

## DUKKHA

### The feeling of dukkha and the universal nature of dukkha<sup>1</sup>

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The wide-ranging meaning of the Pāli term "**dukkha**" (in Sanskrit: *duḥkha*) is important to understand. The term occurs very frequently in the Buddha's teachings and there is no single, clear translation to English, or even to any Western language, that covers the meaning in the various contexts. Common translations depending on the context are:

Suffering, insufficiency, inadequacy, imperfection, unsatisfactory nature, sorrow, affliction, misery, evil, plague, torment, discomfort, unpleasantness, pain, stress, problem (noun);

Suffering, sorrowful, afflicted, vexatious, unsatisfactory, insufficient, inadequate, imperfect, unpleasant, painful, stressful (adjective).

The fact that *dukkha* can be etymologically derived from various Pāli words does not necessarily make things any easier.

*du, dur* = bad, difficult, worthless, miserable, repulsive, abominable, perilous

*khamati* = endure, tolerate, endure

=> *dukkha* = difficult to bear (feeling)

*dukkhayati* = bringing suffering, leading to suffering

("It brings suffering, so it is called 'suffering'").

*kha* = emptiness (of permanence, beauty, pleasure, self), empty space

=> *dukkha* = abominable emptiness, worthless emptiness

*kha* = wheel hub

=> *dukkha* = bad hub (-> inhibited, unsatisfactory ride)

*dvedhā* = in two ways

*khaṇati* = dig, excavate, burn, destroy, uproot, annihilate

*khaṇa* = moment, submoments (emergence, existence, dissolution)

Paṭisambhidāmagga (I, 19):

"It can be seen directly that arising is suffering (*dukkha*);

It can be seen directly that existence (the occurrence) is suffering.

It can be directly seen that non-arising is happiness (*sukha*);

It is straightforward to see that non-existence is happiness. "

### Dukkha as feeling

The Buddha teaches different types or qualities of feeling or sensation (*vedanā*). In the famous Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta [DN 22, MN 10], the discourse on the foundations of mindfulness, three types of feelings are firstly distinguished in the chapter on the contemplation of feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*):

<sup>1</sup> As this is an English translation of my original German article "Dukkha-Gefühl und universelle dukkha-Natur", hence I want to apologize if it is not very smooth in its style and grammar.

### ***Sukha - dukkha - adukkhamasukha***

Pleasant / joyful - unpleasant / painful - and neither-unpleasant-nor pleasant / neutral.

These three feelings can be further classified according to the Satipaṭṭhāna method as worldly (*sāmisa*) and non-worldly (*nirāmisa*), so that ultimately a total of nine types of feelings are considered and practised. It is interesting that no distinction is made here as to whether the feeling is physical or mental.

Now the question might arise: **Who suffers?**

According to conventional truth, one would probably answer quite correctly, a living being. However, beyond concepts, in the higher level of ultimate reality, one finds no living being, no I, you, he, she, it - no *atta*, only *anatta*. So, in reality there is no one who suffers. Therefore, it could be concluded that there is no suffering (*dukkha*). So, we have already arrived at *Nibbāna*, the freedom of suffering? But if the "we" does not exist either...? Joking aside.

It is not that simple. Suffering as an unpleasant feeling (*dukkha vedanā*) arises due to conditions, which in turn are conditioned in many ways. One important condition is the physical or mental contact of the body senses or the mind with an undesirable object. This suffering follows its own laws, not our ideas and desires.

*Dukkha vedanā* is real, is true. As a mental factor, it appears where there is mind, where there is consciousness or, more correctly, where the latter "flows", namely in the stream of consciousness. Only when this is extinguished in the final *Nibbāna* there is no more *dukkha vedanā*. This is the "extinction of the aggregates" (*khandha Nibbāna*) or "extinction without remainder" (*anupādisesa Nibbāna*).

### **Further classification of unpleasant feeling**

In other parts of the Pāḷi canon, feeling is classified as twofold, threefold, fivefold, sixfold, 18fold, 36fold or even 108fold [see especially Saṃyutta Nikāya, Vedanāsaṃyutta, e.g. Atthasata Sutta, SN 36.22].

Important for us is the fivefold classification of feeling, which takes into consideration whether the feeling is physical or mental:

#### ***Sukha - somanassa - dukkha - domanassa - upekkhā***

Physically pleasant - mentally pleasant (joyful) - physically unpleasant (painful) - mentally unpleasant  
- neutral

A physically unpleasant feeling (*dukkha vedanā*) occurs only in connection with body-consciousness (*kāyaviññāṇa*), which is a resultant consciousness (*vipāka-citta*) of unwholesome *kamma*. So, this kind of *dukkha* occurs only in living beings, not in inanimate matter or things. Hence, one speaks of "sentient beings", that means living beings with mind and body. Thus, *dukkha vedanā* can occur and be experienced in humans, animals, etc., but neither in the realm of immaterial brahmas (*arūpa-brahmas*), who have no body, nor in the realm of *asaññasattas*, who have arisen kammically but have no mind in this existence, i.e. neither consciousness nor feeling. Moreover, *dukkha vedanā* is also not possible in the fine-material *rūpa-brahmas*, since they are the kammic product of fine-material absorptions (*rūpa-jhānas*) in which no pain is experienced, and therefore they have no body sensitivity (*kāya-pasāda*) at all. *Dukkha vedanā*, as bodily pain, is still experienced by the Arahats and Buddhas - but they do take it patiently and do not suffer mentally from it.

Mental unpleasant feeling (*domanassa vedanā*), i.e. pure mental suffering, always occurs in the aversive mind, i.e. associated with consciousness rooted in hatred. Mental suffering can arise as a result of physical suffering, but it can also arise, for example, as a result of bad news one hears or sees, and can manifest as worry, anger, fear, etc. This kind of *dukkha* is overcome by the one who attains *Nibbāna* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of holiness, as soon as he becomes a non-returner (*anāgāmi*), i.e. even before all his mental defilements (*kilesas*) and fetters (*saṃyojanas*) are discarded, that means before he becomes an *arahat*, attaining *kilesa-Nibbāna*, the final, irreversible extinction of mental defilements. However, since the aggregates (*khandhas*) still exist in the *arahat*, it is also called "*sa'upādisesa Nibbāna*", extinction with a remainder.

## Dukkha in the Four Noble Truths

All four Noble Truths, which are considered the essence of Buddhist teaching, are about *dukkha*.

They are the truths

- (1) of *dukkha*
- (2) of the cause of *dukkha*
- (3) of the end of *dukkha*
- (4) of the path leading to the end of *dukkha* (the middle path, the noble eightfold path)

In the Dhammacakkappavattana sutta, the Buddha's 1<sup>st</sup> discourse [SN 56.11], in which he has taught the four noble truths, the first truth is defined as follows:

<b><i>Dukkhaṃ ariya saccaṃ</i></b>	<b>The noble truth of suffering</b>
<i>jāti pi dukkhā</i>	birth / rebirth is suffering
<i>jarā pi dukkhā</i>	aging is suffering
<i>vyādhi pi dukkho</i>	disease is suffering
<i>maraṇaṃ pi dukkhaṃ</i>	death is suffering
<i>appiyehi sampayogo dukkho</i>	association with what is displeasing is suffering
<i>piyehi vippayogo dukkho</i>	separation from what is pleasing is suffering
<i>yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ</i>	not to get what one wants is suffering
<i>saṃkhittena pañc'upādānakkhandhā dukkhā</i>	in short, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

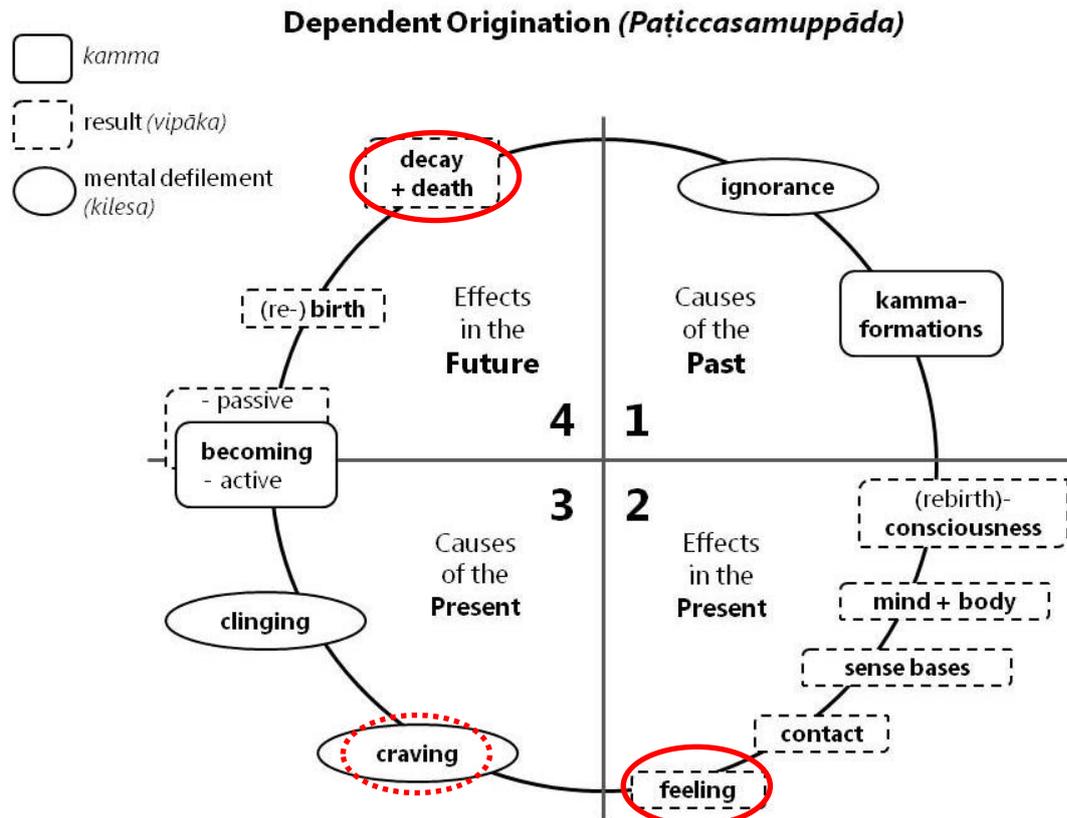
With the first seven definitions, the Buddha explains various, quite obvious types of suffering in conventional terms. The eighth definition, on the other hand, is even more extensive because it includes all the groups of our existence - here the Buddha uses terms which describe ultimate reality, or in other words, everything that constitutes our mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) and can be directly experienced intuitively.

This truth of *dukkha* has first to be known, to be penetrated, to be accepted. After all, one must first realize a problem as such before one can search for and find a solution. Only then one can go further, to also find out the cause of this *dukkha*, which is craving (*taṇhā*) (2<sup>nd</sup> truth), and by walking the path (4<sup>th</sup> truth), i.e. practising, one will be able to eliminate this cause so that the effect (1<sup>st</sup> truth) also ceases and a state of freedom from suffering (3<sup>rd</sup> truth) is achieved or realized.

It is said that in enlightenment all four Noble Truths are penetrated at the same time in their true meaning [Pts. I, 565]. Concerning the first Noble Truth, one fully understands: "Suffering has the meaning of oppressing, meaning of being formed, meaning of burning up, meaning of change as its meaning of full understanding."

### Dukkha in the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*)

In the doctrine of dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), causes or conditions and effects are explained in even greater detail.



In the second quadrant, *dukkha-vedanā* of course is included in feeling.

In the third quadrant, however, we react to unpleasant feeling not only with craving (*taṇhā* or *lobha*), which here is rather the desire to have it different, or we can say with aversion (*dosa*), which is always accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling (*domanassa vedanā*), which as well is a kind of "dukkha".

Let us go further into the future, whether in this life or the next. In the fourth quadrant, the Buddha mentions decay and death (*jarā maraṇa*), both of which are included in the definition of *dukkha* (see above). But that's not all, the formula reads in full:

*Jāti paccayā jarāmarāṇa,  
soka parideva dukkha domanass' upāyāsā sambhavanti.*

Dependent on birth ageing and death occur;  
Worry, lamentation, pain, grief and despair come into being.

At the end of the enumeration of the 11 conditional relations there follows traditionally the sentence:

*Evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudaya hoti.*  
Such is the genesis of the whole mass of suffering.

### Three types of *dukkha*

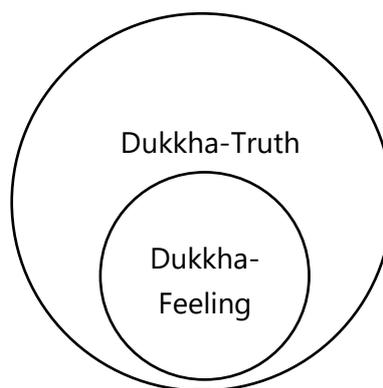
However, as indicated in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta in its last definition of the first Noble Truth, *dukkha* is much wider than that. There are three types of *dukkha* [e.g. Dukkhatā-Sutta, SN 45.165, and Vsm 16]:

1. <i>Dukkha-dukkha</i>	Obvious suffering, pain (physical as well as mental) (e.g. headache, toothache, death, loss, worry, fear...)
2. <i>Vipārināma dukkha</i>	Suffering owing to change Insufficiency, unsatisfactory nature of things due to their change and impermanence.
3. <i>Saṅkhāra dukkha</i>	Suffering due to conditionality Conditioned phenomena are insufficient, imperfect, as they are impermanent and uncontrollable (one has no power to control all the conditions of the phenomenon; it follows its own natural conditions and law).

Interesting in this respect is also the ***Sacca Yamaka*** in the 6<sup>th</sup> book of the Abhidhamma, in which pairs of questions concerning the Four Noble Truths are dealt with in order to achieve an exact understanding. In the "Guide to the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka" by Nyanatiloka, under "Delimitation of Terms" we read:

(a) *Does (everything which is called) dukkha (here, painful feeling), refer to the Dukkha-Truth (Truth of Suffering)? - Yes.*

(b) *But does Dukkha-truth always refer to dukkha (painful feeling)? – (No; e.g.), excepting bodily and mental dukkha (-feeling), the remaining Dukkha- truth is Dukkha-truth, but it is not dukkha (painful feeling). Bodily and mental dukkha (painful feeling), however, is both, dukkha (painful feeling), as well as Dukkha-truth.*



Dukkha-truth, commonly called the Truth of suffering, does not merely refer to actual painful feeling (called likewise *dukkha*), but teaches that, on account of the law of impermanency and change, all the phenomena of existence, even at the states of highest bliss and happiness, are unsatisfactory, and bear in themselves the seed of suffering and misery.

## The three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*) or the universal characteristics (*sāmañña-lakkhaṇa*): *Anicca, dukkha, anatta*

In the Dhammapada verses 277 - 279, the three characteristics of existence, or the universal nature of conditioned phenomena and all things that can be experienced, are stated:

Dhp. 277	278	279
<i>Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā'ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā.</i>	<b><i>Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā'ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā.</i></b>	<i>Sabbe dhammā anattā'ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā.</i>
All conditioned phenomena are impermanent. Seeing this with wisdom, one becomes disgusted with suffering. This is the path to purity.	All conditional phenomena are suffering. Seeing this with wisdom, one becomes disgusted with suffering. This is the path to purity.	All things are non-self (not-me). Seeing this with wisdom, one becomes disgusted with suffering. This is the path to purity.

Let's take a closer look at the key phrase "*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*". All *saṅkhāras* are *dukkha* - but what are *saṅkhāras* here?

The Pāli word ***saṅkhāra*** is explained as follows<sup>2</sup> :

- saṅ* = *saṃ*: together, jointly, harmoniously together  
*kharoti*: to make, form, shape, condition, prepare  
*saṅkharoti*: to compose, to shape, to condition (something by working together).  
*saṅkhāra*: 1. the composed, the shaped, the conditioned (also called: *saṅkhata*) (conditioned phenomenon, formation, fabrication; that which is conditioned; that which has been put together)  
 2. the condition, the phenomenon which shapes, forms (that which is actively conditioning; that which produces a result; that which puts together)

Depending on the context, *saṅkhāra* has different meanings:

1. Mental formations when speaking of the five aggregates (*khandhas*). *Saṅkhārakkhandha* = group/aggregate of mental formations. Mental formations are 50 of the 52 mental factors (*cetasikas*), namely all except feeling (*vedanā*) and perception (*saññā*), to which separate *khandhas* are dedicated; that means mental formations are the emotions and qualities of the mind that shape or form the mind.
2. Kamma formations in the doctrine of dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*): "*Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*" and "*saṅkhārā paccayā viññāṇa*". In this context, *saṅkhāra* refers to kammic formations, also called kammic forces or volitional activities, which lead to becoming and (re)birth. Here, *saṅkhāra* should be seen as identical with *kamma* or *cetanā* (intention, volition, motivation).

<sup>2</sup> References: 'Buddhist dictionary' by Nyanatiloka, and <https://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saṅkhāra>

3. Conditioned phenomena in the sentences "*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*" and "*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*", as well as when speaking of *saṅkhāra* objects in Vipassanā meditation or in the insight stage *saṅkhār'upekkhā ñāṇa*. Here, *saṅkhāra* means things, conditioned phenomena or conditioned realities, in other words, nothing other than mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa*) or the five aggregates (*khandhas*).

It is mainly the latter meaning that gives deeper significance to, for example, the following sentences of the Buddha that have been handed down in the suttas:

"*Vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādethā*"

[the last words of the Buddha, Mahāparinibbāna sutta, DN 16]:

"All (conditioned) things have the nature of decay and dissolution  
- strive diligently with full mindfulness. "

"*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppādavaya dhammino, uppajjivā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukho.*"

[DN 16, §221 - traditionally recited at the occasion of death or funerals]:

"Impermanent, indeed, are the *saṅkhāras*, their nature is arising and decay, born they pass away; their stilling is true happiness."

In this quotation, *saṅkhārā* again is translated in various ways: Formations, fabrications, conditions, compound things, conditioned phenomena. I agree here with, for example, Ajahn Chah<sup>3</sup>, who translates as "conditioned phenomena" and writes: "The word *saṅkhāra* refers to this body and mind."

Regarding *dukkha*, it is said analogously: "*Dukkha vata saṅkhārā, uppādavaya dhammino, uppajjivā nirujjhanti tesam vūpasamo sukho.*" - "Insufficient, indeed, are the conditioned phenomena, their nature is arising and decay; born they pass away; their stilling is true happiness. "

Here it is evident that on the side of *Samsāra* or life in general, there is the arising and dissolving of the *saṅkhāras*, which all are found to be *dukkha*, suffering, as they cannot satisfy - on the other side, that of *Nibbāna* (more precisely: *khandha-Nibbāna* or *anupādisesa Nibbāna*, which is usually referred to as *Pārinibbāna*), it is their final stilling and pacification, which means true happiness (*sukha*). As long as we are alive, that is, as long as the five aggregates (*khandhas*) or, in other words, mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) exist, *dukkha* is present. Even for an Arahant, an enlightened person who has completely overcome mental suffering, there is still physical suffering. With his wisdom he has realized and fully understood that all mental and physical phenomena, all *saṅkhāras*, are ultimately unsatisfactory – and this insight is without suffering, without being frustrated, fearful or depressed. By this knowledge, finally he was able to let go, to turn away, to give up the desire and attachment for all *saṅkhāras* and to find the unconditioned, to attain liberation (*Nibbāna*).

How to achieve this knowledge or insight - without suffering from the omnipresent nature of *dukkha* - is described in the stages of insight (*Vipassanā-ñāṇas*).

<sup>3</sup> Ajahn Chah, "Our Real Home"

