

**The FIVE AGGREGATES are impermanent and suffering, therefore cannot be regarded as self.**

## What are the five aggregates?

 **Form** **Feeling** **Perception** **Mental Formation** **Consciousness**

The *Buddha* taught us that “you” are not an integral, autonomous entity. The self (conventional truth) is a combination of the five aggregates (ultimate truth), namely the **Body** (*form*) and **Mind** (*feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness*).

## Why do we need to understand the five aggregates?

 **They are the objects that identity view and clinging spring. They are the objects for investigation to gain insight.**

1. The five aggregates of clinging is what the *Buddha* summarized as the Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha Ariya Sacca*). Only when we understand *dukkha* correctly can we be liberated from suffering.
2. *Dukkha* comes from the syllable “*du*” which means “bad” and “*kham*” means “void of happiness and self”. *Dukkha* comes about when we cling to the five aggregates as I, mine, myself, my pleasant feeling, my unpleasant feeling, I see, I hear ...
3. The five aggregates are the objects that identity view and clinging spring. They are the objects for investigation to gain insight.

## Why do we attach to the five aggregates?

 **Because we are unable to see the faults and dangers of clinging to them.**

We are attached to the five aggregates as I, mine, myself because we are unable to see the faults and dangers of clinging to them. The five aggregates are the objects of identity view and craving. They are the objects of *insight* (*vipassanā*) for one to gain release from *dukkha*. The goal of our *vipassanā* practice is – **to experience the constant arising and passing away of the five aggregates and to see clearly the dangers of attaching to them** – like a child sees the dangers of getting burnt touching the fireworks in fascination.



**Venerable Ananda attained Stream Entry (Sotāpanna) when Arahant Punna Mantaniputta exhorted him, “It’s with clinging, friend Ananda, that there is ‘I am,’ not without clinging. Clinging to what?”**  
**Clinging to form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness. They are to be seen as they actually are with right discernment as “This is not what I am.”** – SN 22.83

**We practice to see that all these five aggregates are impermanent, not permanent. What is impermanent is suffering and what is suffering cannot be regarded as self. What exists is just causes and effects relationship. Only when we are able to see their rising and passing away together with their causality can we become disenchanted and finally let go of attachment to them.**

**These five aggregates, not clung to, lead to long term happiness and well-being.**



Why is it important to study the five aggregates? It is because the five aggregates of clinging are the truths of suffering which must be fully understood by insight: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.”

— Sayalay Susilā

Understanding this sutta is important so that we do not get attached to the five aggregates and do not determine any of them to be “my self”. These five aggregates, not clung to, lead to long term happiness and well-being.

### The aggregate of **materiality** (*rūpakkhanda*)

Rupa means “keep on changing” and to be subject to deformation and oppression. It is made up of the four great elements (earth, fire, water, and wind) and the 24 derived materialities from these four elements. What causes the arising of the four elements? It is due to past karma, consciousness, nutriment, and temperature — all of these have the ability to influence the four elements which are then seen as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self, as the body reacts to causes and conditions caused by the four factors.

### The aggregate of **feeling** (*vedanākkhandha*)

Dependent on contact, feeling arises. There are six types of contact (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind). Each contact gives rise to three types of feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral). So in total there are 18 types of feeling. Feelings are always present and we practice observing them as they arise and cease. They are the object of your practice. When we do not contemplate on feelings as they arise, two fetters follow. First, one wrongly identifies feeling as “myself” thereby strengthening the personality view. Secondly, feeling conditions craving and one’s craving increases.

**6** TYPES OF CONTACT  
**x3** TYPES OF FEELING  
**18** TOTAL

### The aggregate of **perception** (*saññākkhandha*)

It perceives the quality of an object by recognizing its “sign.” This sign is a distorted sign, such as we mistake a rope for a snake in semi-darkness. We wrongly perceive the five aggregates as permanent, happiness, and even having an unchanging self. Although we experience in our day-to-day life drama a constant fluctuation in our feelings and emotions, the perception of impermanence still does not deeply imprint on our mind. We fail to contemplate or note “impermanence” at that moment. It will take a long time to correct this perverted perception.

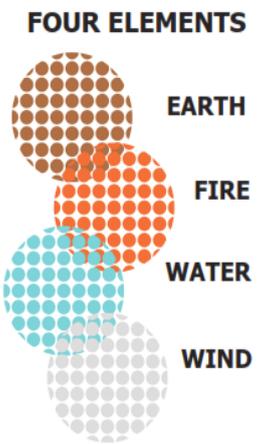
### The aggregate of **formation** (*sankhāraakkhandha*)

Its characteristic is forming, fabricating, and constructing. Its function is to accumulate karma. Excluding feeling and perception, the remaining 50 mental factors are grouped as formation aggregates. Its manifestation is intervening and to be interested. Practicing generosity, morality, and concentration are good karmas that prolong samsaric existences. But through Vipassanā, contemplating impermanence, suffering, and the non-self of formations, the mind turns away from the engagement of formations, letting go of grasping, indeed cuts short our samsaric existence.

### The aggregate of **consciousness** (*viññanakkhandha*)

Its characteristic is to know the object. Its manifestation is a continuity of process rather than what it seems to be: It seems as if an independent being (a compact rather than a composite entity) is experiencing phenomena. The truth of impermanence is hidden by this continuity, because consciousness is arising and passing away so rapidly. Unable to break down the compactness of continuity, we mistake it for an independent self.

**6 TYPES OF CONSCIOUSNESS = EYE • EAR • NOSE • TONGUE • BODY + MIND**



 **Because of gratification, we cling to the five aggregates.**

By Sayalay Susilā

**Because of not knowing clearly, we develop attachment.  
Because of knowing clearly, we give up attachment.**

**Just as a dog, tied to a post. If it walks, it walks right around that post. If it stands, it stands right next to that post. If it sits, it sits right next to the post. If it lies down, it lies down right to that post.**

**In the same way, the uninstructed person regards the five aggregates as “This is mine, this is my self, this is what I am”. If he walks, stands, sits or lies down, he is right next to these five clinging aggregates. Thus one should reflect on one’s mind with every moment “For a long time has this mind been defiled by passion, aversion and delusion”.**

SN 22.100

**Like a crooked murderer who disguised himself as a faithful servant to gain your trust and afterwards will kill you. You assume the five aggregates to be self and do not discern this murderer which will lead you to long term loss and suffering.**

SN 22.85

**Like a born blind man, who was given a grimy rag, believing it was a clear and spotless cloth, thus, develops attachment to it. We have been fooled by our mind, thinking five aggregates are permanent and bring happiness.** MN 75

**Understanding above suttas is important so that we do not get attached to the five aggregates and do not determine any of them to be “my self”. These five aggregates, not clung to, lead to long term happiness and well-being.**



## **What is the gratification, what is the danger, and what is the escape from the five aggregates?**

Form

The pleasure and joy, bhikkhu, that arise in dependence on each of the aggregates – this is the gratification. These aggregates are impermanent, suffering and subject to change – this is the danger. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust – this is the escape. MN 109

## **The five aggregates are empty**

Form is like a large lump of foam. Feeling is like a water bubble. Perception is like a mirage. Formation is like a banana tree. Consciousness is like a magician. Upon investigating, they would appear empty, void, and without substance. SN 22.95

Mental Formation

Mahā Kotthita asked:

## **What is the appropriate way to contemplate the five aggregates?**

Venerable Sarīputta replied: “A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to the five aggregates of clinging by contemplating them as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness and not as self.” SN 22.122

Clinging to the Five Aggregates is dangerous.  
Let go and not get attached to them.

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**Form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness are inconstant and non-self. All phenomena are inconstant and not-self.**

Venerable Channa, having received and understood the teaching of non-self from the senior monk, thought to himself: “But still my mind does not leap up, grow confident, steadfast, and release in the ending of craving. Instead, agitation and clinging still arise. Who, then is my self?”

— *Channa Sutta (SN22.90)*

 **SS** Agitation arises because of fear of losing the “self” that one has clung to so strongly.

He sought help from Venerable Ananda who preached to him: “The world is supported by a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is, with right discernment, “non-existence” with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is, with right discernment, “existence” with reference to the world does not occur to one. He has no uncertainty or doubt that, when there is arising, only stress is arising, and that when there is passing away, stress is passing away.”

## This is RIGHT VIEW

### Yamaka Sutta (SN 22.85)

**Is form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness constant or inconstant?**  
Inconstant, my friend.

**And is that which is inconstant, peaceful, or stressful?**  
Stressful, my friend.

**And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as “This is mine. This is myself. This is what I am?”**  
No, my friend.

**Do you regard form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness as Tathāgata?**  
No, my friend.

**Do you regard Tathāgata as being in form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness?**  
No, my friend.

**Then, an Arahant with no more mental effluents, what is he on the break up of the body after death?**  
Form is inconstant, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness are inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end.

Understanding this sutta is important so that we do not get attached to the five aggregates and do not determine any of them to be “my self”. These five aggregates, not clung to, lead to long term happiness and well-being.



**The Middle Path:** “Everything exists. That is one extreme. Everything does not exist. That is a second extreme. Avoiding the two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the Middle Path (Dependent Origination).”  
— *Kaccayanagotta Sutta (SN12.15)*

 **SS** The instruction here is to contemplate the arising and ceasing of mind-and-matter (nāma-rūpa) so that the myth of “self” is destroyed. When there is no “self” then there is only the natural process of rapid arising and passing away; there is no clinging to existence (to be) and non-existence (not to be).

 **SS** With clear understanding of Dependent Origination, one frees oneself from the wrong view of these two extremes. Understanding intellectually is not enough as insight knowledge is weak.