is no essence of permanent nature, no essence of beauty, no quality of permanent entity. This is the way the physical body is seen by one

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who possesses penetrative vipassanā knowledge.

The ordinary eye, however, will perceive the physical body as permanent, pleasurable, governable and having a self-entity. Thus one will be pleasurably attached to it. As the Buddha has said, “Being attached or strongly attached to material phenomena is called *satta*.”

2. The Aggregate of Feeling

(Vedanākkhandha)

“My dear son Rādhā, beings who attach or have strong feelings towards aggregates are said to be *satta*.”

The Buddha taught that there are three types of feeling in the physical body. (1) Experiencing the agreeable object is pleasant feeling, *sukha vedanā*. (2) Experiencing the disagreeable object is unpleasant feeling, *dukkha vedanā*. (3) Experiencing neither the agreeable nor the disagreeable object is neutral feeling, *upekkhā vedanā*. Because neutral feeling is not very obvious to the senses, most people are more familiar with pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

During a hot summer, a person will feel pleasantly comfortable when a cool breeze comes to him. In winter, putting on a blanket makes one feel warm and comfortable. Stretching and bending the hands and feet when they are tired brings relaxation and comfort. When experiencing bodily comfort, we are enjoying pleasant feeling, *sukha vedanā*. The ordinary being perceives this

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pleasurable feeling with the view “I feel good” or “I am peaceful.”

Feelings such as bodily pain, too much heat, too much cold, bodily discomfort, and itchiness are called *dukkha vedanā*, unpleasant feeling. These unpleasant feelings are interpreted by ordinary people as “my painful feeling.”

The three types of feeling occur in the mind-door. *Sukha vedanā*, pleasant feeling, arises in the mind when we are meeting with or thinking about an agreeable object. *Dukkha vedanā*, unpleasant feeling, occurs in the mind when we meet or think about sad or fearful things. Indifferent feeling, *upekkhā vedanā*, arises in the mind when we meet with objects that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. When the above three types of feeling occur in the mind, they are mistakenly interpreted by people as “I am feeling good...I am feeling bad...I am indifferent.”

Pleasurable feeling, *sukha vedanā*, arises when a favorable image is seen, a pleasant voice is heard, or a fragrant scent is smelled. That pleasurable sensation is thought of as being “mine.” Then a perception such as “I am happy” arises. When an unsatisfactory image is seen, an unpleasant voice is heard, or a bad smell is sensed, unpleasant feeling, *dukkha vedanā*, arises.

Indifferent feeling, *upekkhā vedanā*, arises when the image seen is perceived as neither attractive nor unattractive, when the voice that is heard is neither

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pleasant nor unpleasant, and when the scent that is smelled is neither good nor bad. One also may think that these indifferent feelings belong to oneself.

In reality, all pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent feelings are only sensations. When one does not observe an object clearly or is not mindful enough to see its nature, attachment towards the object arises. Therefore, *satta* is used to refer to one who has attachment for those sensations.

But if meditators are mindful enough to see the nature and characteristics of feelings, attachment to those feelings becomes diminished. Eventually the insight knowledge of path, which eradicates attachment to feelings, will arise in the meditator.

Because the following account from the scriptures relates to *vedanā*, I will now tell you about two friends who left their life of ease and in time became the Buddha's two chief disciples: Venerable Sāriputta, who possessed supreme wisdom, and Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, who possessed supreme magical power.

On realizing the emptiness in their lives of pleasure and frivolity, Upatissa (the future Venerable Sāriputta) and Kolita (the future Venerable Mahāmoggallāna) agreed to search for the truth that would enable them to escape from suffering, from aging, sickness and death. They began by taking ordination and becoming pupils under

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the guidance of a well-known wandering ascetic teacher named Sañjaya. But after learning everything he was able to teach, they found no essence in his teaching. Therefore they left, and continued searching for truth by wandering throughout all of Jambudīpa (India).

Eventually Upatissa met a monk, the Venerable Assaji, an Arahant who was one of five earliest disciples of the Buddha. When Upatissa saw the dignified appearance of Venerable Assaji, who was going around for alms, he followed him. Then he prepared a seat and brought water so the monk could have his meal peacefully. When the Venerable had finished the meal, Upatissa approached him and asked, “Who is your teacher and what is his teaching?”

Venerable Assaji replied, “My teacher is the Buddha. Since I have just recently become a monk under the Buddha, I can teach you something only in brief.”

Wanting to know something, Upatissa said, “Then please tell me in brief what you have learned from your teacher.”

So Venerable Assaji told him, “My supreme teacher, the Buddha, has taught that, as the result of conditioning factors, all phenomena are conditioned. He also has taught the extinction of conditioning things and their results, and the existence of Nibbāna, the fully extinguished state.”

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Even though this teaching was very short, Upatissa understood its meaning deeply. Consciousness of the first path, the realization of Nibbāna, immediately arose in him, and he became a *Sotāpanna*, ‘a stream-enterer’.

Wanting to meet the Buddha, Upatissa asked the Venerable Assaji where the Buddha was currently residing, and then he returned to his friend Kolita. When Kolita saw his friend’s calm and satisfied facial expression, he said, “Upatissa, you must have found the truth that we have been searching for.”

Upatissa then described in detail his encounter with the Venerable Assaji, and recited the verse that he had learned from him. On hearing the verse, Kolita attained the first stage of enlightenment and, like Upatissa, became a *Sotāpanna*.

So the two friends decided to go to the Buddha. But first they paid a visit to their previous ascetic teacher Sañjaya, and invited him to accompany them. However, having been the teacher of a large community of disciples for a long time, Sañjaya could not bring himself to become a pupil of anybody else. Saying that it would be like a big reservoir becoming a very small pond, he declined their invitation and told them, “Wise students will go to the Buddha, and the unwise ones will come to me. So you go, but I will stay here.”

Accompanied by 250 of Sañjaya’s disciples who had

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now become their followers, Upatissa and Kolita went to the Buddha, who stopped in the middle of a discourse and received their respects. When the friends then requested ordination, the Buddha ordained the entire group by saying, “Come, bhikkhus! Well proclaimed is the Dhamma. Now live the life of purity to make an end of suffering.” From that time onward, Upatissa was known as Sāriputta and Kolita was called Mahāmoggallāna.

