

Chapter 4, A New Approach to the *Khandhas* – How We Experience the World in The Buddha’s Teachings: Seeing Without Illusion.

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A New Approach to the *Khandhas* – How We Experience the World

‘What is this world condition?

Body is the world condition.

And with body and form go feeling, perception, consciousness, and all the activities throughout the world.

The arising of form and the ceasing of form – everything that has been heard, sensed, and known, sought after and reached by the mind – all this is the embodied world, to be penetrated and realized.’

Samyutta Nikaya

‘The ‘world’ of experience is not given in experience:

it is constructed by thought from the data of sense.’

C. I. Lewis¹

For us to understand the profundity of the Buddha’s teachings, we must first turn to an examination of the *khandhas*. According to the Wisdom Library², the *khandhas* (Pali) (Sanskrit: *skandhas*) or Five Aggregates are the five components of a being which come together at birth and separate at death:

(1) Matter or form (*rupa*) – external and internal matter. Externally, *rupa* is the physical world. Internally, *rupa* includes the material body and the physical sense organs, i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body;

(2) Sensation or feeling (*vedana*) – the feeling in reception of physical things by the senses through the mind;

(3) Perception and/or cognition (*sanna*) – the functioning of mind in distinguishing appearances;

(4) Volition or mental formation (*sankara*) – habitual action, i.e. a conditioned response to the object of experience, whether it is good or evil,

whether you like or dislike it;

(5) Consciousness (*vinnana*) – the mental faculty engaged in perception, cognition, and experience.

The Traditional Interpretation of *Khandha*

Khandha is most frequently translated into English as ‘aggregate.’ Before the Buddha’s particular use of the word, the word *khandha* had very common meanings: a *khandha* could be a pile, a bundle, a heap, a mass. Inaccurately, this image of a ‘pile’ has continued to be used in describing the Buddha’s use of the word. For example, as Thanissaro Bhikkhu traditionally uses the term, ‘The five *khandhas* are bundles or piles of form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness. [...] The common and explicit image is of the *khandhas* as burdensome.’ (SN 22.22)³

Or as C.A.F. Rhys Davids wrote:

*‘And the Khandhas stand exposed as the vehicles of pain and misery, and as “a burden” taken up ever again by craving ever-reborn – craving of sense-desires, craving for rebirth.’*⁴

Extended Interpretation of *Khandhas*

Sue Hamilton, in her book *Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder*, makes a significant extension of reference from the above traditional doctrine of the *khandhas* as five individual, separate, burdensome aggregates or ‘piles.’ She cogently argues that, in his first sermon and after, the Buddha always referred to the *khandhas* as a collective, unified unit, and only as a ***unified*** unit can one best understand the Buddha’s perspective regarding their function. In their collective function, the *khandhas* refer to the body as a living organism that provides the basis for our ability to know anything.

This important formulation of the *khandhas* as an integrated organic whole highlights the reality that it isn’t possible for us to separate ourselves from our experience, nor is it possible to know anything other than by the *khandhas*. There is not only no separation between our self and our experience; there is also no separation between mind and body. The human ability to conceptualize relies on the sensory data that are filtered through the collective unit of *khandhas*. From this perspective, the *khandhas* are not a ‘burden’ and cannot be separated or jettisoned from our experience – nor should they be.

They are our experience. We know the world through the *khandhas*. The *khandhas* must be understood not as five separate ‘heaps’ of bodily material but as a cohesive, living physical apparatus, an apparatus whose main

operating processes are centered on the survival of the organism and the functioning of our cognitions.

So we come to understand that our senses are not ‘windows on the world’ and what we see isn’t actually what’s out there but instead an ‘informed guess’. Our brain constructs a reality of the external world based on what evolution has developed as a capacity of cognitive construction of what we need to know for our survival.

***Khandas* as a Collective, Unified Unit**

This crucial point of understanding the *khandhas* as a collective, unified, organic unit and not five separately functioning bases is similar to what Marek McGann explains as the enactive cognitive position regarding our cognitions.⁵ McGann notes that, while individual sensory organs may be vital, no perception depends on, or can be explained by, the input of a specific organ alone. All perception is inherently multi-modal. Modalities are not atomic in nature; rather, they are a product of a dynamic process which involves an embodied agent (with goals and sensitivities) and a world. Any aspect of a person’s awareness during a particular action will have to be described and interpreted in light of the rest of the system during that same activity. In other words, the *khandhas*, or body as living organism, is an organization of interacting modalities.

