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## 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 Isī,patana near Benares, the Lord addressed the company of 5 monks:  
“Bhikkhus [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, [sense-faculties and sense-objects]  
 gross or subtle, [physical sense-objects and mental objects]  
 inferior or superior, [sense-world or beyond the sense-worlds]  
 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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