The Discourse on
The Non-self Characteristic

Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta | S 22.59 ≈ Mv 1.6.38-47 (V 1:13 f)
or Pañca Sutta The Discourse on the Five
Theme: The 3 characteristics, the 5 aggregates, and non-self
Translated by Piya Tan ©2010; simplified ©2016

[For full text, commentary and notes, see SD 1.2 at http://dharmafarer.org.]

The italicized sections are reflective repetitions (peyyāla), to be read mindfully and directly felt.

1 Contra “eternal self”: The 5 aggregates

At the Deer Park at Isi,patana near Benares, the Lord addressed the company of 5 monks:
“Bhikshus [monks],

(1) Form is non-self.
For if form were self, this form would not bring about illness [affliction],
and it would be possible to tell the form:
‘Let my form be such. Let my form not be such.’
But because form is non-self, form brings about illness [affliction],
and it is not possible to say of form:
‘Let my form be such. Let my form not be such.’

(2) Feeling is non-self.
For if feeling were self, this feeling would not bring about illness [affliction],
and it would be possible to tell the feeling:
‘Let my feeling be such. Let my feeling not be such.’
But because feeling is non-self, feeling brings about illness [affliction],
and it is not possible to say of feeling:
‘Let my feeling be such. Let my feeling not be such.’

(3) Perception is non-self.
For if perception were self, this perception would not bring about illness [affliction],
and it would be possible to tell the perception:
‘Let my perception be such. Let my perception not be such.’
But because perception is non-self, perception brings about illness [affliction],
and it is not possible to say of perception:
‘Let my perception be such. Let my perception not be such.’

(4) Formations are non-self.
For if formations were self, these formations would not bring about illness [affliction],
and it would be possible to tell the formations:
‘Let my formations be such. Let my formations not be such.’
But because formations are non-self, formations lead to illness [affliction],
and it is not possible to say of formations:
‘Let my formations be such. Let my formations not be such.’
(5) **Consciousness** is non-self.

For if consciousness were self, this consciousness would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the consciousness:

'Let my consciousness be such. Let my consciousness not be such.'

But because consciousness is non-self, consciousness brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of consciousness:

'Let my consciousness be such. Let my consciousness not be such.'

2 The aggregate characteristics formula

(1) Now, what do you think: is **form** permanent or impermanent?

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?

"No, bhante."

(2) "Now, what do you think: is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?

"No, bhante."

(3) "Now, what do you think: is **perception** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?

"No, bhante."

(4) "Now, what do you think: are **formations** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?

"No, bhante."

(5) "Now, what do you think is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:
‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”
“No, bhante.” [Mv 1.6.43]

3 The non-self totality formula

(1) “Therefore any kind of form whatsoever,
whether past, future or present,
internal or external,
gross or subtle,
inferior or superior,
far or near—
all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(2) Therefore any kind of feeling whatsoever—
whether past, future or present,
internal or external,
gross or subtle,
inferior or superior,
far or near—
all feelings should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(3) Therefore any kind of perception whatsoever—
whether past, future or present,
internal or external,
gross or subtle,
inferior or superior,
far or near—
all perceptions should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(4) Therefore any kind of formations whatsoever—
whether past, future or present,
internal or external,
gross or subtle,
inferior or superior,
far or near—
all formations should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(5) Therefore any kind of consciousness whatsoever—
whether past, future or present,
internal or external,
gross or subtle,
inferior or superior,
far or near—
all consciousness should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ [Mv 1.6.45]

4 Revulsion
Seeing thus, the disciple is revulsed [disenchanted] with form,
is revulsed with feeling,
is revulsed with perception,
is revulsed with formations,
is revulsed with consciousness.

5 Liberation: The arhat’s review knowledge
Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate [free from lust].
Through dispassion, his mind is freed.
When it is freed, there arises the knowledge: ‘(It is) Freed!’

He understands:
‘Destroyed is birth.
The holy life has been lived.
What needs to be done has been done.
There is no more becoming like this. [No more rebirth.]’

6 Arhathood of the 5 monks
When the Lord said this, the company of 5 monks joyfully approved of it.
And while this teaching was being given, the minds of the company of 5 monks were freed from all defilements of senses and mind.
At that time, there were 6 arhats in the world.

— So it is —

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