The Buddha then resumed his Dhamma talk, and after listening to it, the entire retinue of newly ordained students became Arahants. But that supreme attainment was postponed for the two chief-disciples-to-be, who would need more training for their future responsibilities in the Saṅgha. Seven days after his ordination as a monk, Venerable Mahāmoggallāna attained *arahatta-magga*, the highest stage of enlightenment. But, until the full moon day of February, Sāriputta was still practicing *anupassanā vipassanā*.

According to the Dīghanakha Sutta, on that full moon day Sāriputta’s nephew Dīghanakha, who had stayed behind with the ascetic Sañjaya, remembered that his uncle used to return right away after meetings with other religious teachers. But almost fifteen days had passed since his uncle had gone to the Buddha, and he had not yet returned. So Dīghanakha decided to investigate the teachings himself, and set off to see the Buddha, who was staying in the Sūkarakhatā cave on Gijjhakūṭa (Vulture Peak) near Rājagaha.

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When Dīghanakha arrived, Venerable Sāriputta was standing behind the Buddha and fanning him, where he remained throughout the discourse that followed. After approaching and greeting the Buddha, Dīghanakha put forth this view to him: “Venerable Gotama, I do not like anything.”

‘Anything’ here means any kind of rebirth. The direct meaning of his view is that he did not want to be reborn after the present life. Because he said, “I do not like anything,” that dislike would have to include his nihilistic view. Therefore the Buddha pointed out, “Since you said you do not like anything, you must not like your own view either.”

But Dīghanakha’s reply was ambiguous. In order to clarify his visitor’s view, the Buddha said, “The eternalistic view can be accepted and taken easily; it is easy to be liked and grasped. On the other hand, the nihilistic view can be detached and given up easily; it is easy to be disliked and relinquished.”

On hearing these words of the Buddha, Dīghanakha mistakenly concluded, “Venerable Gotama admired my view.”

The Buddha then explained the risks and benefits of the eternalistic and nihilistic views. Those who have the eternalistic view engage in wholesome actions, expecting good consequences in the afterlife. They enjoy the rebirths

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and become attached to future existences. According to the Commentary, “An eternalist hardly ever gives up his view supporting the concept of everlasting self-entity.”

Ordinary Buddhists who have no vipassanā knowledge do not like to accept the non-existence of a permanent entity. They do not understand the truth of the continuum of mental and physical phenomena that arise and pass away every moment. And they do not want to accept the fact that Arahants have no more rebirths after their present life because they have eradicated greed at the moment of *arahatta* path consciousness. These eternalists prefer to believe that Arahants pass away into a transcendental existence formed of material and mental phenomena.

The commentarial teachers explain that because eternalists believe in present and future existences, and also know the kammic effects of wholesome and unwholesome deeds, they do good deeds out of fear of doing bad deeds. But they are pleurably attached to the ongoing rebirths or becoming. Even if they were to meet with an omniscient Buddha or his disciple, they would find it hard to surrender their view of eternity. Though they seldom commit unwholesome deeds, their views are hard to give up.

The nihilists, on the other hand, do not know that the present existence is due to the past, and that future existence arises due to the present. So they do not believe

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in the kammic effect of wholesome and unwholesome deeds. Therefore they make no special effort to engage in wholesome deeds, and are not afraid of engaging in unwholesome deeds. And because they do not believe in an afterlife existence, they do not accept the idea of rebirth after the present life.

However, if nihilists meet with an omniscient Buddha or his disciples, they may readily give up their views. If they make an effort to fulfill the perfections, the *pāramis*, they might attain the highest stage of enlightenment, *arahatta magga* and *phala*, just as the Buddha and Arahants have done. Therefore, even though they may have committed great misdeeds, their views are easy to give up.

Not understanding what had been said, Dīghanakha again thought that the Buddha admired his nihilistic view. To broaden and correct Dīghanakha's misunderstandings, the Buddha taught him the three kinds of views: (1) the eternalistic view of liking everything, (2) the nihilistic view of disliking everything, and (3) the view of partial like and partial dislike towards things.

If somebody firmly holds on to any one of the wrong views, he would find himself arguing with groups supporting the remaining two views. So the Buddha counseled Dīghanakha and enabled him to give up his nihilistic view. He next taught him to get rid of attachment to his physical body:

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“Your body is composed of four great essentials: earth element, water element, fire element and air element. Your body originated from the fusion of sperm from the father and egg from the mother. Supported by nutriment, your body has grown. To maintain your body in good shape you have to condition it constantly, but it still has an impermanent nature.”

The Buddha also instructed Dīghanakha to visualize the nature of the body—its impermanent nature, suffering nature, infectious nature, sore nature, sharp-pointed nature, unwholesome nature, sick nature, alien nature, and detrimental nature. He also should observe the body as having a non-soul nature and an uncontrollable nature. If one observes the body this way, attachment to it will become weaker and weaker.

After the Buddha had taught Dīghanakha how to contemplate on the physical body, he continued by teaching him how to contemplate on the three different types of feeling—pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neutral feeling.

The three kinds of feeling cannot coexist. If one type of feeling is present, the other two will be absent at that moment. Since each type of feeling excludes the other two at the moment of occurring, the meditator may notice this changing from one type to the other. When that happens, the impermanent nature of feeling will be understood.

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Depending on their respective conditioning factors, feelings arise. While noting mental and physical phenomena, one may come to understand their dependent origination and their dissolving nature after arising. The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has given effective instructions to enable the meditator to realize the nature of these changing phenomena. These instructions on how to note successfully are based on the rise and fall of the abdomen.

Why the abdomen? Like breathing, which it reflects, it is with us as long as we are alive, but its movements are more easily observed. Thus it is easier for the meditator to maintain his focus on the abdomen's rise and fall, and to return to it after the necessary pauses for noting distractions.