### The realization of *dukkha* in the stages of insight (*Vipassanā-ñāṇas*)

<i>nāmarūpa pariccheda ñāṇa</i>	analytical knowledge of mind and matter	preparatory knowledge
<i>paccaya prigaha ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge of the conditions (of mind and matter)	
<i>sammasana ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge by repeated contemplation (of the 3 characteristics of existence)	<i>anicca, dukkha, anatta</i> at a basic level
<i>udayabbaya ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge of rising and falling	<i>anicca</i>
<i>bhaṅga ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge of the dissolution	highest level of seeing <i>anicca</i>
<b><i>bhaya ñāṇa</i></b>	Knowledge of terror, that mind and matter are fearful	<b><i>dukkha</i></b>
<b><i>ādīnava ñāṇa</i></b>	Knowledge of the danger	
<b><i>nibbidā ñāṇa</i></b>	Knowledge of unpleasantness, disenchantment and turning away	
<i>muñcitu-kamyatā ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge of the desire for deliverance	
<i>paṭisaṅkhā ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge by reflective contemplation	
<i>saṅkhār'upekkhā ñāṇa</i>	Knowledge in equanimity with regard to all <i>saṅkhāras</i> (formations of existence, phenomena, mind and matter).	

No matter how you practise *Satipaṭṭhāna*, no matter what the object of meditation is, with successful *Vipassanā* meditation you will pass through these realizations.

*Kāyānupassanā* – contemplation of bodily or physical objects (*rūpa*)

*Vedanānupassanā* – contemplation of feeling (e.g. *dukkha*), i.e. a mental object (*nāma*).

*Cittānupassanā* – contemplation of consciousness or the mind as a whole (*nāma*)

*Dhammānupassanā* – contemplation of phenomena (*dhammas*) according to different categories:

Hindrances, aggregates subject to clinging, internal and external sense bases, enlightenment factors, Four Noble Truths

The objects that are suitable for insight and should be observed are only **ultimate realities (*paramattha dhammas*)**, only these can be directly experienced and have the three characteristics *anicca, dukkha, anatta*. These are all ***saṅkhāra objects***, i.e. all *nāma* and *rūpa*.

Concepts (*paññatti*) are not part of it.

#### Concepts (*paññatti*)

Concepts or conventional realities (such as "table", "car", "aunty", etc.) are also transient and changeable, but do not have the nature of *anicca* (definition: "Not existing before, it comes into being; having come into being, it immediately passes away again forever."), but can even be used as *samatha* objects because of their apparent constancy. Certain concepts, like the concept of "man" or "animal"

can suffer, but not the concept of "table" or other inanimate things. The issue is whether a thing or being has consciousness. If it does, then the accompanying universal mental factor of feeling naturally is present too, so *dukkha vedanā* is possible.

But that alone does not constitute "*dukkha*". The table, this thing, the concept, can of course not "suffer". But if we perceive the table with sharpened concentration, trained mindfulness and clear insight (*Vipassanā*), we will intuitively realize that this compact looking unit "table" consists of many individual material phenomena (*rūpas*). They occur in material groups (*rūpa-kalāpas*), each consisting of eight inseparable material or physical qualities (*rūpas*): Earth, water, fire, air element (or hardness, cohesion, temperature, motion), colour, smell, taste and nutritive essence. These *rūpa-kalāpas* constantly arise and immediately fall away. Thus, the *rūpas* in the table are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfying (*dukkha* – here: *vipārināma-dukkha* and *saṅkhāra-dukkha*) and without self (*anatta*).

A concept such as the table, for example, is mind-made and we are just taught that it is a table. It only exists when someone, an observer, perceives it as such. The individual material components (*rūpas*) of the table, however, exist for a short moment, they arise and pass away independently of the observer and his or her mind.

*Rūpas* can arise due to 4 causes:

1. *Kamma*
2. Consciousness (*citta*)
3. Temperature (*utu*)
4. Food (*āhāra*)

According to Theravāda, *rūpas* definitely exist outside of us and in inanimate matter, where they arise due to temperature, climate, weather (*utu*), independent of any mind or observer.

The "normal" person, however, only observes concepts with which he identifies, to which he clings and therefore suffers. (Modern) natural science observes and measures *rūpas* in the best case, and of course this often involves mind-born matter (*cittaja rūpa*), so that dependence on the observer (or rather the observer's consciousness) comes into play.

In many suttas, especially in the Saṃyutta-Nikāya, it is clearly stated again and again that *rūpa* has the nature of *dukkha* too. This is also the case in the Buddha's second discourse to his five fellow ascetics:

**Excerpt from the Anattalakkhaṇa sutta [SN 22.59]:**

"Is *rūpa* permanent or impermanent?" - "Impermanent." - "But is that which is impermanent suffering (*dukkha*) or joy (*sukha*)?" - "Suffering." - "Is it then appropriate to regard that which is impermanent, suffering, changing, as, 'This is mine, this is me, this is my self'?" - "Of course not."

