

# Going Deeper Meditation Morning: Anatta

## EMPTINESS OF SELF

The most common view in the Buddha's day, the one with which he appears to have been most concerned, asserted that the *atman* was individual – in the sense that I am I and you are you – incorporeal or immaterial, conscious, unchanging, blissful, and sovereign – in the sense of exercising complete control over its own destiny.

The Buddha maintained that there was no such entity – and he did so by appealing to experience. He said that if you look within, at yourself, at your own mental life, you can account for everything you observe under just five headings: form, feeling, perception, volitions, and acts of consciousness. Nothing discovered in these categories can be observed to be permanent. There is nothing sovereign or ultimately blissful among them. Everything in them arises in dependence on conditions, and is unsatisfactory in one way or another. These five categories or aggregates are *aatman*. They don't constitute any such self as the Hindus of the Buddha's day asserted. Such a self exists neither in them nor outside of them nor associated with them in any other way.

Sangharakshita: What is the Dharma? P65

## THE BUDDHA'S DISCOURSE WITH RAHULA

At Savatthi. Then the Venerable Rahula approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him:

“Veneable sir, how should one know, how should one see so that, in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, the mind is rid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit, has transcended discrimination, and is peaceful and well liberated?”

“Any kind of form whatsoever, Rahula, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – having seen all form as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self,’ one is liberated by nonclinging.

“Any kind of feeling whatsoever ... Any kind of perception whatsoever ... Any kind of volitional formations whatsoever ... Any kind of consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – having seen all consciousness as it really is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self’, one is liberated by nonclinging.

“When one knows and sees thus, Rahula, then in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, the mind is rid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit, has transcended discrimination, and is peaceful and well liberated.”

SN 18.22

## LETTING GO

There are a number of ways of looking systematically at all of our experience: one of them is the 5 khandhas or aggregates: form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness.

Within these we assume there is a self which is enduring and in control, but when we look in our experience for this self, we always come back to some particular experience: and these are changing, and arising in dependence on conditions quite outside our control.

## Form (Rupa)

This is the form or 'shape' of what is sensed: in meditation mostly what is heard or felt – also what is seen if we meditate with our eyes open.

## Feeling (Vedana)

Vedana is the feeling tone of what is sensed: its simple pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutrality. This is always the feeling tone *of* some sensation: it is conditioned by that sensation and ends with it. For example, the pleasant quality of a birdsong ends when the bird stops singing.

## Perception (Sanna)

This is the perception of a sensation *as* something – it includes recognition, for example of a sound *as* a car. Like feeling, it is conditioned by sensation. For example, when the sound ends, the perception of that sound as a car ceases.

## Volitions (Sankhara)

We can see volitions as the quality of wanting or not-wanting in our heart experience. In meditation there will be the broad quality of either contentment and engagement, or of hindrance: not wanting to do this, wanting to do something else.

Also, in particular experience, such as sounds heard, there may be a sense of not-wanted 'noise' or 'distraction', perhaps with a police siren, or of 'delightful' 'lovely' birdsong.

Feeling tone shades in to volition. Both are conditioned by sensation: they arise in dependence on things outside our control (such as the sound of a car passing) and cease when the sensation ends.

## Consciousness (Vinnana)

The mind has a basic ability to apprehend sense experience directly and know it to be as it is.

To look at consciousness, we can go back to sense experience: to what is felt or heard, but this time relating to each moment not as a moment of experience, as a moment of knowing or apprehending.

These moments of knowing or apprehending are always moments of consciousness *of* something. As each experience ends, the consciousness of that experience ends. For example, the sound of a car passing fades, and the auditory-consciousness of that sound ceases.

So these moments of knowing are impermanent, and arise in dependence on things outside our control: when there's a sound experienced then there's consciousness of that sound.

## General points

We may find that as we reflect on one aspect of our experience, we shift to identifying with another part. It can be tempting to try to chase after the self-view, but this can be frustrating: like pushing down a bubble in the wallpaper only for it to pop up somewhere else.

The practice is just to take a close look at a range of experience and let go of identification with this.