When meditators focus on the abdomen's movements, pausing only to make brief mental notes of any obvious momentary distractions, painful bodily feelings may arise. The meditator must acknowledge awareness of that painful sensation by mentally noting "pain, pain, pain." When an uncomfortable mental feeling arises, it is noted as "unpleasant, unpleasant, unpleasant."

A pleasant feeling should be noted as "pleasant, pleasant." And if the meditator feels happy, it can be noted as "happy, happy." But when neutral feeling arises, it is hard to notice, it does not draw attention. The meditator should just keep his noting mind on the physical

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and mental phenomena that are obvious.

Thus the yogi clearly will see pleasant and unpleasant sensations that have newly appeared and then disappeared. He will understand their impermanent nature, their unsatisfactory nature and their non-self or non-soul nature. When those three characteristics are clear in his mind, the yogi will become tired of all phenomena and their constant arising and passing away.

The Buddha then explained to Dīghanakha how the insight knowledge of *nibbidānupassanā-ñāṇa* arises in a meditator's mind. It arises when, having seen the three characteristics in the aggregate of feeling, one becomes tired of all three types of feeling—pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neutral feeling. The purpose of practicing vipassanā is to gain *nibbidānupassanā-ñāṇa*, which is attained when one experientially sees the arising and disappearing nature of physical and mental phenomena.

In this sutta the different material phenomena are not distinguished in detail. The instruction is just to observe the collective physical appearance of material phenomena. One remarkable thing here is that even though one does not analyze material phenomena in detail, as is done in Abhidhamma, a meditator may still attain the experience of *nibbidānupassanā-ñāṇa*.

Another notable thing in this sutta is that in

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contemplating mental phenomena, only the explicit elaboration of the three different types of feeling is explained, but not the other mental states. That is because being aware of the presently occurring three types of feeling is enough for one to gain the insight knowledge of *nibbidānupassanā-ñāṇa*.

The Buddha also explained how the knowledge of path, the knowledge of fruition and the knowledge of recollection occurs in the mind after one attains enlightenment. When a meditator is tired of observing the impermanent nature of physical and mental phenomena, attachment is eradicated and the insight knowledge of path arises.

Due to the arisen insight knowledge of the *arahatta* path and fruition, one is fully liberated from all suffering. On reaching that fully liberated stage, the yogi will recognize that he is fully liberated. Thus enlightened, he will review as follows: “I will not be reborn again. I have already practiced the Noble Eightfold Path completely. I have completely done what one should have done, and I have nothing else to do for liberation.”

The Buddha then explained how one can reach the highest stage of enlightenment, and how the knowledge of recollection occurs in the Arahant. He also explained that one who has attained this stage has no argument with anyone: “Dīghanakha, an Arahant never argues with anyone. Even though an Arahant may use name concepts

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such as I, he, woman, and man, he never perceives them as personal entities or existing souls. The reason why he does not argue with anyone is because he has already realized the truth.”

In the Puppha Sutta from the Khandhavagga Pāḷi, the Buddha also said, “I do not argue with people. But people like wanderer Sisaka, wanderer Vekhanassa, wanderer Vikhanatha, Assalāyana, and a rich man named Upāli have come and argued with me. Telling the truth to them does not mean arguing with them, because what I have told them is the truth.”

Not only the Buddha, but anyone else giving the true teaching of Dhamma should not be considered as arguing with others. One is only explaining the truth to those who are trying to argue against it. Telling the truth means trying to educate ignorant people.

While the Buddha was teaching Dīghanakha about the three different feelings, Venerable Sāriputta was still fanning him and listening intently to his words. At the end of this teaching he reached the fully enlightened stage, and from the stage of stream-entry he became an Arahant.

Another version of his enlightenment is found in the Anupada Sutta, which states that on the fifteenth day, he became an Arahant by contemplating the impermanent nature of the *jhāna* factors. And in yet another sutta, Venerable Sāriputta himself says that he attained

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Arahantship by contemplating on the internal *dhamma*. These three statements are compatible if we conclude that he reached the highest stage of enlightenment by listening to the Dhamma while simultaneously entering the *jhāna* stage and contemplating on the concomitant feeling of that *jhāna* stage.

Following the Buddha's discourse, Dīghanakha reached the first path and fruition, and became a Stream-enterer. This was because of the vipassanā insight knowledge he had attained by contemplating on feeling, *vedanā*.

After teaching this sutta, the Buddha left Vulture Peak and, by using his supernormal power, went back to the Veḷuvana Monastery. Then, with his supernormal telepathy, he called for an assembly. Venerable Sāriputta, through his newly acquired divine knowledge, received the message and came to the meeting by using his divine power. The total number of monks attending was 1,250.

This assembly of disciples is notable for four extraordinary reasons: the time was astronomically coincident with Marga planets and was also the full moon day of February; none of the monks were invited verbally, but all were telepathically informed; all of them possessed sixfold supernormal power, and all had been ordained by the Buddha saying the words, "Come, monk."

If one correctly contemplates on feeling, the

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knowledge of path and fruition may be attained. In reality, no self-entity exists in feeling. Feeling is not permanent, and no essence can be found in it. The Buddha compared it to the ripples appearing when a stone is thrown into water, and to the bubbles formed when raindrops fall on the water's surface. Like the appearance and disappearance of those bubbles on the water surface, feelings in the body also arise and disappear moment by moment. This appearance and disappearance of feelings is clearly observed by vipassanā meditators.

The ordinary person thinks that pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent feelings last forever. However, when one is continuously mindful of the physical and mental phenomena occurring at all six sense doors whenever one is seeing, hearing, smelling, eating, touching, and thinking, the disappearance of feeling at every single moment will be observed. This observance becomes clear when one gains the insight knowledge of *udayabbayānupassanā-ñāṇa*.

Udayabbayānupassanā-ñāṇa is the experiential knowledge of seeing the rising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena. The next insight knowledge is *bhangānupassanā-ñāṇa*, the experiential knowledge of seeing physical and mental phenomena being dissolved. Whatever is being noted, the meditator observes the quick disappearance of physical and mental phenomena. Then it becomes very clear to the mind that feelings are similar

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to bubbles. The meditator can understand from experience that feeling is impermanent, and that one cannot exercise control over it.

