UNDERSTANDING THE FIVE AGGREGATES

In the Satipatthana Sutta (the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse), the Fourth Foundation is called *Dhammanupassana,* which translates as *Mindfulness of Mind Objects*. The first dhamma category examined is the Five Hindrances, with the intention to understand what stimulates their activity, what can be done to direct attention away from them and what can be done to prevent their future emergence into awareness. The remaining dhamma categories focus on how to recognize and enhance the mind conditions that create insight into the impermanent and non-self characteristics of existence.

The focus of this discussion is the Five Aggregates of Clinging, described by Analayo in “Satipatthana-The Direct Path To Realization” on pgs 216-217:

“These five aggregates are often referred to in the discourses as the “five aggregates of clinging” (*pañcupãdãnakkhandha*) [pahn-choo-pah-dah-nah]. In this context “aggregate” (*khandha*) is an umbrella term for all possible instances of each category, whether past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, near or far. The qualification “clinging” (*upãdãna*) [ooh-pah-dah-nah] refers to desire and attachment in regard to these aggregates. Such desire and attachment in relation to the aggregates is the root cause for the arising of *dukkha*.”

The actual wording in the Sutta is this:

He knows “such is material form, such its arising, such its passing away; such is feeling, such its arising, such its passing away; such is cognition, such its arising, such its passing away; such are volitions, such their arising, such their passing away; such is consciousness, such its arising, such its passing away.”

*Form* describes physical experience: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and the various bodily experiences such as pain, pleasure, hunger, fatigue and how the body is arranged in space (proprioception). This repeats the characteristics examined in the First Foundation, Mindfulness of the Body (Kayanupassana).

*Feeling* describes those characteristics of experience investigated in the Second Foundation, Mindfulness of Feelings (Vedanupassana). Feelings are the immediate response to stimulation, either pleasurable, painful or neutral in experience; they can be either physical or mental. Feelings are often represented as the bridge between sensory stimulation and mental processing of the stimulation.

*Cognition*, often referred to as *perception*, is the immediate categorization of experience. Examples would include hot or cold, apple or red ball, up or down, etc. This categorization process is ongoing, constantly “re-compared” to prior experience and updated dynamically. It is primarily associated with feeling, so that feeling and perception are fundamental ways that the selfing process is formed and modified dynamically.

*Volitions* are often termed *mind conditioners*. The Pali word for this process is *sankhara.* Volitions are literally termed *cetana,* but the dynamic operation of these mental processes determines how the selfing process is present in awareness. *Volition* is synonymous with *intention* and is how the mind orients thought processes and behaviors towards action and *cetana* represents the categories of processes involved in this process.

*Consciousness* is *the dynamic process of awareness*, the subjectivity of lived experience. The Pali word for this is *citta,* and the component elements of citta are called *cetasikas*. There are 52 of these cetasikas and they are subdivided into 5 categories: Universal (Five in number, conditioning each moment of consciousness), Occasional (Six in number, which may or may not condition consciousness), Unwholesome (Fifteen in number) and Wholesome (Twenty-five in number). Also on the list are Feelings and Perceptions—their bridging function makes them universal, but they don’t actively contribute to conditioning the mind.

***The goal of the practice of being mindful of the Five Aggregates of Clinging is to discover in the immediacy of experience the impermanent nature of these elements of personality and discover how craving and clinging create a false perception of an enduring and autonomous self***. This immediate and detached awareness “deconstructs” the process of selfing. With the experience of nirvana, the unconditioned, the Five Aggregates are relieved of clinging.