

12

Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Sutta

The Discourse on Self-identity View | S 22.154/3:185 [Be S 22.155]

Theme: Self-identity view is the grasping of craving

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1 Sutta summary and significance

SD 53.12 comprises two related Suttas—the **Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta** (S 35.165) [2] and the **Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Sutta** (S 22.154). [1.3]

For details on the Sutta teachings, see Introductory Notes to the **Micchā,diṭṭhi Sutta** (S 22.153), SD 53.11.

1.1 THE 42 ELEMENTS

1.1.1 The Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (S 35.165) instructs on the nature of self-identity view. When we fail to see or understand *impermanence, suffering and non-self*, we identify with one, a set or all of the 30 elements (*dhātu*)—the 6 sense-bases, their respective sense-objects, the 6 consciousnesses, the 6 sense-contacts, and the 6 kinds of feelings. If we take each feeling as being of 3 kinds (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral), then, we have 18 kinds of feelings, and a total of **42 elements**.

1.1.2 When we understand and accept **the 3 characteristics** of *impermanence, suffering and non-self*¹—or even understand and accept just the first of them—we will be able to see that although we are composed of these 42 elements, they are impermanent, suffering (unsatisfactory), and we do not “own” any of them, as they have no abiding essence.

1.1.3 Since none of the 42 elements is singly, as a set, or all the elements together, or outside of them, is permanent, fully satisfactory, there can be *no abiding essence or anything related to such an essence*. Hence, there is no way we can really or effectively identify with any of these 42 elements as permanent self or abiding entity.

1.2 THE 5 AGGREGATES

1.2.1 The Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Sutta (S 22.154) instructs on **how to abandon self-identity view**, that is, not to “own” any of the 5 aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—but to see them as being *impermanent, suffering and non-self*. Its teaching opens by saying that wrong view arises on account of our **clinging** to any of the 5 aggregates.

1.2.2 Clinging, as we well know, is rooted in craving, a thirst for things, which once we have acquired, we grasp (*gaṇhāti*) tenaciously. What we grasp simply takes the shape of our hand, and we have no other use for it. Hence, we keep looking for things, for ever more things, to run after, to cling to, to grasp. And finding them unsatisfactory, we continue with our endless quest for more things.

1.2.3 The aggregates are all impermanent; hence, *suffering* or *unsatisfactory*, not fit to be regarded as: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self.” They are all of the nature of arising and ending; we cannot own any of them—they are *non-self*. We are nothing but the 5 aggregates—we are form, feelings, percep-

¹ See SD 1.2 (2); SD 18.2 (2.2).

tions, formations and consciousness—this is “our world,” so to speak, but we own none of them, in that we have no control whatsoever over them.² When we understand and accept this, we go on to awaken to liberation.

1.3 SUTTA TEACHINGS

1.3.1 SD 53.12 comprises two related Suttas—the **Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta** (S 35.165) and the **Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Sutta** (S 22.154). While the former defines self-identity view, the latter shows us how to overcome it. **Self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*),³ is, in simple terms, the identifying of oneself with our bodies or minds, that is, seeing some sort of abiding entity in any of the **5 aggregates**—our body, feelings, perception, karma and consciousness.⁴

1.3.2 Self-identity view is the 1st of 3 fetters,⁵ the breaking of which brings about **streamwinning**.⁶ These 3 fetters arise in connection with the 5 aggregates by way of the 4 kinds of self-identity views,⁷ that is, in terms of regarding:⁸

- (1) (an aggregate) as the self;
- (2) the self as possessing (an aggregate);
- (3) (an aggregate) as in the self;
- (4) the self as in (an aggregate).

1.3.3 None of these aggregates—indeed no part of our existence—exists in itself. Both body and mind are closely interrelated and mutually conditioning, as are all the 5 aggregates—the are conditioned as well as conditioning us. Hence, we really are *all interdependent and changing processes*.

2 Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (S 35.165)

SD 53.12(2)

Sakkāya, diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta

The Discourse on Abandoning Self-identity View | S 35.165/4:147 [S:B 35.166]

Traditional: S 4.1.4.1.11 Saṃyutta 4, Saḷāyatana Vg 1, Saḷāyatana Saṃy 4, Catuttha Pṇsk 1, Nandikkhaya Vg 11

Theme: Overcoming self-identity view

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1 Then, a certain monk approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Sitting at one side, the monk said to the Blessed One:

² **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,40), SD 3.13.