A person who does not practice vipassanā meditation, or a meditator who has not gained enough concentration, may be unable to see the disappearance of feelings clearly. So he will still think of them as permanent, pleasant, or existing in a self. In the Satta Sutta two phrases are used to describe an ordinary individual—‘being’ and ‘attached to’. As they are defined in the text, they are related in being attached to feelings, or being strongly attached to the five aggregates.

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The five aggregates are the five components of the human body and mind. They are form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The Buddha taught that these aggregates are impermanent, suffering, and not-self. By understanding their true nature, one can destroy them and attain liberation.

The Buddha taught that the five aggregates are the basis of suffering. They are the source of attachment and craving, which lead to the cycle of rebirth. By seeing the aggregates as they really are, one can break the cycle and attain the end of suffering.

The Buddha taught that the five aggregates are the basis of the self. They are the components of the person who experiences the world. By understanding the aggregates, one can see that there is no permanent self, and that the self is a collection of these aggregates.

3. The Aggregate of Perception

(Saññākkhandha)

A being who is attached to perception or the aggregate of perception is said to be *satta*. There are six different types of perception: (1) perception of the visible object, (2) perception of sound, (3) perception of odor, (4) perception of taste, (5) perception of touch, and (6) perception of dhamma objects.

The aggregate of perception is translated by ordinary people as “I perceive or I recognize.” When a visible object is seen, the perception related to that visible object arises as follows: “This is a person, this is a woman (or man), the appearance is such and such, the time is about that time, the place is at that particular location, etc.” If an audible object is heard, a similar pattern of perception also arises. When one remembers the objects in this way, the aggregate of perception is mistakenly interpreted a personal entity. This interpretation is due to attachment to perceptions.

The Buddha has compared perception with a mirage,

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a phenomenon that falsely appears to be real. In the desert the illusory image of water or an oasis might appear. When one is driving on a very hot day, the road in the near distance may appear flooded with water. It is even said that in summer the deer in India, deceived by mirages, travel in vain to their usual water holes, only to find them dried up. But a mirage is only an optical illusion caused by light rays from layers of air having varying densities and unequal temperatures.

In like manner, beings wrongly perceive sight, sound, odor, taste, touch and dhamma objects to be a man, a woman, an animal, etc. They become attached to these misguided and distorted perceptions. So an individual can be called *satta* if the aggregate of perception is being attached or strongly attached.

In order to get rid of this false view, meditators must be mindful of all physical and mental phenomena that arise from the six sense doors. When one thus reaches a strong concentration level, the cause and effect relationship between physical and mental phenomena will be clear in mind. Eventually, whenever this relationship is being noted, one will experientially see the disappearance of mental and physical phenomena.

Then what formerly was perceived as permanent—an individual, a woman, a man, a self-entity—is now understood to be a deception. This deception is similar to an optical illusion, to a mirage. But in reality the meditator

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will be seeing experientially the arising and passing nature of all phenomena. He will understand that their general characteristics are impermanence, suffering and non-soul.

4. The Aggregate of Formations

(Sāṅkhārakkhandha)

“My dear son Rādhā,” the Buddha said, “the reason an individual is called *satta* is due to the fact that the volitional activities are being attached, or strongly attached.”

There are two kinds of formation, *saṅkhāra*: (1) resultant, or that which is being conditioned, and (2) causative, or that which is causing the condition.

The *saṅkhāras* being conditioned are the mental and physical phenomena that arise because of four factors: (1) volitional activities, *kamma*; (2) consciousness; (3) temperature, and (4) nutriment.

Beginning from the moment of conception, the resultant mental phenomena are the relinking consciousness and mental concomitants. The developing physical phenomena that follow are: (1) eye sensitivity, (2) ear sensitivity, (3) nose sensitivity, (4) tongue sensitivity, (5) body sensitivity, and (6) the heart base.

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All are *sañkhāras* conditioned by past *kamma*.

The *sañkhāras* conditioned by consciousness include all physical and verbal activities. Bending, stretching, moving, walking, standing, sitting, talking, smiling—all are resultant types of *sañkhāra* caused by consciousness. The mental concomitants mutually condition one another. They can be either conditioning *sañkhāras* or resultant *sañkhāras*.

Cold or hot temperatures are the resultant *sañkhāras* caused by weather. Physical changes occurring after ingesting food are due to the resultant *sañkhāras* conditioned by nutriment. Succeeding consciousness and mental concomitants are also resultant *sañkhāras*, as they are conditioned by the preceding mental phenomena.

Therefore, all mental and physical phenomena, being conditioned by the four factors—*kamma*, consciousness, temperature and nutriment—are called resultant *sañkhāras*. And all resultant *sañkhāras* conditioned by respective causes are also impermanent and suffering.

According to the Buddha, the five aggregates must be seen through vipassanā insight knowledge as impermanent, suffering and lacking self-entity. In order to see these three characteristics of mental and physical *sañkhāras*, the meditator must be continuously mindful of them whenever they arise.

When concentration becomes strong enough, there

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will be keen awareness of the momentary appearance and disappearance of the three characteristics. Thus their impermanent nature will become clear in the meditator's mind. Oppressed by this constant arising and disappearing, the meditator will become afraid of them. Then the nature of suffering also will become clear in his mind. This type of contemplation is confirmed by the practice taught by the Buddha.

We shall now examine the other kind of *saṅkhāra*, the causative, conditioning *saṅkhāra*. According to the Khandha Vagga Saṃyutta Pāli text, this kind of *saṅkhāra* is defined as the phenomenon that causes physical, verbal and mental activities.

Each aggregate can only do its own function. The aggregate of matter is unique, however. Although it cannot do anything by itself, it is transformed by environmentally opposite factors. Due to its substantiality, the manifestation of matter becomes prominent only when it is conditioned by *saṅkhāra*.

