

ZEN notes



SOKEI-AN SAYS

THE FIVE SKANDHAS

The five groups of aggregates of all existing dharmas called the five skandhas are the basis for one of the important doctrines in Buddhism.

European and American scholars who talk about Buddhism pay little attention to the five skandhas. Some scholars who call themselves profound Buddhists have never spoken of this nor thought about it, but the five skandhas doctrine is the back-bone of Buddhism.

This term appears, one might say, almost on the first page of the Agamas, the oldest scriptures of Buddhism. Its translation from the Sanskrit into Chinese is made up of two characters. The first means five, the second "piled up." Earlier, the second character used could be translated "shadows."

The Buddha divided all existing dharmas within and without the human mind into five groups, calling them the "five aggregates," as a farmer might separate all his vegetables into five different baskets--putting green peas into one, turnips into another, celery into another, potatoes into still another, and onions into the fifth. There are also finer discriminations in Buddhism. In the *Abhidharma-kosha*, the dharmas are separated into seventy-five groupings.

The five skandhas are the properties of samskrita (the opposite of asamskrita). Before I explain the details of the five skandhas, I shall explain about samskrita and asamskrita, so that you may understand the fundamental system of Buddhism.

Asamskrita is something that exists without relying on any other

thing. It is like electricity. No one knows what it is in itself. When electricity relies on something, it burns that on which it relies and produces light. When the human soul is in its original state, it is called asamskrita. When it relies upon something--as when electricity relies on something, carbon, iron, or copper wire--it acts differently. It is then said to be in the state of samskrita.

The spontaneous first motion of human or sentient mind is in the state of asamskrita. It creates all active phenomena. Then the human mind brings all the results of the action of mind back into mind as a fruit drops seed into the ground. When a ham is smoked and keeps the flavor of the smoke in the ham, it is called "smoked ham." Human mind is similarly "aromatized" by the outside. In this state, human mind is in samskrita. It is called *vasana* ("suffused"). The state of asamskrita is pure, but the state of samskrita is impure. If your mind were water, pure water would be in a state of asamskrita. When polluted with dust and debris, it is in the state of samskrita, a so-called "aggregation."

Buddhism embraces these two states of asamskrita and samskrita. Human mind is always in the samskrita state (*ui* in Chinese). Asamskrita is *mui*. The meaning of the Chinese *ui* is "doing something." The meaning of *mui* is "doing nothing." When the human mind is in the "doing nothing" state, it burns like fire. When the mind "does" something, we must separate this impure "doing" from the pure "doing nothing." We stop the fire from smoking by meditation, by pure mind action. We make an analysis

Here I go



Sokei-an's Lives

SUBJECTIVE, OBJECTIVE.

When I was young and it was examination day, before I went to school in the morning I would close my books and go to my seat to meditate. If, in the examination, a very difficult problem appeared on the blackboard and I was in a quandary, I meditated to quench the palpitation of my heart, for I had found that my brain worked better after meditation.

When I was young and studying wood carving, I always realized that someone was living in my attic, carving something independently in my attic, someone independently thinking while I carved. Whenever I did anything, walking the street, going to bed, working, this fellow in the attic was independently thinking his own thoughts. Sometimes I put my tools away and cooperated in his thinking. I became intimate with him, became acquainted with him. I thought he was an old man. I called him a philosopher, a queer philosopher three thousand years old. And gradually he occupied all my house and drove the wood carver out; and then, one day the philosopher disappeared and I discovered myself. When he snatched the entire property of the woodcarver, then he disappeared and I was born! I visit the philosopher occasionally.

When I was seventeen years old I was associating with other students, talking about philosophy. Some German philosophy had come into my country and was translated. The students read it and every night in this boarding house and that boarding house they gathered together to argue and discuss

and dispute, and in the end to fight. even giving one another black eyes.

A law student told me four words-- subjective, objective, abstract, concrete. After that my brain flowed like water, and I became a no-good boy for daily life. I puzzled about the division of subjectivity and objectivity. It obsessed me! I ran outside and closed the door. I thought I was in objectivity. Then I ran into the house, closed my eyes and thought I was in subjectivity.

My mother thought I had gone crazy. I wrote the character "tree" on paper, then destroyed it and brought in a real tree, hung it on the wall. My mother said, "What has happened to this poor child?"

I fell into a sickness that lasted until I went into the monastery.

What is "concrete?" When you pass the first koan, then you will realize what is concrete and what is abstract. Your heart is beating and your blood is rising; from zenith to nadir--it is revealed immediately--the concrete!

The students worked hard, strove to find the truth, but they thought the truth existed only in words.

Some became Christians, some agnostics, others came to popular Buddhism.

I came to Zen. I had been sent to a Zen master, my teacher there. I said two or three words. He said, "There is no truth in the word! The word speaks *about* something. You open your mouth ... The word has gone away. There is something that was spoken by the word. What was that something?" I gasped and went away. If I cannot speak, Truth has gone away. There is no truth left in

my mind. The only truth that is left to me is this body and this mind. If I think analytically about it and meditate upon it, body disappears and mind disappears--nothing is left! I fail to find truth. That is the beginning study of meditation. We analyze mind till there is no truth left in it.