³ See SD 40a.8 (3); SD 40a.12 (3.2.4).

⁴ On the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), see **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a.

⁵ The 3 fetters (*saṃyojana*) are (1) self-identity view, (2) spiritual doubt and (3) attachment to rituals and vows: see SD 3.3 (5); **Abhabba Tayo, dhamma S** (A 10.76,6), SD 2.4; **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8. These 3 fetters are, in turn, part of the 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*): SD 10.16 (1.6.6-1.6.8); **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 (5.1.4); **(Se-kha) Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3 (2).

⁶ On streamwinning, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

⁷ See **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81,12-30), SD 6.1; SD 40a.8 (3.3). The first is rooted in annihilationist view (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*); the rest, in eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*).

⁸ When each of these views is applied to the 5 aggregates, we get the 20 kinds of self-identity views: **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,7.3), SD 40a.9; **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109,10), SD 17.11; **Nadī S** (S 22.93) @ SD 42.18 (2.2.1); **“I”: the nature of identity**, SD 19.1 esp (2.2).

2 “Bhante, how should one know, how should one see, so that **self-identity view**⁹ is abandoned?”¹⁰

(1) THE EYE IS SUFFERING

3 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the eye**¹¹
is suffering [unsatisfactory],¹² then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that forms
are suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that eye-consciousness
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that eye-contact
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the eye** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—
when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

(2) THE EAR IS SUFFERING

4 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the ear**
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that sounds
are suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that ear-consciousness
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that ear-contact
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the ear** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—
when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

(3) THE NOSE IS SUFFERING

5 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the nose**
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that smells
are suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that nose-consciousness
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.
When one knows, one sees that nose-contact
is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned,

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the nose** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—
when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

⁹ On self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), see (1.3.2).

¹⁰ *Katharṃ nu kho bhante jānato katharṃ passato sakkāya, diṭṭhi pahīyatīti.*

¹¹ The eye is the 1st of **the 42 elements** (*dhātu*), listed here as being “suffering” [1.1.1].

¹² S:B (2000:1220) mistranslates the key qualifier here (S 35.166) and in S 35.165 as “impermanent” throughout.

(4) THE TONGUE IS SUFFERING

6 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

the tongue

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

tastes

are suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

tongue-consciousness

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

tongue-contact

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned,

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the tongue** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

(5) THE BODY IS SUFFERING

7 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

the body

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

touch

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

body-consciousness

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

body-contact

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the body** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

(6) THE MIND IS SUFFERING

8 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

When one knows, one sees that

the mind

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

thoughts [mind-objects]

are suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

mind-consciousness

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

mind-contact

is suffering, then, self-identity view is abandoned.

Whatever that is **felt** arising with **the mind** as condition—pleasant or unpleasant or neither—when one knows, one sees it to be *suffering, self-identity view is abandoned.*

9 When one knows and sees thus, self-identity view is abandoned.

— evaṃ —

Sakkāya Diṭṭhi Sutta

The Discourse on Self-identity View

S 22.154

- 1 At Sāvattḥī.
- 2 “Bhikshus, when what exists, on account of clinging to what, does **self-identity view**¹³ arise?”
- 3 “Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge.¹⁴ It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the bhikshus would remember it.”¹⁵

The 5-aggregate clinging pericope¹⁶

- 4 “Bhikshus,
 - (1) when there is **form**,
on account of clinging to form, by adhering to *form*, self-identity view arises.¹⁷
 - (2) When there is **feeling**,
on account of clinging to feeling, by adhering to *feeling*, self-identity view arises.
 - (3) When there is **perception**, bhikshus,
on account of clinging to perception, by adhering to *perception*, self-identity view arises
 - (4) When there is **formations**,
on account of clinging to formations, by adhering to *formations*, self-identity view arises.
 - (5) When there is **consciousness**,
on account of clinging to consciousness, by adhering to *consciousness*, self-identity view arises.