The feeling aggregate can experience only the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral object. Like a secretary recording names in a book, the perception aggregate just recognizes the object. The consciousness aggregate is merely aware of the object, merely seeing, merely hearing, etc. But the *saṅkhāra* aggregate causes walking, standing, sitting, lying, bending, stretching, moving, smiling, talking, thinking, seeing, hearing, and all other physical and mental

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activities. The wishes to go, stand, sit, and sleep are all due to the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*.

Instigated by the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*, the accomplishment of all physical, verbal and mental action occurs. Therefore, the physical, verbal and mental manifestation of the aggregate of *saṅkhāra* is mistakenly attached and wrongfully perceived as a self-entity or as “I”.

In reality, *saṅkhāra* does not have an inner core or a soul. Its manifestations are only natural phenomena occurring in a process of causal relationship. They do not possess soul. Due to their soulless nature, living beings are oppressed by them. There is no core or essence in *saṅkhāra*. There is only suffering.

One who associates with bad companions, follows the guidance of a bad teacher, or reflects unwisely on his own experiences might commit unwholesome physical, mental and verbal actions. Examples of unwholesome and blameworthy actions in this present life include violating law and order, drinking, taking drugs, and gambling.

Conditioned by greed and anger, improper verbal and physical actions result in loss of one’s own property, in being punished, losing friends, and being subject to disasters in this lifetime. And beyond this present life, one may be reborn in woeful states. To avoid such

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happenings, we should understand how we are being oppressed by such volitional *saṅkhāra* activities.

Looking carefully with vipassanā insight knowledge, one may observe that no self-entity, no inner core or essence exists in the *saṅkhāras*. Therefore the Buddha compared the *saṅkhāras* to the stem of a banana plant. Its stem looks like a tree trunk and seems to possess a solid inner part. However, if one cuts it with a knife and peels off the leaf-like stem-shells, no inner essence or core is found. Only soft leaves will be found, layer after layer. Like the trunk of a banana plant, *saṅkhāra* has no valuable inner core.

Saṅkhāra consists of fifty mental concomitants headed by volition, *cetanā*. The twenty most prominent of these fifty mental concomitants are:

1. *phassa*, contact that arises when the sensitive parts of the six sense doors are struck by their corresponding objects, such as visible objects, audible objects, etc.
2. *manasikarā*; attention towards the object
3. *ekaggatā*, one-pointedness of mind
4. *vitakka*, initial application (concomitants that put the mental states on the object)
5. *vicāra*, sustained application that investigates and keeps mental phenomena on the object

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6. *virīya*, effort
7. *lobha*, greed
8. *dosa*, hatred
9. *moha*, delusion
10. *māna*, conceit
11. *diṭṭhi*, wrong view
12. *vicikicchā*, skeptical doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha
13. *alobha*, non-greed
14. *adosa*, non-hatred
15. *amoha*, non-delusion
16. *saddhā*, faith
17. *sati*, mindfulness
18. *mettā*, loving kindness
19. *karuṇā*, compassion
20. *muditā*, sympathetic joy

Physical, mental and verbal actions are determined by volition, *cetanā*, which directs the numerous *saṅkhāra dhammas*. However, only the resultant *saṅkhāras*, the physical, verbal and mental actions, are noticeable.

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The wrong view that “all actions are being done by me” is due to these *saṅkhāra dhammas*. Therefore the Buddha said, “When the aggregate of *saṅkhāra* is attached or being strongly attached by an individual, that person can be called *satta*.”

5. The Aggregate of Consciousness

(Viññāṇakkhandha)

The Buddha then said, “My dear son Rādhā, attachment to consciousness or the aggregate of consciousness occurs in beings. When such attachment occurs, that being should be called *satta*.”

The aggregate of consciousness comprises (1) eye consciousness, (2) ear consciousness, (3) nose consciousness, (4) tongue consciousness, (5) body consciousness, and (6) mind consciousness.

These six types of consciousness are mistakenly perceived as self or soul, because they possess qualities different than inanimate things such as rocks, lumps of soil, wooden carvings and clay toys. So when the consciousness perceives any object occurring at any of the five sense doors, that consciousness is interpreted as self or soul. But in reality there is no soul or self-entity in the aggregate of consciousness.

Of the fifty-three different types of mental

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phenomena, the majority of people in this world recognize only consciousness, which they understand to be 'mind' or 'soul'. They are unable to distinguish the other mental concomitants such as contact, volition, perception, feeling, etc.

Not only human beings, but also celestial beings think of consciousness as self or soul. But despite what people see or how people think, self or soul does not exist. Only bare awareness exists. Without penetrative wisdom, one will cling to the consciousness and believe it to be an everlasting soul.

The Buddha compared the consciousness to magic, mere illusion, a magician's trick. Ordinary people mistakenly take the seeing consciousness to be a woman, a man, a dog, a cat, a hen, a bird, etc. They also perceive the consciousness as "I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch, and I think." Such wrongly conceived awareness is totally contradictory to ultimate truth. Due to these misconceptions, one clings to the aggregate of consciousness as being a permanent entity. Therefore the Buddha said, "The word *satta* is given to the individual who is strongly attached to the aggregate of consciousness."

There are five types of consciousness that arise at the five sense doors: (1) seeing consciousness at the moment of seeing, (2) hearing consciousness at the moment of hearing, (3) smelling consciousness at the

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moment of smelling, (4) tasting consciousness at the moment of eating, and (5) bodily consciousness at the moment of touching.

At the moment of experiencing a sense object, the visible forms and audible sounds are not yet conceptualized as a personal entity. Consciousness by itself possesses only one function—mere awareness of objects. It just sees the visible forms, or just hears the audible sounds, etc.

However, if we study the thought processes we will also see the mind-door consciousness. Remembering and thinking about the objects that appear in the five sense doors, the mind-door consciousness conceptualizes those objects.

By giving the example of a thought process, a young novice who had attained arahantship once taught a monk named Pautila how to contemplate on the consciousness. So that you, too, may gain some knowledge of how thought processes occur, we shall briefly examine the sequence of consciousness arising in the eye-door.

