

Pañcakkhandha

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According to the Buddha there is no permanent and eternal soul inside a ‘being’ as is conceived by some philosophical systems. The latter gives the example of a bird in a cage to explain what happens when one dies. The eternal soul leaves the body just like the bird in a cage and only the cage is left behind.

Instead, the Buddha has analyzed a being into five *khandhas* and says that a being is made up of these *khandhas* in the same way a chariot is made up of several parts like the wheels, poles, shafts etc.

When Māra asks bhikkhuni Vajirā,

‘By whom has this being been created?
Where is the maker of the being?
Where has the being arisen?
Where does the being cease?’

She replies,

‘This is a heap of sheer formations:
Here no being is found.

Just as, with an assemblage of parts
The word “chariot” is used.
So, when the aggregates exist,
there is the convention “a being”.’

And what are the aggregates that go into making a being?

The Buddha has analyzed ‘being’ in great detail and shown that it consists of only five aggregates. They are *rūpa khandha*, *vedanā khandha*, *saññā khandha*, *saṅkhāra khandha* and *viññāṇa khandha*. *Khandha* means aggregate or heap because *rūpa* (matter) is not one kind but many different kinds which join to form one *rūpa* such as *cakkhu rūpa* (eye formation). Similarly, there are so many *vedanas*, so many *saññās*, so many *saṅkhāras* and so many *viññāṇas* in a being. That is why all *rūpas* that go into making a being are called *rūpa khandhas*; all *vedanās* that make a being are called *vedanā khandhas* and so

on. When it is said that all *rūpas*, all *vedanas* etc. go into making a being, it does not mean that *rūpa* or *vedana* is something which is permanent. They are always changing, changing very fast. But they are abstracted and grouped together as the five *khandhas*. The function of *saññā* is different from the function of *vedanā*. Whereas *vedana* means feeling, *saññā* means perceiving. Function wise they are different. In the same way, each *khandha* is different from the others and its function is also different from the functions of the other *khandhas*.

Since none of the five *khandhas* is permanent and a being is made of them, there is, therefore, nothing like a permanent soul. That ‘one is’ because one sees, hears, smells, tastes and touches is just a mirage; it is not true. What one sees at this moment is not the same as what one sees the next moment. Furthermore, both the seer and the seen are constantly changing. The change that takes place is so quick that one has the impression of ‘permanence’ or ‘continuity’ in the perceiver and the perceived.

See the topic called *Puggala* for a detailed understanding of *pañcakkhandha*.

Questions:

The questions set in the topic *Puggala* will be relevant for this topic also.