Most translators translate *rūpa* here as "form" and mean corporeality or rather the own body. But according to the next passage, any kind of *rūpa*, matter or physical phenomena are included, not just that of our body (although, of course, the matter of our own body is what is meant with the "aggregate of matter" (*rūpakkhanda*) and is the most important for our practice):

"Whatever *rūpa* there is, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near - all *rūpa* should be understood with full wisdom according to reality: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self!'".

And furthermore, we should understand that matter – even in our body – can be created by *kamma*, mind (*citta*), but also just by heat or cold (*utu*) or by nutrition (*āhāra*).

Similarly, and in even greater detail, the Buddha explains the three characteristics of all *saṅkhāras* in ten groups to his son Rāhula:

**Excerpt from the Rāhula-Saṃyutta, Rūpa and Khandha sutta [SN 18. 2 + 10]:**

"What do you think, Rāhula?

"Are the (visible) forms - the sounds - the smells - the tastes - the touches - the mind objects permanent or impermanent?" - "Impermanent, venerable Sir." - "But what is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness?" - "Suffering." - "Now what is impermanent, suffering, changeable, is it right to look at this thus: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self'?" - "Certainly not, venerable Sir." (...)

"Is corporeality - feeling - perception - are the mental formations - is consciousness permanent or impermanent?" - "Impermanent." - "But what is impermanent, is that suffering or happiness?" - "Suffering." - "Now what is impermanent, suffering, changeable, is it right to look at this thus: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my Self'?" - "Certainly not, venerable Sir."

**The contemplation of *dukkha* (*dukkhānupassanā*)**

In the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta [MN 10 and DN 22], the practice of mindfulness with regard to the Four Noble Truths is also mentioned under the heading *Dhammānupassanā* (contemplation of the *Dhamma* or the *dhammas*). For example, in the case of the first Noble Truth, it is necessary to contemplate diligently, clearly comprehending and mindfully (*ātāpi, sampajāno, satima*) whatever is suffering. That is, *dukkha* itself becomes the object.

While contemplating and realizing *dukkha*, one does not have to suffer. On the contrary, the penetration of suffering can be accompanied by happiness. – In the Sattisata sutta, the teaching on the 100 spears [SN 56.35], the Buddha said:

"(...) I do not say that the penetration of the four noble truths is associated with suffering and affliction. Rather, I say that the penetration of the four noble truths is associated with happiness and cheerfulness."

The contemplation of suffering (*dukkhānupassanā*) is one of the three main methods of insight meditation in general, or one of the 18 chief kinds of insight (*mahā-vipassanā*). Attention is focused on any *saṅkhāra* object and in all of them the characteristic of *dukkha* is seen clearly, experienced and penetrated. Wherever one looks, whatever one experiences, whatever one desires - everything ultimately has the nature of *dukkha* and is no longer desirable. *Nibbāna* then presents itself first through its desireless aspect and the practice leads to liberation by desirelessness (*appaṇihitā-vimokkha*) with concentration as the gateway to liberation (*vimokkha-mukha*).

As long as we see the *saṅkhāra* objects compactly and as concepts (*paññatti*), we do not truly realize their nature of *anicca, dukkha* and *anatta*. If we do not realize their *dukkha* nature, craving (*taṇhā*) will arise, the desire to possess or to be (or not to be or to have it differently, an aspect of aversion) - and suffering will follow definitely (here: unpleasant feeling, *dukkha vedanā* or more precisely *domanassa vedanā*). However, if we penetrate and pierce through the objects to their ultimate

realities (*paramattha*), we recognize their unsatisfactory, insufficient, imperfect nature and can let go of desires and cravings. The wise, discerning mind turns away from the *saṅkhāras*, disillusioned and disenchanted, loses its interest in them, which are nothing but *dukkha*, and is mature for *Nibbāna*.

Among all ultimate realities, whatever we can experience and directly know, *Nibbāna* alone does not have the *dukkha* nature. *Nibbāna* is desireless bliss, stillness, peace.

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