When an object that can be sensed is not in contact with sensory organs or sensitivities, then the *bhavaṅga* consciousness, the life continuum, continues its flow undisturbed. But when a visible object comes and strikes the eye sensitivity, the *bhavaṅga* flow is interrupted. The last moment of *bhavaṅga* consciousness is replaced by

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an eye-door advertent consciousness, which turns to the object that is presented.

When the eye-door advertent consciousness ceases, the seeing consciousness appears, and at that moment is merely aware of a visible object. When the seeing consciousness disappears, the receiving consciousness arises and accepts that object. When the receiving consciousness disappears, the investigative consciousness arises to wonder whether the object is pleasant or unpleasant. When the investigating consciousness disappears, the determining consciousness arises and determines whether the object is pleasant or unpleasant.

Following the determining consciousness, seven moments *javana* consciousness arise, during which the object is fully experienced by the seven *javanas*. When the last *javana* consciousness disappears, two registering consciousness moments arise to review the foregoing thought process. After the disappearance of the second registering consciousness, the *bhavaṅga* consciousness again flows in continuum until there is another object presented to the senses. When a person is in deep sleep, the life continuum occurs continuously. This is the usual sequence of a thought process.

However, when an object being sensed is not strongly sensed, there will be fewer moments of consciousness appearing in the sequence of the thought process. Sometimes the sequence will end at the last *javana*

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consciousness, without being followed by the two registering moments of consciousness. At the moment of dying, only five moments of *javana* consciousness arise instead of the usual seven. But if the being is too weak, the sequence stops at the determining consciousness.

When vipassanā concentration is very strong, its sequence also will stop at the determining consciousness. But in such a case, two or three determining consciousness moments occur and the sequence of thought process stops. This allows the series of *bhavaṅga* consciousness to flow again until interrupted.

In the previously described sequence of the seeing thought process, the consciousness is only aware of the visual object at the level of ultimate reality. But that is just the beginning. It has not yet conceptualized the object in a conventional way, for example, as being a woman or a man.

Moving from the level of ultimate reality to the conceptual level requires four thought processes in sequence. The seeing thought process, as previously described, arises first, and is followed by some moments of the *bhavaṅga* consciousness. Then three mind-door thought processes occur, separated by moments of *bhavaṅga* consciousness.

The sequence of the first mind-door thought process includes ten moments, as follows: one mind-door

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adverting consciousness, seven moments of *javana* consciousness, and two moments of registering consciousness. Then comes the flow of *bhavaṅga* consciousness. This first mind-door thought process takes the same visible object taken by the consciousness in the seeing thought process. So the object is not yet conceptualized.

In the sequence of the second mind-door thought process, however, the consciousness captures the shape-concept—for example, the feminine or masculine appearance of the object. And in the third mind-door thought process, the consciousness takes the name-concept. But ultimately this concept is not correct. This conceptualization shows how easily one can be tricked by the consciousness.

The seeing thought process and the first mind-door thought process take only the ultimate object. But the last two mind-door processes perceive concepts. This same pattern holds true for the hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching thought processes. In each of the four thought sequences, the first two take the ultimate object, and the last two conceptualize the conventional shapes and names.

If one is aware only of the visible object or sound, smell, taste, and bodily impression, or can just stop at the first mind-door thought process, the objects being sensed cannot be conventionally interpreted. So in order to remain at the level of ultimate reality, meditators must not give

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name or form to any sensed objects that become momentarily prominent during meditation. Such objects are noted only as they are experienced by the senses—as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or thinking.

Thus, if one notes “seeing, seeing” at the moment of seeing, the sequential consciousness is interrupted by the noting consciousness, both of which are at the level of ultimate reality. Therefore, as long as one maintains a sensed object and noting sequence, a conceptualizing thought process has no opportunity to intrude.

Such a way of contemplation agrees with the teaching called *diṭṭhi-dītamata*, which in Pāḷi means “just being aware of.” Moreover, the meditator will be able to distinguish between physical phenomena and mental phenomena. He will understand that the visible object and eye sensitivity lack cognitive ability, a function that only the consciousness possesses.

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6. Destroying the Five Aggregates

When the momentary appearance and disappearance of all phenomena become obvious, their impermanent nature, suffering nature and non-soul nature will be experientially realized. Just as the meditator distinguishes physical and mental phenomena at the moment of seeing, he will realize the respective physical and mental phenomena at the moment of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. He will also see the three characteristics in these phenomena, and the cause and effect relationship between them.

The eye of one who has not practiced vipassanā is tricked into perceiving wrongly—into seeing a man, a woman, a self, etc. With vipassanā knowledge, however, one does not find a self-entity, because it does not exist. One sees only the momentary appearance and disappearance of mental and physical phenomena. These phenomena do not last long when being watched by a concentrated noting mind. They just momentarily appear and disappear.

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Because all phenomena, whether mental or physical, arise singly and disappear singly, meditators will see clearly that they are not dependable, but are unsatisfactory, suffering. Moreover, they will see the non-soul nature of phenomena, which cannot control their own arising, but must arise according to their respective causes.

Therefore, all five aggregates—the aggregate of matter, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of formation, and the aggregate of consciousness—have only three characteristics: impermanence, suffering and non-soul. To see these three characteristics, one must contemplate. It is by contemplation of physical and mental phenomena that the five aggregates are destroyed.

The Buddha has given instructions on how to dispel clinging to the five aggregates. He said to Āyasmā Rādha, “My dear son Rādha, children play with sand to build toy houses in the streets and parks. Imitating their elders, they play with pots to cook food. As long as they cling to those toys with a view such as ‘my house, my property, and my belongings’ they are happy. If someone comes and destroys the toys, they cry and complain to their parents.

“As long as children do not become tired of the toys, they happily play with them. But attachment, desire, strong desire and burning desire disappear when the children become bored playing with those toys. At that time they

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tear them up and throw them away.

“Like those children, beings cling to the five aggregates. Interpreting them wrongly, such as ‘This is I, this is my possession, these are my belongings, this is my son, this is my daughter and this is my property,’ beings strongly cling to the five aggregates. Therefore they sink in the ocean of *samsāra*, and never escape from the continuous rounds of rebirth.”

