

Sanna and its implications

Dear Dhamma Friends,

There are five aggregates called khandha. They are rupakkhandha or aggregate of material, vedanakkhandha or aggregate of feeling, sannakkhandha or aggregate of perception, sankharakkhandha or aggregate of mental formation and vinnanakkhandha or aggregate of consciousness.

Among these five khandha, sannakkhandha frequently cause confusion in terms of translation and interpretation. As usual, translation is not an easy job as any couple of languages will not be so close to fully understand each other. But interpretation on the other hand may work to make sense.

Sanna is mostly understood as perception and at many Dhamma sites, sanna appears as perception. At another time, it may appear in the name of consciousness which is a bit confusing with citta which is consciousness. For example the highest jhana or the 4th arupa jhana is called n'evasanna-nasannaayatana arupa jhana. It is translated as neither perception nor non-perception. At another site, it is written as neither consciousness nor unconsciousness.

Still there are others who believe that sanna is memory and they will persistently use sanna as memory and they will relate sanna with memory whenever the word sanna arise in a setting of Dhamma anywhere. What does Visuddhimagga say? Some believe that Visuddhimagga is a comprehensive collections of all Dhamma and whenever problem arise they will consult with Visuddhaimagga.

What is 'sanna'?

1. Sanna is sense, sanna is consciousness, sanna is perception, sanna is 3rd aggregate of 5 aggregates.
2. Sanna means sense, perception, discernment, recognition, assimilation of sensation, awareness.
3. Sanna is consciousness of diversity. In etymology there appear words end with -nna. It means cognition or perception. Sanna, vinnana, panna are examples of words end with -nna or ~n~na. Here sanna is like knowledge of a child. Vinnana is like knowledge of ordinary adult. And panna is like knowledge of an expert.
4. Sanna is conception, idea, notion.

5. Sanna is a thing that used as a mark. It is a guiding wire. It is a guiding rope. " Rukkha sanna pubbatta sanna karonto" "using trees and hills as guiding marks" while trekking through jungles and forests.

6. Sanna as twofold.

- a) Patighasamphassaja. Sense impression and recognition
- b) Adhivacanasamphassaja. Association by similarities.

7. Sanna as threefold.

- 1) rupasanna
- 2) patighasanna
- 3) nanatthasanna. Kama, vyapada, vihinsa

8. Sanna as fivefold. Pancavimutti

- 1) anicca
- 2) anicce dukkha
- 3) dukkhe anatta
- 4) pahana
- 5) viraga

9. Sanna as sixfold.

- 1) rupa
- 2) sadda
- 3) gandha
- 4) rasa
- 5) photthabba
- 6) dhamma

10. Sanna as sevenfold.

- 1) anicca sanna
- 2) anatta sanna
- 3) asubha sanna
- 4) adinava sanna
- 5) pahana sanna
- 6) viraga sanna
- 7) nirodha sanna

11. Sanna as tenfold.

- 1) asubha
- 2) marana
- 3) ahare patikula
- 4) sabbaloke anabhirata
- 5) anicca
- 6) anicce dukkha
- 7) dukkhe anatta
- 8) pahana
- 9) viraga
- 10) nirodha

12. Still there are other unclassified definitions.

Among these, three words deserve to be examined in some detail.

There three words are sanna , vinnana , and panna.

Sanna is like the knowledge of a child. For example, when a child see a penny coin he will perceive it as money coin. He will not know more than that as a normal child. As soon as he sees that coin, he immediately knows that it is a money coin.

Vinnana is like the knowledge of an ordinary adult. When a man sees the same coin, he knows that it is a money coin and it worths a panny and it is not a 5 pence coin or 10 pence coin but one penny coin. And he knows that the coin can be used in circulation of money in trading.

Panna on the other hand is like the knowledge of an expert. When a doctor of Chemistry sees a penny coin. He knows that it is a money coin. It worths one penny and it is not 5 pence or 10 pence coin but one penny coin. And he also knows that it can be used in circulation of money in trading. Moreover, he also knows that the coin is made of copper and the weight and texture of the coin is so and so. So panna is penetrative, analytical and in detail realization of all those which are to be realized.

Sanna is sometimes translated as memory because there is some relation with memory but not to the extent that sanna is to be equated with memory. As can be seen in above detailing, sanna perceives.

When a person see a green tree, he sees it as a green tree. Here there are many moments pass when he actually assumes what he has seen as a green tree. When 'he' first sees that green tree, he knows nothing more than a light and colours. If someone cannot believe this he can test himself by doing rapid blinking. There should place some object in front of him and that object should be replaced with another coloured thing. If the shift is very rapid, he will not know what the object is but just a light in colour.

But in that object there always is at least a marker. See No. 5. Sanna is a thing used as a mark. He sees first green. That marker green provokes him another thought which causes arising of dhammaarammana or mental object at manodvara or mind door.

As soon as the green colour is seen possible thoughts and concepts that may arise are:

1. Grass as grass is always green.
2. Tree
3. Painting
4. Idea of hatred in some culture
5. Previous dressing with green colour
6. Green car
7. Green velvety sandals or footwear
8. Green hat
9. Holiday
10. Moss
11. Traffic light and accidents
12. Exitway of a building and disasters
- 13...and so on.

Sanna works as perceiver of a mark attached to object. Memory on the other hand is a collection of concepts and ideas that suddenly flash back and all at once realize that these concepts are what he experienced.

I hope this message is clear to all and this makes all members to arise comprehensive thoughts and provokes further search.

May you all attain penetrative and analytical wisdom.

With Unlimited Metta,

Htoo Naing

Source: <http://dhammacitta.org/forum/index.php?topic=1442.15>