With Hamilton’s extension of understanding, we analyse the *khandhas* as interacting modalities of a unified organization. This leads us to a very different analysis of the nexus of interactions of the *khandhas*, the cognitive apparatus through which we construct our ‘world,’ so it makes sense to us. Ultimately, instead of the traditional analysis focusing on the impermanence of each separate ‘heap’ or *khandha* as the root of suffering, we understand on a more radical and profound level that the sources of our suffering are the illusory cognitive constructions of ‘self’ and ‘world’ with their accompanying cravings. The result is that, with Enlightenment, one ceases to grasp at the object and subject of experience. Enlightenment results from insight into, and the dis-identification of, the thoughts and the conceptual constructions and projections that provide the foundation for our pre-enlightened cognitions. This dis-identification transforms our basic and mundane mode of cognition into ‘pure experience’ (emptiness), which is defined as non-conceptual and devoid of interpretive overlay. Much of this book explores the implications of this extended analysis.

The Explanatory Analysis of the Five

The five *khandhas* are body, consciousness, sensations or feelings, apperception, and volitional activities. The body is significant as a *khandha* not as simply a 'pile' of matter, but as the living organism which is the origin of one's 'experience' – the locus of the senses through which we experience the world. In Buddhism there are six senses of the body: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and 'mind.' While the first five are familiar to us, we usually do not consider mind a sixth sense. As Hamilton states, '[...] in the early Buddhist teachings (mind) is the faculty, or sense, which filters and collates all sensory data so it can actually make sense to us.'⁶ In the Buddha's teachings, it is mind that mediates everything the other senses collect, that makes sense of the huge volume of information that arises with the interaction between our sense organs and sense datum. Mind is not a permanent substance; it is the ongoing process of conceptualization and emotion. Or, as neuroscientists J. A. Scott Kelso and David Engstrom put it, 'The body is crucial to our experience of the world because it provides the sense organs through which the objective world is accessed by us and it has the organizing capacity of the mind that processes and constructs an understanding of that data. Organisms are not just pieces of matter; they are matter in motion – animate forms. [...] Coordination dynamics (the study of how human beings and human brains – singly and together – coordinate behavior) has stressed the coevolution of real organisms coupled to and acting in real environments, a view captured in the term "embodied cognition."⁷

Our Bodies are Crucial

The body is thus crucial to our experience of the 'world,' since it provides us with the sense organs through which the 'objective world' is accessed by us. The input through our sense organs is then further processed by our sophisticated complex mental activities; these become our 'experience' or knowledge of the world. Experience which originates for us through our sense organs, then, is not simply sensation or perception but is also embodied, unified, and interpreted with the mind's organizing, processing, and constructing our 'sense' of the world.

This analysis is emphasized in the Buddha's teachings, with the crucial importance of how the body operates; it also places a different perspective on what is now found in many Buddhist meditation practices as well as in teachings regarding the body. Often, the body is taught in a negative light as an encumbrance, a heap of unwanted bile, pus, and cells, a burden. In fact, the emphasis of numerous Buddhist interpretations is mainly on impermanence and encourages *bhikkus* (monks) to feel disgust with their

bodies in order to create an attitude of nonattachment. For example, the common ‘corpse meditation’ is considered to be a particularly powerful method to develop disgust toward our bodies; this is then supposed to cut our attachment to sensual pleasures, such as sexuality or pride in appearance.

An example of this attitude, as Hamilton writes in *Identity and Experience*,⁸ can be found in an often-cited text by the 5th century AD Indian Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa. It has been translated as: ‘Wherefore, monks, be ye disgusted with this body.’ However, in Hamilton’s opinion, a more appropriate translation (both in this specific text and the wider context of the Buddha’s teachings) is: ‘So monks, be indifferent towards or dis-encharmed with your body.’ Hamilton posits that this second interpretation of the passage, and the accompanying general attitude – rather than encouraging bhikkus to feel disgust and repulsion towards their ‘impure’ bodies – is meant simply to discourage them from identifying with their bodies. The early Buddhist attitude toward the body was neither positive nor negative but neutrally analytical. In fact, the Buddha repeatedly encouraged a healthy lifestyle and care for the body.