The Buddha continued giving instructions to Rādha with the words, “My dear son Rādha, you should demolish the aggregate of matter and should practice to get rid of craving. Just like the children who destroy the sand houses when they become bored playing with them, you also should shatter and get rid of the aggregate of matter.

“Practice until all craving is eradicated. In the same way that the aggregate of matter is destroyed, you should practice to demolish all other aggregates: the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of formation and the aggregate of consciousness. And practice until all attachment to the five aggregates is eradicated.”

The Buddha explained to Rādha that eradication of craving means reaching the peace of Nibbāna. What is Nibbāna? In order to understand its nature, the meaning should be explained. Nibbāna comes from the Pāli word *nibbānum*. It literally means being extinguished,

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extinguishing, or having a peaceful nature. And what is extinguished? The ‘three rounds’, which continuously occur, are extinguished—the round of defilements, the round of volitional actions, and the round of resultants.

The round of defilements, *kilesa-vaṭṭa*, comprises ignorance, craving, and clinging. The round of volitional action, *kamma-vaṭṭa*, comprises meritorious and unmeritorious deeds. The round of resultants, *vipāka-vaṭṭa*, comprises relinking-consciousness, physical and mental phenomena, six sense doors, six types of contact and six types of feeling. Whatever we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, all are part of the round of resultants.

Not knowing the true nature of the moment of seeing and hearing is due to ignorance. Interpretations such as “I know, I see and I hear” are due to ignorance. Holding the view that what is being seen or heard is permanent or pleasant is due to ignorance. Attachment to what is being seen or heard is due to ignorance. This attachment is called *taṇhā*. Clinging, *upādāna*, occurs when one strongly attaches to what is seen or heard. That is how the round of defilement continues to occur.

Craving the aggregates and interpreting them as pleasant, one tries to fulfill one’s desires. Thus the round of volitional action is created. Conditioned by volition, the rebirth-linking consciousness arises immediately after the moment of death consciousness. The rebirth-linking

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consciousness causes the arising of physical and mental phenomena, six sense bases, contact and feeling. Their arising is the appearance of the round of resultants, and what we see and hear are part of the rounds of resultants.

Depending on the round of resultants, ignorance, craving and clinging arise. These impurities are also part of the round of defilements. Conditioned by the round of defilements, the round of resultants arises. Thus the three rounds revolve continuously, one after another.

If one can remain mindful continuously, path consciousness eventually will arise by the power of vipassanā knowledge. When one sees Nibbāna through path and fruition knowledge, the defilements from the round of *kilesa* will never appear again.

Because the defilements are eradicated, volitional activities will not take place. When there are no volitional activities, resultant mental and physical phenomena cannot arise again. Thus, when a fully enlightened Arahant passes away, there is no more becoming. The arising of physical and mental phenomena will not occur after the death consciousness of an Arahant.

The transcendental phenomenon that extinguishes all suffering is called Nibbāna. When one experiences Nibbāna with *arahatta* path and its fruition, all of one's suffering is absolutely extinguished. That extinguishing essence is known as Nibbāna. This is not the only way to

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explain Nibbāna. It also means the termination of all of the three rounds. Because of the power of the *arahatta* path consciousness, the three rounds will never appear again. Thus Nibbāna is also explained as the essence that stops the three rounds.

That is why the Buddha has encouraged us to practice until all three rounds have been destroyed—in other words, until craving has been eradicated. The first step is fulfillment of one's moral purity by observing the five precepts. After moral purity has been achieved, concentration and wisdom must be gained through the practice of *vipassanā*.

It is helpful if one first can attain *jhāna* concentration as the basis for practicing *vipassanā*. If *jhāna* concentration cannot be attained, one may note the prominent mental and physical phenomena arising at the present moment at the six sense doors. As it will be difficult for beginners to note them all, it is enough if they just note the most prominent physical phenomena.

While walking, movement should be noted. While sitting, the sitting posture and any other obvious phenomena must be noted. Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw therefore recommended contemplation on the rising and falling of the abdomen. Because of its easily felt tension and movement, it is a more prominent focal point than the breath.

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If the noting mind is interrupted by daydreaming or by thoughts, note them as “dreaming, dreaming” or “thinking, thinking.” When sensations such as bodily discomfort, heat, and pain become obvious, note them for what they are. If something is seen or heard, note it as “seeing, seeing” or “hearing, hearing.” When the concentration level is not strong enough at the beginning, the mind will wander here and there. If that happens, try to be aware of the wandering. Eventually, at a higher concentration level, the mind will seldom wander away.

During the practice of continual mindfulness, the noting mind will coincide with the object of meditation in the process of rising and falling. The mind still will wander occasionally, but not so often or for so long as previously. As soon as the wandering is noted it will be stopped. When it stops, the noting mind should return to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Thus all prominent phenomena are noted at every moment by one’s past noting mind, present noting mind, and future noting mind. Purification of mind, *cittavisuddhi*, is accomplished when every distinct momentary object is continuously noted.

When the mind is pure, the object of meditation is clearly observed. The meditator will see the distinction between physical and the mental phenomena, and will be able to distinguish between the noting mind and its object. Since everything being noted can be distinguished in the same way, the meditator will realize that only physical

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and mental phenomena exist in the body. This understanding is the insight knowledge called *nāmarūpāriccheda-ñāṇa*. One accomplishes purity in view, *diṭṭhi visuddhi*, when that insight knowledge has arisen.

The causal relationship between physical and mental phenomena will be understood during continuous practice of mindfulness. All physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, bending, stretching, and stepping are conditioned by will, a mind that wants. And the meditator will know experientially that one sees, or seeing consciousness arises, because of four factors: (1) eye base or eye sensitivity, (2) visible object, (3) light, and (4) attention.

The meditator will also understand how the consciousness arises not only in the eye door, but also at the moment of hearing, smelling tasting, and touching in the other sense doors. Understanding of the causal relationship means that the insight knowledge called *paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa* has been gained. When this knowledge is realized, one has already accomplished *kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi*, purification by overcoming doubt.