Of course I was annoyed with my mother after my father's death--she cried in the night, so I despised her. Why did she have to take that agony? After I came into the temple I practiced introspection. I realized my mother's morbid dreaming, and not only hers, but also that morbid flowing mind must be external. It is like a man sitting in his chair and tapping on the table--insane.

Your mind, if you introspect it, is like running water--you think of a cigarette, a postcard, giving a gift to the postman, no letter from your sweetheart, etc. It is human mind--and you go to bed and cry.

I was eighteen years old when I realized that I was thinking something all the time. I said to my mother, "I think someone is living in my attic!"

"Therefore you are insane," she said.

When I first introspected my mind I realized that my mind was flowing always. It was like looking into a dirty pond. I realized something was moving inside but I couldn't see the bottom. I am sure that many people, mature people--40-50 years old---have never introspected their minds, have never known what is going on in their minds. I made an attempt to keep a record of my mind activity from morning to even-

ing seeking to find out what I was thinking. I wrote ten pages a day. After a time I gave it up. There was too much. I destroyed it. Of course my mother found it and laughed at me.

At the age of twenty, when I came to Zen, I realized the value of introspection.

When I was a child I attempted to make daily notes of my dreams. I kept a notebook and pencil near my pillow and tried to scribble them down. Then I would go off to sleep again. My mother always said: "What are you doing? Stop that nonsense and go to sleep. Don't be bothered by your dreams." It usually happened that when I had carefully arranged my notebook and pencil and gone to bed, either I didn't dream anything or I didn't awake. If I had made no arrangements I would be sure to dream, but by the time I had awakened, jumped from my bed, searched around for the notebook and pencil and finally found them, I had forgotten what I dreamed, I had lost my dream. This training was the beginning of my meditation. Finally I trained myself to memorize my dreams so exactly that I couldn't note all the details down in my book. I would have had to write ten or fifteen pages every day. My poet friend laughed at me: "Most of it is your imagination, your own creation. You have lost the boundary line between your dreams and your imagination. Stop this nonsense!" I realized that it was so. But I still use that training. Today, when I have been somewhere and come back home I can sit down and, supporting my chin with my elbow, evoke exactly what I have seen and heard just as it happened--the hot-dogs, the maple trees, everything--I can recall clearly.

When I was young, I told my teacher: "I think the most truthful moment of mind is when I am sleeping." "Yes it is so" he agreed.

"And when I get home and talk to my mother, it seems that *this* is the true time."

Now I realize that from morning to evening I am true. There is no false time. Every moment is a true moment.

People ask me sometimes: "Sokei-an, you have experienced the transcendental world and you are still there. How do you feel?" I say, "I feel just like this. I got into it in my twenties and I have been there ever since, so I haven't much experience of the other world."

How did I get into it? Well, I shall tell you the truth. One day I wiped out all notions from my mind. I gave up all desires. I discarded all the words with which I thought, and stayed in quietude. I felt a little queer--as if I were being carried into something, or as if I were touching some power unknown to me. I had been near it before; I had experienced it several times but each time I had shaken my head and run away from it. This time I decided not to run away, and I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but my physical body extended to the corners of the world. I walked two, three, four yards, but I felt I was standing in the center of the cosmos. I spoke, but my words had lost their meaning. I saw people coming toward me but all were the same man. All were myself! Queer, I had never known this world. I had believed that I was created, but now I must change my opinion; I was never created; I was the cosmos. No individual

Mr. Sasaki existed.

I came to my teacher. He looked at me and said: "Tell me about your new experience, your entering the transcendental world."

Did I answer him? If I spoke, I would come back into the old world. If I said one word, I would step out of the new world I had entered. I looked at his face. He smiled at me. He also did not say a word.

Afterwards I realized that to do this needed strong conceit. I went back home and told my mother. She looked at me and said: "I thought you would go crazy and die, but now it seems you have got somewhere."

In satori it is as if you go to your mother. I felt so when I was meditating on my koans. You have used your mind to its utmost force, but you haven't attained satori. Then you return to mother's lap--abandon everything--this is the real religious feeling. You worship the whole universe, all nature, and you bring yourself back to the bosom of your nature which is your mother. Then nature's universal force will support you. Zen is like a type of art. I found this knack of going back to the bosom of Nature because I was an artist and worshipped Nature. From this feeling I entered Zen very quickly.



of the mind and drive out all the things that are smoldering in the mind. Just as when a room becomes full of cigarette smoke, you open the windows and turn on the electric fan to drive out the smoke, so with meditation you must drive out all suffering and questions, and keep your mind pure. With this pure mind you will find your mind's origin.

Without understanding samskrita and asamskrita, you cannot grasp Buddhism. Recently I gave a lecture on Buddha's skandhas. Buddha's skandhas are in the nature of asamskrita. They are spontaneous and intrinsic. Man's five skandhas are cultivated, consciously or unconsciously. They are not natural; they are biased. They have no freedom of movement of their own, but are always clinging to the seeds carried in from the outside.

