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**Comprehensive Study of the Significance of the Five  
Aggregates as a Theoretical and Practical Basis  
to Understand the Buddhist Concept of Reality**

By  
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## Abstract

This thesis uses both the microscopic/macroscopic approaches to research into the doctrine of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The microscopic approach analyzes in detail, *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* separately and this is described in the Part I of this thesis. The macroscopic approach that deals with the five aggregates as a whole in relation to other important Buddhist doctrines in the context of the whole Buddhist doctrinal system is dealt with in the Part II. It is that when the five aggregates are examined from this combined microscopic/macroscopic approaches, the significance of the doctrine can be properly grasped.

This comprehensive understanding of the five aggregates examined from both approaches is as follows: Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arises every moment when sense organ, corresponding object, and attention (*samannāhāra*) meet together, forming a kind of stream (*viññāṇasota*). When consciousness arises, the five aggregates always arise together. Therefore, “stream of consciousness” is nothing but “stream of the five aggregates”. This “stream of the five aggregates” constitutes an individual’s “subjective experiential world” (*loka*), which is “reality” in Buddhism. When ego-consciousness is involved in the arising of the five aggregates, they become the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandha*), in the sense that they are constructed (or conditioned) by craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*), view (*diṭṭhi*). The “subjective experiential world” that consists of the five aggregates of clinging is *dukkha* for an individual who has constructed (*abhisamkharoti*) it as “I” or “mine”, due to its inherent impermanent (*anicca*) nature. The constructed “world” is *saṃkhata* in the sense that it is constructed (or conditioned) by “I-ness” ignorance and craving. And the stream of the “world” is *saṃsāra*.

The way to end the “subjective experiential world” consisting of the five aggregates of clinging, which is *dukkha*, *saṃkhata*, and *saṃsāra*, is to understand the true nature of this “world”, and not to cling to it. By contemplating on the five aggregates which constitute the “world” as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*, the practitioner deconstructs (*visaṃkhāra*) “his world” through the process of *nibbidā*, *virāga*, and *vimutti*. When a practitioner completely removes ignorance and craving toward “his world” consisting of the five aggregates of clinging, he



achieves *kilesa-parinibbāna* and becomes an arahant. And the arahant, at his death, achieves *khandha-parinibbāna*, in which the conditionality of the five aggregates itself is eliminated.

Through this comprehensive understanding of the five aggregates, it can be observed that the five aggregates are not only the theoretical basis (as constituent factors of the experiential self and the experiential world), but also the practical basis (as meditational objects) to understand the Buddhist concept of reality.