The doctrine of dependent origination, *paṭiccasamuppāda*, explains how the resultants and their conditioning factors relate to one another. Understanding the causal relationship from scriptures, however, is not the same as vipassanā insight knowledge. It is just

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theoretical knowledge from the scriptures, *sutamayāpaññā*. Or it may be merely an extrapolation of cognitive ability, *santīranapaññā*. After transcending these two types of knowledge, one reaches true vipassanā insight knowledge, *bhāvanāmayāpaññā*, from one's own experience. This is why we have to practice mindfulness.

While practicing mindfulness continuously, meditators will observe the appearance and disappearance of newly formed meditation objects at every moment. They will clearly see three phases, the starting phase, transitory phase and dissolution phase of all phenomena. Since all phenomena appear and disappear, their impermanent, unsatisfactory and suffering nature, and non-soul or non-self nature will be clearly understood. Understanding this way, one is reaching the vipassanā knowledge called *sammasana-ñāṇa*, the beginning of insight.

Being mindful continuously, the meditator will observe the arising and passing away of phenomena at a faster pace. Even though the appearance and disappearance of mental and physical phenomena are extremely rapid, by now the meditator will have developed strong enough concentration and mindfulness to see them clearly. Sometimes light or rapture will be experienced. When that happens, the insight knowledge of rise and fall, *udayabbayānupassanā-ñāṇa*, has developed.

At this stage, the various kinds of shape concepts

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and substantial concepts have been penetrated by vipassanā wisdom. But now meditators also will see ultimate phenomena arising and passing away. When one observes only the disappearance of mental and physical phenomena or sees them dissolving, the insight knowledge of dissolution, *bhangānupassanā-ñāṇa*, has been gained.

There is still higher knowledge to be reached. With continuous practice, the awareness of terror, *bhayatupaṭṭhāna-ñāṇa*, will be attained. And finally the yogi will reach the insight knowledge of *sankhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*. At this stage the mind reaches absolute equanimity. Whatever is being observed, whether pleasant or unpleasant, the mind is too calm to become distracted. The meditator is able to contemplate all mental and physical *sankhāra* clearly and with no imbalance between concentration and effort.

In time, when one is contemplating every moment, the continuous rising and falling of all mental and physical phenomena will be totally extinguished. Experientially observing the absolute extinguishing nature of Nibbāna, the meditator has reached the first path and fruition. This is how one becomes a stream-enterer, a *Sotāpanna*.

When, through the *arahatta* path and fruition knowledge, the highest stage of enlightenment is finally attained, one will experience the absolute extinguishing nature of Nibbāna. The three rounds of volitional

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activities, mental defilements and resultants will be absolutely destroyed. Destruction of the rounds of resultants means eradication of craving, the root of the five aggregates. With the annihilation of craving, all suffering is extinguished in the yogi, and there will be no rebirth in *samsāra*.

Craving is the potential root or original conditioning factor for rebirth. As long as it is not eradicated, one will be reborn. Some people look forward to an afterlife. But one who is reborn will undergo many kinds of suffering related to that existence. Therefore rebirth should be considered as a fearful suffering.

Even though one knows the dangerous nature of becoming and wishes not to be reborn, such a wish cannot be fulfilled until one eradicates craving by reaching the highest stage of enlightenment. The reason one is reborn is craving, the creator of the five aggregates.

And even though one is afraid of being reborn in hell, one may be destined to go there. This feared and unwanted destination is due to two prominent factors. The first factor is that one has not eradicated craving for becoming, and the second is that one possesses unwholesome kamma strong enough to cause rebirth in hell.

With no penetrative knowledge of the *arahatta* path, the Buddha-to-be had been caught in the rounds of *samsāra*

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for four incalculables and a hundred thousand world cycles. He was unable to see any escape from the sufferings of rebirth and becoming, life after life. At last, as a hermit named Sumedha, his life was to change when the Buddha Dīpankara declared him to be a future Buddha. Only then, as a Bodhisatta, did he begin his long search for the cause and cessation of bondage in *samsāra*.

After finally attaining enlightenment the Buddha uttered the following inspired words of victory:

Through many a birth in *samsāra* have I wandered
in vain,

Seeking the builder of this house.

Repeated birth is suffering indeed!

O house-builder, you are seen!

You will not build this house again,

For your rafters are broken and your ridgepole
shattered.

My mind has reached the unconditioned.

I have attained the destruction of craving!

These few lines are full of meaning. According to the Commentary, 'house builder' means craving, and the 'house' refers to the five aggregates. Destroyed by the Buddha's enlightenment and omniscience, the broken rafters represent the defilements, *kilesa*, and the shattered

Destroying the Five Aggregates

ridgepole is ignorance, *avijjā*.

A more detailed, though less poetic, explanation is given in the following paraphrase of the Buddha's words.

“Through the *arahatta* path and omniscient knowledge, I now have seen that craving is the builder of the five aggregates. Because this realization has been gained through powerful insight knowledge, craving is unable to build this house of aggregates again. I have already destroyed all of the mental defilements caused by ignorance.

“My mind is absorbed into the absolute extinguishing stage. My consciousness is restfully taking Nibbāna as an object that is devoid of volition and all attachment. My mind is peacefully absorbed in the *arahatta* fruition, *samāpatti*.”

Out of compassion the Buddha has offered to seekers the knowledge and freedom that he had toiled and suffered so long to find. Awareness of the suffering and weariness of rebirth in *samsāra* should inspire meditators to deepen their practice in the path he has discovered and revealed. His teaching is clear: the eradication of craving kills the conditioning factor of attachment, thus destroying the five aggregates that lead to rebirth. And the way is clear: one should practice *vipassanā* mindfulness by contemplating on the continuous occurrence and disappearance of physical and mental phenomena.

Destroying the Five Aggregates

May you all reach the Eightfold Path.
May you all, through knowledge of the Noble
Eightfold Path, eradicate craving.
May you all reach Nibbāna, the total extinction
of the five aggregates!

Destroying the Five Aggregates

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Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā

Sharing of Merits

May all beings share this merit
Which we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of
All kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth
Deities and others of mighty power
Share this merit of ours!
May they long protect the Teachings!

May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful



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