A quote attributed to him is: ‘To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.’ This perspective is stated by Dr. Pinit Ratanakul:

‘In the Buddhist perspective the unique body of each of us, both in appearance and structure, is a result of our past kamma. The human body is at the same time the means by which we contact the world and the physical manifestation of our mind. Being such an important instrument, the body must be duly attended to, i.e. one must not abuse it through unwholesome food, alcohol, drugs, or by taxing it with over-indulgence and deprivation. Even enlightenment, the highest goal of Buddhism, cannot be attained by the mortification of the body, as witnessed in the personal experience of the Buddha. This is due to the interdependency of the mind and the body (mind and the body are also labeled name and form). Intellectual illumination can be attained only when the body is not deprived of anything necessary for the healthy and efficient functioning of all bodily organs.’⁹

So, as we see in all of his teachings, the Buddha did not teach revulsion but an analytic and pragmatic Middle Way in our attitude toward our bodies.

Consciousness

The other *khandhas* engage in our intricate cognitive activities, and the necessary condition for all of the activities of the *khandhas* is consciousness.

Consciousness is the activity of being conscious or aware and is dependent on the operation of the organic integrated whole of the *khandhas*, not individual aggregates acting in isolation from each other. Even though our attention becomes selective, narrowed, and focused on one awareness in a given moment, the general process of knowing what one is aware or knowledgeable of is called the *khandha* of consciousness.

Evan Thompson wrote about the brain basis of consciousness model called the Unified Field Model, as developed by Professor John R. Searle, which echoes the Buddha's conception of consciousness: 'According to this model (the Unified Conscious Field) the neural substrates of individual conscious states should not be considered sufficient for the occurrence of those states, for those states themselves presuppose the background consciousness of the subject. Any given conscious state is a modulation of a preexisting conscious field. An individual experience or conscious state (such as visual recognition of a face) is not a constituent of some aggregate conscious state, but rather a modification within the field of a basal or background consciousness: "Conscious experiences come in unified fields. In order to have a visual experience, a subject has been conscious already, and the experience is a modification of the field."'¹⁰

In other words, Searle, like the Buddha, is advocating that the process of consciousness be understood not as manifested through separate individual 'piles' of experience but as an integrated 'unified' whole.

Sensation

The final three *khandhas* – sensation, apperception, and volition – explain how incoming sensory data filtered through the 'mind' and awareness become our knowledge, or what we know. Again, we need to remember that we do not attend to our raw sensations one at a time; this process is, therefore, not linear. Rather, many inputs course through the various sense organs as well as bodily sensations that the 'mind' sorts out, and then specific inputs are given conscious attention within the unified field. McGann states: 'Cognition is not added to perception after the fact, because it is inherent in the process of perception itself, it is part of what continually initiates, drives and structures the act of perceiving. An enactive approach to perception thus maintains a strong distinction between sensation and perception. Perception, wrapped up as it is in cognition, action, sense-making, is an activity embedded within, contextualized by, value driven intentional action. Sensation is an aspect of an embodied agent's interaction with the world, an important part certainly, but not one with any veto or absolute authority as the character of experience.'¹¹

This is clearly different from the traditional intuitive stage-like description of

perception which holds modalities as basic ‘modes of presentation’ in which a perception is simply ‘presented’ to us as is – as visual, gustatory, tactile, or the like. All other aspects of perception (recognition of the object, interpretation of the event) involve some form of further, often inferential, cognitive operation; perception mingles with cognition. In other words, it’s not just what the sensory organs are doing, but what the brain is already doing, that is involved in perception.

Sensations are vipaka, which are whatever you initially experience through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. We first have an impinging of incoming sensory data but are unaware of the ‘pure’ sensation and experience of it because it is still too early for the data to reach a necessary threshold to register it. In this pre-reflective stage, experience is direct, immediate, and intuitive. Subject and object, inner and outer, are unified. This is the khandha of sensation. Every perceptual experience is an experience of my body.

