SD 65.7

Sakkāya,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta

The Discourse on Letting Go of Identity View | **S 35.165**
Theme: Reflecting on suffering helps us abandon identity view
Translated and annotated by Piya Tan, 2009, ©2026

1 Sutta summary and note

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Sakkāya,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta (S 35.165) is a "meditation lesson" the Buddha gives to "a certain monk" on **the suffering** [unsatisfactoriness] of our dynamic being in its 5 aspects—*the internal sense-faculties*, their respective *sense-objects*, their respective *consciousnesses*, their respective *contacts* and their respective *feelings*. When we know and see this, then, "**identity view is abandoned**."

1.2 SUTTA NOTE

Like the 3 Koṭṭhika Suttas (S 35.161-163) [SD 65 (3-8) (1)]—**the Sakkāya,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** is a "meditation lesson" on abandoning identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*)—especially the notion that there is something *pleasant* or *eternal* either as an aspect of our mind (such as feelings, memories, karma or consciousness) or the body itself, that we can identify as the "Soul." Thus identity view is to be abandoned.

2 Views, right and wrong

2.1 HOW VIEWS ARE REMOVED

2.1.1 Seeing removes views

2.1.1.1 The overcoming of wrong view and attaining of right view has one clear purpose: that of gaining the path of awakening, that is, streamwinning.[1] One first knows wrong view as wrong; then one works on right view; finally, one *sees* for oneself true reality—this is "**vision**" (*dassana*) or "seeing the whole picture." Such a person has attained the path of awakening.

2.1.1.2 A key consideration of the abandonment of defilements and the cultivation of right view is found in **the Dhamma,saṅgaṇi**, the 1st book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. In an instructive passage the question is asked: "What are the states (*dhamma*) that are to be put away by seeing [vision] (*dassana*)[2]?"

The answer is that it is "The 3 fetters of (self) identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*) and attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*)."[3] (Dhs 182 §1002)

It is also stated that the causes of these 3 fetters are to be put away by seeing.[4]

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[1] Briefly described in SD 65.6 (2.3.1.6).

[2] "Seeing" (*dassana*) here is "right view" (*sammā,diṭṭhi*): PmA 2:244. *Dassana* is also a broader term that incl spiritual knowledges (*ñāṇa*), such as the super powers and knowledge connected with awakening (AA 1:57, 5:40).

[3] On the 3 fetters, see **Abhabba Tayo,dhamma S** (A 10.76,6), SD 2.4; **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8; SD 3.3 (5).

[4] *Katame dhammā dassanena pahātabba,hetukā tīṇi saṁyojanāni sakkāya,diṭṭhi vicikicchā sīlabbata,parāmāso* (Dhs 182 §1002, 184 §1009, 220 §1254; cf 258 §1394, 260 §1568). On the 3 fetters: §1113-1134 (ch 5).

2.1.2 Mental cultivation removes views

2.1.2.1 Certain other dharmas (physical states and mental states) are to be put away by **mental cultivation** or meditation (*bhāvanā*). This is whatever "greed, hatred and delusion remain, any defilements, and the 4 aggregates[5] associated with them, and actions of body, speech and mind that come from them."[6] The causes of these are also to be put away by meditation (Dhs 183 §1011).

2.1.2.2 The mental hindrances[7] are then eradicated by seeing and cultivation. One then easily attains dhyana; emerging from it, one then directs the calm and clear mind to seeing true reality. However, the analysis of the early Abhidhamma was aimed towards an analysis of the eradication of all unwholesome states (*akusala dhamma*). To this end a final question is asked:

"Which are the dharmas that are to be put away by neither *seeing* nor *cultivation*?'[8]

It is those wholesome and indeterminate dharmas, relating to the sense-world, the form-world and the formless world, or to the unincluded (*apariyāpannā*), the 4 aggregates, all forms, and the unconditioned element.[9] This is, so to speak, the area in which right view functions. The point is that, having abandoned wrong view, right view functions as wisdom (*panna*), whose essential nature is that it sees without any attachment.

2.2 Abandoning all views

2.2.1 Unfettering the mind

2.2.1.1 Buddhaghosa, in his comments on the first **Dhamma,saṅgaṇī** passage cited above [2.1.1.2] explains the phrase "for the sake of abandoning views" to refer to the 62 views,[10] which are abandoned by the path of streamwinning. He then states that "forming and holding views" (*diṭṭhi,gatāni,* "going to views") is also abandoned. These are dharmas that are "similar in course to view" (*diṭṭhi,sadisa,gamanānī*). These are the identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), doubt (vicikicchā), and grasping to rituals and vows (*sīlab,bata,parāmāsa*), and the unwholesome dharmas of greed, hatred and delusion (*rāga,dosa,mohâkusalāni*)[11] together with associated dharmas. (DhsA 214,20-22)

All these dharmas tend to form and hold views (*diṭṭhi,gatāni*) and it is these dharmas that are abandoned by right view (*sammā,diṭṭhi*). So, when the early texts explain that right view abandons wrong view it means that right view abandons all these dharmas (views and related mental states).

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[5] Ie, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. On the use of 4 *khandhas*, excluding *rūpa*, see Fuller 2005: ch 5.

[6] *Katame dhammā bhāvanāya pahātabbā. avaseso lobho doso moho, tad ekaṭṭhā ca kilesā, taṁ sampayutto vedanā-k,khandho saññā-k,khandho saṅkhāra-k,khandho vinnāṇa-k,khandho, taