

A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness. This vicissitude is included in *dukkha* as suffering produced by change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*).

It is easy to understand the two forms of suffering (*dukkha*) mentioned above. No one will dispute them. This aspect of the First Noble Truth is more popularly known because it is easy to understand. It is common experience in our daily life.

But the third form of *dukkha* as conditioned states (*saṃkhāra-dukkha*) is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth, and it requires some analytical explanation of what we consider as a 'being', as an 'individual', or as 'I'.

What we call a 'being', or an 'individual', or 'I', according to Buddhist philosophy, is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The Buddha says: 'In short these five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*'.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere he distinctly defines *dukkha* as the five aggregates: 'O bhikkhus, what is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of attachment'.<sup>2</sup> Here it should be clearly understood that *dukkha* and the five aggregates are not two different things; the five aggregates themselves are *dukkha*. We will understand this point better when we have some notion of the five aggregates which constitute the so-called 'being'. Now, what are these five?

### *The Five Aggregates*

The first is the Aggregate of Matter (*Rūpakkhandha*). In this term 'Aggregate of Matter' are included the traditional Four Great Elements (*cattāri mahābhūtāni*), namely, solidity, fluidity, heat and motion, and also the Derivatives (*upādāya-rūpa*) of the Four Great Elements.<sup>3</sup> In the term 'Derivatives of Four Great Elements' are included our five material sense-organs, i.e., the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and their corresponding objects in the external world, i.e., visible form, sound, odour, taste,

<sup>1</sup> *Samkhattena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*. S V (PTS), p. 421.

<sup>2</sup> S III (PTS), p. 158.

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and tangible things, and also some thoughts or ideas or concep-  
tions which are in the sphere of mind-objects (*dharmāyatana*)<sup>1</sup>. Thus  
the whole realm of matter, both internal and external, is included  
in the Aggregate of Matter.

The second is the Aggregate of Sensations (*Vedanākkhandha*).  
In this group are included all our sensations, pleasant or unplea-  
sant or neutral, experienced through the contact of physical and  
mental organs with the external world. They are of six kinds:  
the sensations experienced through the contact of the eye with  
visible forms, ear with sounds, nose with odour, tongue with  
taste, body with tangible objects, and mind (which is the sixth  
faculty in Buddhist Philosophy) with mind-objects or thoughts or  
ideas.<sup>2</sup> All our physical and mental sensations are included in this  
group.

A word about what is meant by the term 'Mind' (*manas*) in  
Buddhist philosophy may be useful here. It should clearly be  
understood that mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. It should  
always be remembered that Buddhism does not recognize a spirit  
opposed to matter, as is accepted by most other systems of  
philosophies and religions. Mind is only a faculty or organ  
(*indriya*) like the eye or the ear. It can be controlled and developed  
like any other faculty, and the Buddha speaks quite often of the  
value of controlling and disciplining these six faculties. The  
difference between the eye and the mind as faculties is that the  
former senses the world of colours and visible forms, while the  
latter senses the world of ideas and thoughts and mental objects.  
We experience different fields of the world with different senses.  
We cannot hear colours, but we can see them. Nor can we see  
sounds, but we can hear them. Thus with our five physical sense-  
organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body—we experience only the  
world of visible forms, sounds, odours, tastes and tangible  
objects. But these represent only a part of the world, not the whole  
world. What of ideas and thoughts? They are also a part of the  
world. But they cannot be sensed, they cannot be conceived by  
the faculty of the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body. Yet they can be  
conceived by another faculty, which is mind. Now ideas and

<sup>1</sup>Abhisamuc, p. 4. Vibh. p. 72. Dhs. p. 133 § 594.  
<sup>2</sup>S III (PTS), p. 59.

thoughts are not independent of the world experienced by these five physical sense faculties. In fact they depend on, and are conditioned by, physical experiences. Hence a person born blind cannot have ideas of colour, except through the analogy of sounds or some other things experienced through his other faculties. Ideas and thoughts which form a part of the world are thus produced and conditioned by physical experiences and are conceived by the mind. Hence mind (*manas*) is considered a sense faculty or organ (*indriya*), like the eye or the ear.