Skandha means "neck," for the neck is "piled" upon the shoulders. The five skandhas are the five piles of agglomerations of existing dharma--as on the sea bottom you have jellyfish, then seaweed, and so forth. The order of arrangement of the five skandhas begins with those that are coarse, gradually going through those that are finer, and finally reaching those that vanish into nothing. They are in this order: (1) rupa-skandha, (2) vedana-skandha, (3) samjna-skandha, (4) samskara-skandha, (5) vijnana-skandha.

Rupa-skandha implies all existing appearances both within and without our sense perceptions: clouds, mountains, rivers, sun, moon, stars, red, green, blue, all colors, sounds, odors, touch--hot, cold, smooth, rough; all visible semi-material signs in our minds, the aggregation of signs in the mind--

the faces of cats and dogs, sometimes the shapes of letters or characters, the forms of bodies, and so forth.

Vedana-skandha is usually translated by Western scholars as sense-perception. It includes feelings--pleasant and painful, agreeable and disagreeable, hunger, itching, and so forth. All these belong to vedana. Beauty and ugliness may be included in vedana also, but they stand between vedana and samjna usually.

Samjna-skandha implies all human mind. Characters, numbers, names, signs and symbols--all these are the products of samjna. Human beings think of things by means of numbers, names, signs and symbols. So the "idea" belongs to samjna. The "idea" of Emptiness belongs also to samjna. For example, someone comes into the Zen room and answers a question about Reality by saying "Emptiness." This one is still in samjna; he has not broken through. He thinks he is at the bottom of the sea, but he is still in the cabin of the boat. Emptiness, Shunyata, Nothingness--these words are the products of samjna. One who uses these to answer a koan is not yet at the bottom of the ocean of Emptiness. Samjna must be translated into English as thoughts, or ideas.

Samskara-skandha Western scholars have translated as "confection." It means aggregation of seeds. The state of samskara is independent of rupa and vedana and samjna. There are no sensations, no thoughts or images, nor is there any material existence. Here everything is amalgamated. All the seeds that have filtered through our eyes, ears, from the outside, through samjna--all are amalgamated, just as silver, gold, iron and copper can be

come a molten amalgamation. Samskara is the aggregation of mood, finer than feeling. It is the essence of mind. Dr. Goddard has translated Dharmakaya as "essence of mind," but I object, for essence of mind means samskara. Dharmakaya and samskara are entirely different things in Buddhism. How can samskara be Dharmakaya? Dharmakaya is like the empty sky, while samskara is like a rainbow.

The field of samskara is very large. It has tremendous extension. In the state of samskara, we think many things in the same terms. We might say "painful color," though color has nothing to do with pain. "Painful color" is in samskara. "I am so happy, I cannot stop crying!" This, too, is the state of samskara where joy and grief are interchangeable. However, joy and grief are separate in samjna. In samskara all feelings are amalgamated and interfused. We feel this in the depths of our minds. Perhaps psychologists would call this the semi-conscious or unconscious mind. When we look at it from the side of samskrita we see these moods manifested everywhere about us on the earth. The willow droops its branches, appearing sad, while the pine tree, with vigor, stretches out its sturdy arms and seems to laugh. The cat meows, the dog bow-wows. All are in the state of samskara. You cannot explain this state, but poets, artists, and meditators feel it.

Vijnana-skandha is the state of consciousness that lies at the bottom of the aggregation, but it appears in many places. The highest consciousness that we have is the intellect. With our intellectual consciousness

we become aware of our own state of existence and our own state of mind as well. This state of consciousness may be cultivated by education or by the attainment of enlightenment. The human being has a large area of this consciousness. Animals have a narrow field. In Buddhism, it is called prajna. It can appear as will power, and it appears as continuous consciousness. We are continually aware of our own existence, while some other sentient beings at times have no awareness. They exist but have no awareness--like vegetables that have consciousness but no awareness. Human consciousness has continual awareness.

Consciousness with suffering is called klista-mano-vijnana and consciousness without suffering is a-klista-mano-vijnana. There is further consciousness in the eye, in the ear, in the nose, in the tongue, in the million pores of the skin. Consciousness in the mind is mano-vijnana. Everlasting consciousness is called alaya-vijnana. It carries the seeds of reincarnation. Then there is the consciousness that will never be aromatized, the amara consciousness. This consciousness reaches to the bottom. In the terms of Buddhism, amara consciousness is the deepest; it does not carry the seeds from the outside.

YEARS OF THE COCK (1969, 1957, 1945, and so forth by twelves backwards) are said to produce deep thinkers who may be eccentric and lonely. Others are attracted to them but may find them too "cocky." Rabbits make their worst spouses according to The Japanese Fortune Calendar.

pen notes

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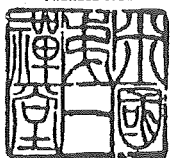
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