Apperception

Next come discrimination and identification, which are associated with the khandha of apperception. In modern terms, this equates to cognitive functioning – an intellectual constructive process by which one becomes aware of, perceives, or comprehends ideas – and it involves all aspects of perception, thinking, reasoning, and remembering. One identifies more clearly or becomes perceptually aware when what was previously only a sensation (the impinging data) reaches a certain threshold, triggering impulses in the receptor neurons that register in the brain through various mediating processes. It is through this process that we identify things individually by contrasting and distinguishing them from their surrounding contexts, independently from us, and giving them a separate continuity. ‘Ideas’ about the object mingle with the awareness of its sense presence: we name it, categorize it, and compare it to other things. Seeing a color is vipaka, but conceptualizing our like or dislike of it is not. Names, features, and what seem to be independent objects are the products of this reification process and are dependent phenomena. Importantly, the independent status of objects is purely an attributed state. They are only distinguished contrastively, and they no longer correspond to an original ‘pure’ sensation, because they are now the result of a complex, constructive neurological process.

Take, for example, the act of seeing, or looking at a flower, to distinguish what characterizes the stage of sensation, or immediate awareness, from that of apperception, or ascertaining distinguishing features of an object. In the first instant of experience, the flower and the observer are one. The impinging

stimuli hasn't yet reached the threshold that triggers registration in the cortex. The flower seen and the seeing of it are one indivisible act, which is the datum, or the 'pure sensations' experience. But to cognize and then declare that the flower is a flower and, more specifically, a yellow rose, involves interpretation, which is an abstracting process. What is now experienced is not an immediate, unmediated sensation, but the outcome of a complex, constructive cognitive process. Therefore, sensation is defined as the contact between sense organ and sensory input, as well as the consciousness that results from their contact. After the direct experience, the sensations are processed by a complex, constructive neurological process and categorized and their significance established. As Hamilton writes, 'One sees, hears, tastes, something. As such, though one refers separately to sense organs, sense objects and what is sensed – nose, cheese, smell, for example – this separation is in fact an abstraction from the experience "smelling cheese-smell."' ¹² It is in this reflective phase of perception and conceptualization that experience becomes a constructive process and that sensations are interpreted in light of past experience, including cultural and linguistic constructs and individual interests and preferences.

Writer and philosopher Alva Noë makes a similar point about the difference between sensations and perceptions when he argues:

'In general, there are reasons to doubt that tactile sensation or feeling is sufficient for tactile perception. To perceive by touch, for example, the rectangularity of something you hold in your hands, or the layout of furniture in a room (as a blind person might, by moving around and reaching and touching) is not merely to have certain feelings or sensations. After all, the rectangularity is not captured by specific sensations. There is no unitary sensation or feel of a rectangle. The rectangularity is made available to you, in touch, by your active touching (probing, prodding, stroking, rubbing, squeezing) with your hands. What informs you of the shape of what you feel or hold is not the intrinsic character of your sensations, but rather your implicit understanding of the organization or structure of your sensations.' ¹³

Bhikkhu K. Ñānananda also makes a relevant observation with this analysis:

'Suppose there is a little child, a toddler, who is still unable to speak or understand language. Someone gives him a rubber ball and the child has seen it for the first time. If the child is told that it is a rubber ball, he might not understand it. How does he get to know that object? He smells it, feels it, and tries to eat it, and finally rolls it on the floor. At last he understands that it is a plaything. Now the child has recognised the rubber ball not (only) by the name that the world has given it, but

*by those factors included under “name” in nāma-rāpa, namely feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention.*¹⁴

And finally, Sariputta, a chief disciple of the Buddha, declared:

*‘Feeling, apperception, and cognitive awareness, friend – these factors are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is impossible to separate each of these states from others to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one apperceives; and what one apperceives, that one cognizes.*¹⁵

In the workings of the *khandhas*, the initial impingings of sense data are not enough for the grasping of what the initial data represent. Sensation and sensory knowledge must work together, for example, in the case of furniture, to produce the perception of the spatial layout of an object or a room. As Noë concludes, modeling any sense requires that we understand it not as something that concerns the brain alone but as something involving ‘the animate body and the world. I propose that to perceive is not merely to have sensation, or to receive sensory impressions, it is to have sensations that one understands [...]. The enactive view insists that mere feeling is not sufficient for perceptual experience (i.e., for experience with world-representing content).’¹⁶

As the Buddha explained, the process of selection begins at the initial non-reflective stage when attention creates the necessary threshold and then moves to the self-conscious stage of apperception. David J. Kalupahana explains:

*‘Selectivity based upon “interest” occurs even in the pre-reflective stage beginning with the impinging of the sense object with the sense organ culminating in feeling or sensation. The need for selectivity even at this initial stage of sense experience is prompted by the inability of consciousness to deal with the “big blooming buzzing confusion.” During the second stage, when sensations give rise to perception and reflection, the selectivity is conditioned by the stronger “dispositions” or habitual tendencies, thereby leading to obsession and bondage during the final stage. This selectivity in consciousness accounts for the possibility and, therefore, the ability on the part of the human being to choose, think and act, and these represent the core of selfhood or personality in the Buddha’s doctrine.*¹⁷

For William James, the making manifest of what is attended to by the sensations is the result of what he called attention, which is selection: ‘Out of what is in itself an indistinguishable, swarming continuum, devoid of distinction or emphasis [...] Attention [...] picks out certain sensations as worthy of notice, choosing those that are signs to us of things which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give

substantive names and to which we give the status of independence and dignity.’¹⁸

So while selection or attention is based on an inherent or learned focus as well as on our organic biological makeup, it isn’t until the selected sensation is cognitively recognized, named, and interpreted that it moves into the realm of apperception. There are two aspects of a single, represented, integral event – two poles (subject/object) with consciousness linking them together.

Volition

The fifth *khandha*, volition, is the most complex aspect of our cognitive apparatus. We have affective responses to whatever we experience; these can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. A neutral response is to merely register a sensation and become aware of it simply in a non-attached, factual sense. When we consider an experience to be pleasant, on the other hand, we become attached and want it to continue or be repeated. These desires or cravings become preferences and choices and therefore originate in our cognitive apparatus; they can range from minor preferences in the positive domain and mild aversion in the realm of the negative to very profound affective states in both. These affective states are responses not only to bodily sensations, but also to abstract concepts and beliefs; they are established on, among other things, one’s beliefs, desire to continue to exist (or not), self-identifications, traditions, customs. They can also be such general desires as to be loved, successful, accepted, happy, wealthy, not alone, not poor, or not unhappy. These biases and inclinations make up our psychological orientation and represent our ‘world.’

According to the Buddha, our affective volitional characteristics fuel the kammic process and continue until our last affective volitional states are extinguished with Enlightenment. Their continued functioning is conditioned (dependently originated) by the level of ignorance or insight on which we are operating. As we better understand how to see things ‘as they are,’ the degree of our ignorance – and, therefore, our volitions – becomes differently conditioned. To return to the work of David J. Kalupahana: ‘The Buddha insisted that desire is not identical with the variegated objects in the world. It is the thought of lust which is generated by wrong ideas or misconception, primarily the metaphysical conceptions of self and object. As such it is possible to maintain that on occasions of sense experience, which are represented by the coming together of the subject and object, the subject does come to be affected in a certain way and this is conditioned by views it holds regarding its own nature as well as the object.’¹⁹

We cannot separate ourselves from our experience, which is organically

based and which takes place through the *khandhas*. It is the understanding of the operation of the *khandhas* that is the focus of insight meditation. We clearly see that dukkha is intimately linked with our cognitive experience and is not just a description of the world in which we have our experience, or of what we perceive and then react to. Since our affective-volitional apparatus, which fuels our continuity, is cognitively based, dukkha is also. The cessation of suffering, or Enlightenment, is a radical cognitive re-orientation. The Buddha taught that our cognitive experiences and phenomena are dependently originated, dynamic, ever-changing, and impermanent. This is the Truth of experience.

The Buddha's teachings focus on epistemology, or how we can know about reality, and they assign primary importance to the workings of one's constructive and categorical cognitive apparatus. They are not ontological or based on the study of fundamental categories of reality. Unfortunately, this significant but subtly expanded understanding of the Buddha's teachings is often missed in contemporary Buddhist teachings. For example, in a discussion about the Buddha's perspective on suffering, Adam Miller writes, 'Sensation is suffering. Sensation takes place only when a sense is affected, stimulated, irritated, perturbed, or pressed upon. We see only when light perturbs the eye, we hear only when sound perturbs the ear, we think only when thoughts perturb the mind. It is in light of the constant, relentless pressure of sensation in all its modalities that life is suffering.'²⁰

We have seen, though, that the Buddha taught dukkha not as the simple occurrence of sensations of inputs alone, but as the secondary processing which then identifies, contrasts, classifies, and creates pleasure or discomfort and then desires or craves or rejects as a consequence of cognition. In the Second Noble Truth, the Buddha clearly teaches that dukkha is our pre-enlightened constructed experience.