The third is the Aggregate of Perceptions (*Saññākkhandha*). Like sensations, perceptions also are of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and the corresponding six external objects. Like sensations, they are produced through the contact of our six faculties with the external world. It is the perceptions that recognize objects whether physical or mental.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth is the Aggregate of Mental Formations<sup>2</sup> (*Samkhāra-khandha*). In this group are included all volitional activities both good and bad. What is generally known as *karma* (or *kamma*) comes under this group. The Buddha's own definition of *karma* should be remembered here: 'O bhikkhus, it is volition (*cetanā*) that I call *karma*. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind.'<sup>3</sup> Volition is 'mental construction, mental activity. Its function is to direct the mind in the sphere of good, bad or neutral activities.'<sup>4</sup> Just like sensations and perceptions, volition is of six kinds, connected with the six internal faculties and the corresponding six objects (both physical and mental) in the external world.<sup>5</sup> Sensations and perceptions are not volitional actions. They do not produce karmic effects. It is only volitional actions—such as attention (*manasikāra*), will (*chanda*), determination (*adhimokkha*), confidence (*saddhā*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*), desire (*rāga*), repugnance or hate (*paṭigha*)

<sup>1</sup>S III (PTS), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>'Mental Formations' is a term now generally used to represent the wide meaning of the word *saṃkhāra* in the list of Five Aggregates. *Samkhāra* in other contexts may mean anything conditioned, anything in the world, in which sense all the Five Aggregates are *saṃkhāra*.

<sup>3</sup>A (Colombo, 1929), p. 590—*Cetanā'ham bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi. Cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācā manasā.*

<sup>4</sup>Abhisamuc, p. 6.

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ignorance (*avijjā*), conceit (*māna*), idea of self (*sakkāya-ditthi*) etc.—that can produce karmic effects. There are 52 such mental activities which constitute the Aggregate of Mental Formations.

The fifth is the Aggregate of Consciousness (*Viññānakkehandha*).<sup>1</sup> Consciousness is a reaction or response which has one of the six faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) as its basis, and one of the six corresponding external phenomena (visible form, sound, odour, taste, tangible things and mind-objects, i.e., an idea or thought) as its object. For instance, visual consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāna*) has the eye as its basis and a visible form as its object. Mental consciousness (*mano-viññāna*) has the mind (*manas*) as its basis and a mental object, i.e., an idea or thought (*dhamma*) as its object. So consciousness is connected with other faculties. Thus, like sensation, perception and volition, consciousness also is of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and corresponding six external objects.<sup>2</sup>

It should be clearly understood that consciousness does not recognize an object. It is only a sort of awareness—awareness of the presence of an object. When the eye comes in contact with a colour, for instance blue, visual consciousness arises which simply is awareness of the presence of a colour; but it does not recognize that it is blue. There is no recognition at this stage. It is perception (the third Aggregate discussed above) that recognizes that it is blue. The term 'visual consciousness' is a philosophical expression denoting the same idea as is conveyed by the ordinary word 'seeing'. Seeing does not mean recognizing. So are the other forms of consciousness.

It must be repeated here that according to Buddhist philosophy there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered 'Self', or 'Soul', or 'Ego', as opposed to matter, and that consciousness (*viññāna*) should not be taken as 'spirit' in opposition to matter. This point has to be particularly emphasized, because a wrong notion that consciousness is a sort of Self or Soul that

<sup>1</sup>According to Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy the Aggregate of Consciousness has three aspects: *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna*, and the *Ālaya-vijñāna* (popularly translated as 'Store-Consciousness') finds its place in this Aggregate. A detailed and comparative study of this subject will be found in a forthcoming work on Buddhist philosophy by the present writer.

<sup>2</sup>S III (PTS), p. 61.

continues as a permanent substance through life, has persisted from the earliest time to the present day.

One of the Buddha's own disciples, Sāti by name, held that the Master taught: 'It is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders about.' The Buddha asked him what he meant by 'consciousness'. Sāti's reply is classical: 'It is that which expresses, which feels, which experiences the results of good and bad deeds here and there'.

'To whomever, you stupid one', remonstrated the Master, 'have you heard me expounding the doctrine in this manner? Haven't I in many ways explained consciousness as arising out of conditions: that there is no arising of consciousness without conditions.' Then the Buddha went on to explain consciousness in detail: 'Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises: on account of the eye and visible forms arises a consciousness, and it is called visual consciousness; on account of the ear and sounds arises a consciousness, and it is called auditory consciousness; on account of the nose and odours arises a consciousness, and it is called olfactory consciousness; on account of the tongue and tastes arises a consciousness, and it is called gustatory consciousness; on account of the body and tangible objects arises a consciousness, and it is called tactile consciousness; on account of the mind and mind-objects (ideas and thoughts) arises a consciousness, and it is called mental consciousness.'

Then the Buddha explained it further by an illustration: A fire is named according to the material on account of which it burns. A fire may burn on account of wood, and it is called wood-fire. It may burn on account of straw, and then it is called straw-fire. So consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises.<sup>1</sup>

Dwelling on this point, Buddhaghosa, the great commentator, explains: '. . . a fire that burns on account of wood burns only when there is a supply, but dies down in that very place when it (the supply) is no longer there, because then the condition has changed, but (the fire) does not cross over to splinters, etc., and

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<sup>1</sup>*Mahātaṇhāsambhaya-sutta*, M I (PTS), p. 256 ff.

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become a splinter-fire and so on; even so the consciousness that arises on account of the eye and visible forms arises in that gate of sense organ (i.e., in the eye), only when there is the condition of the eye, visible forms, light and attention, but ceases then and there when it (the condition) is no more there, because then the condition has changed, but (the consciousness) does not cross over to the ear, etc., and become auditory consciousness and so on . . .'<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha declared in unequivocal terms that consciousness depends on matter, sensation, perception and mental formations, and that it cannot exist independently of them. He says:

'Consciousness may exist having matter as its means (*rūpupāyam*), matter as its object (*rūpārammaṇam*), matter as its support (*rūpapatittham*), and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop; or consciousness may exist having sensation as its means . . . or perception as its means . . . or mental formations as its means, mental formations as its object, mental formations as its support, and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop.

'Were a man to say: I shall show the coming, the going, the passing away, the arising, the growth, the increase or the development of consciousness apart from matter, sensation, perception and mental formations, he would be speaking of something that does not exist.'<sup>2</sup>

Very briefly these are the five Aggregates. What we call a 'being', or an 'individual', or 'I', is only a convenient name or a label given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing. 'Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*' (*Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*). This is the true meaning of the Buddha's words: 'In brief the five Aggregates of Attachment are *dukkha*.' They are not the same for two consecutive moments. Here A is not equal to A. They are in a flux of momentary arising and disappearing.

'O Brāhmaṇa, it is just like a mountain river, flowing far and swift, taking everything along with it; there is no moment, no instant, no second when it stops flowing, but it goes on flowing and

<sup>1</sup>MA II (PTS), pp. 306-307.

<sup>2</sup>S III (PTS), p. 58.

continuing. So Brāhmaṇa, is human life, like a mountain river.<sup>1</sup> As the Buddha told Raṭṭhapāla: 'The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent.'

One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. There is no unchanging substance in them. There is nothing behind them that can be called a permanent Self (*Ātman*), individuality, or anything that can in reality be called 'I'. Every one will agree that neither matter, nor sensation, nor perception, nor any one of those mental activities, nor consciousness can really be called 'I'.<sup>2</sup> But when these five physical and mental aggregates which are interdependent are working together in combination as a physio-psychological machine,<sup>3</sup> we get the idea of 'I'. But this is only a false idea, a mental formation, which is nothing but one of those 52 mental formations of the fourth Aggregate which we have just discussed, namely, it is the idea of self (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*).

These five Aggregates together, which we popularly call a 'being', are *dukkha* itself (*samkhāra-dukkha*). There is no other 'being' or 'I', standing behind these five aggregates, who experiences *dukkha*. As Buddhaghosa says:

'Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found;  
The deeds are, but no doer is found.'<sup>4</sup>

There is no unmoving mover behind the movement. It is only movement. It is not correct to say that life is moving, but life is movement itself. Life and movement are not two different things. In other words, there is no thinker behind the thought. Thought itself is the thinker. If you remove the thought, there is no thinker to be found. Here we cannot fail to notice how this Buddhist view is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: 'I think, therefore I am.'

Now a question may be raised whether life has a beginning.

<sup>1</sup>A (Colombo, 1929), p. 700. These words are attributed by the Buddha to a Teacher (*Sattbā*) named Araka who was free from desires and who lived in the dim past. It is interesting to remember here the doctrine of Heraclitus (about 500 B.C.) that everything is in a state of flux, and his famous statement: 'You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.'

<sup>2</sup>The doctrine of Anatta 'No-Self' will be discussed in Chapter VI.

<sup>3</sup>In fact Buddhaghosa compares a 'being' to a wooden mechanism (*dāruyanta*). *Vism.* (PTS), pp. 594-595.

<sup>4</sup>*Vism.* (PTS), p. 513.

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