The aggregate-characteristic¹⁸ pericope¹⁹

- 5 What do you think, bhikshus:
 - (1) Is form permanent or impermanent?

¹³ “Self-identity view” (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) is, in simple terms, the identifying of oneself with our bodies or minds, that is, seeing some sort of abiding entity in any of the 5 aggregates. [1.3.1]

¹⁴ “Has the Blessed One as refuge,” *bhagavaṃ ... dhammā paṭisaraṇā*. This means that 2 things: (1) that the Buddha discovers, proclaims and protects the Dharma, and (2) that the Buddha himself takes the Dharma as his refuge. Hence, even with the Buddha’s passing, the Dharma still exists (as it always does) but is still available to us when we follow the Buddha’s teaching as preserved in the suttas.

¹⁵ *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā bhagavaṃ nettikā bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante Bhagavantaṃ yeva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressaṇī ti*, which is stock: **Mahā Dhamma, samādāna S** (M 46,2/1:309 f), **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47,3/1:317), **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68,8/1:465), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,19/3:115), SD 11.4; **S 8.5-11/1:188-196**, **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 12.19/2:24), SD 21.1, **Parivīmaṃsanā S** (S 12.51/-2:81), SD 11.5, **Candūpama S** (S 16.3/2:199), **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58/3:66), SD 49.10, **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:208), SD 5.5, **Ānanda S 2** (S 36.16/4:221); A 3.68/1:199, A 8.6/4:158, A 8.83/4:338, A 9.1/4:351, A 10.58/5:106, A 11.20/-5:355. See S:B 404 n227.

¹⁶ On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

¹⁷ *Rūpe kho bhikkhave sati rūpaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ abhinivissa sakkāya, diṭṭhi uppajjati.*

¹⁸ On “the 3 characteristics” —impermanence, suffering and non-self, see (1.1.2).

¹⁹ A shorter version of this and foll sections are given as **Arahatā S 1** (S 22.76/3:82 f @ SD 26.7) = **Arahatā S 2** (S 22.77/3:84, without verse). Bodhi’s tr (S 22.154) has a *peyyāla* which seems to omit this whole section.

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”²⁰

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“But without clinging to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, would self-identity view arise in it?”²¹

“No, bhante.”

(2) “Is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] 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.”

(3) “Is **perception** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“But without clinging to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, would self-identity view arise in it?”

“No, bhante.”

(4) “Are **formations** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“But without clinging to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, would self-identity view arise in it?”

“No, bhante.”

(5) “Is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“But without clinging to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, would self-identity view arise in it?”

“No, bhante.”

²⁰ *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā*. Here, the alternative tr, “painful,” reminds us that whatever brings us pain or discomfort (bodily or mentally) is not liked by us. When the pain is gone, we feel some pleasure. However, even the pleasurable is impermanent, and when it is gone, we feel pain. Hence, both the painful and the pleasant are “suffering” (*dukkha*). It is useful to understand this difference between pain and suffering. Simply put, pain is natural (we have a physical but conscious body, so we feel pain, whether tolerable or intolerable, which is a sign of irritability or sensitivity of our experiences); suffering is optional (we can train our minds not to be attached to what is pleasant or to reject what is unpleasant, and to regard even the neutral as being impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.)

²¹ *Yaṃ pañāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma, dhammaṃ, api nu taṃ anupādāya sakkāya, diṭṭhi uppajjeyyāti.*

Revulsion

6 Seeing thus, bhikshus, the tutored noble disciple
 is revulsed [disenchanted]²² with form,
 is revulsed with feeling,
 is revulsed with perception,
 is revulsed with formations,
 is revulsed with consciousness.

Liberation: The arhat's review knowledge

7 Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.
 Through dispassion, he is free.
 Freed, there arises the knowledge: 'Free!'²³

He understands:

'Destroyed is birth.
 The holy life has been lived.
 What needs to be done has been done.
 There is no more of this state of being.'" [Mv 1.6.46]

— evaṃ —

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²² On revulsion, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

²³ *Vimuttismiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti*, or "When free, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is free." Note that the self is not addressed here. On "Free!" see SD 50.1 (3.1.2.2).