Cognition after Enlightenment

Often, also, there is confusion as to how the Buddha, as a human being, experienced life cognitively after his enlightenment. To end suffering, an Enlightened One does not become a 'robot' that transcends worldly sense experience or someone who denies the reality of the world of sense experience. Quite the contrary: the operation of the five *khandhas* becomes intimately known and accepted. The grounding of Enlightenment as a cognitive event leaves intact the locus of experience in the body, and the post – Enlightenment life experience becomes quite reasonable and understandable.

In fact, if we accept biologist H. R. Maturana's concept of autopoiesis²¹ – that living systems are 'self-producing' organisms which maintain their particular

form despite material inflow and outflow, through biological self-regulation and self-reference – we can consider the Buddha's biological existence to have continued as before his Enlightenment. The biological, physical functions of sleep/wakefulness, hunger/satiation, fatigue/alertness, and so on, as well as smelling, tasting, seeing, hearing, touching, and thinking would have remained the same. These physical conditions only ended upon the Buddha's death. The Buddha made the distinction between the experience of living which is grounded in the body and in the *khandhas* and the ignorance of a cognitive schema in which a subject/object dualism exists. Actually, the Enlightenment experience allowed the Buddha to move in the world unhindered by the ordinary restrictions borne of our ignorance in referring naively to our dualistic cognitive constructions.

Another source of confusion has to do with the 'I' of an Enlightened One. As Kalupahana explains:

'In the context of the five aggregates (khandhas), the Buddha was not reluctant to speak of "I" or "myself" or even of the "self." Without admitting to a "ghost in the machine" or a transcendental apperception, the Buddha was willing to recognize the feeling of individuality, of self. It is a feeling that can contract and expand depending on the context. It does not represent a static entity to which everything belongs. [...] There seems to be no justification for assuming the Buddha encouraged the annihilation of this feeling of self. Indeed, the reality of feelings and emotions that occur in the stream of experience are relevant to an explanation of harmonious life. [...] Thus the Buddha spoke of "I" or "myself" and "mine" but avoided and discouraged "I-making" or "mine-making," both terms imply egoism. The feeling of self-occurring thus turns out to an important element in the affirmation of the relation of dependence that exists between a person, his family, nation, humanity, as well as nature.

*The solidification of this feeling into a 'pure ego' can interrupt its extension at any level, confining it exclusively to the neglect of every other. As such, it can lead to extreme selfishness, to tribalism, to nationalism, or to pure altruism. For the Buddha, the so-called self-feeling is dependently arisen, and, is therefore contextual, not absolute.'*²²

As much as the Buddha emphasized the elimination of egotism, he did not intend the annihilation or depersonalization of what modern psychology labels the empirical self or the individual experiences. The terms 'I' or 'self' are pragmatic conventions that reflect the living experience that all conscious living beings have.

***Khandhas* and Awakening**

With Enlightenment, the Buddha came to a sudden realization or epiphany about the nature of ‘existence.’ The basis of his enlightenment was having had the ‘pure experience’ of emptiness or *Nibbāna* (Sanskrit: Nirvana). It was only when he experienced this state of no-thingness that he understood the mechanism of the creation of cravings and desires which, in turn, causes the dukkha of our lives. Upon Enlightenment, he comprehended that it was his ‘mental apparatus’ that had in ignorance created his desires and cravings; therefore, it is the process and organization of our systematic mental organization that needs to be understood and altered in a radical way, and to do this we must understand the *khandhas*.

What the Awakening insight reorients is our understanding of how the cognitive apparatus creates craving and dukkha. The Buddha was concerned with the spiritual and existential suffering of sentient beings, and his Awakening showed him that our world is completely subjectively constructed, and that what the cognitive apparatus creates or imagines is dualism (most notably, subject-object dualism). Therefore, the Buddha’s teachings focus on understanding the workings of our bodies as embedded living organisms and the process of how we ‘experience’ living and knowing.

Upon achieving a correct understanding of the nature of our constructions of reality and the consequences thereof, the Buddha attained Enlightenment; this extinguished the fuel of the fire – the desires and cravings – of continuity (the cycle of rebirth). He taught the way for us to also achieve Nirodha and become Awakened. Dukkha is based not solely on impermanence but more profoundly on how we construct our ‘world’ and cling to the illusions we construct – our pre-enlightened experience.

Notes

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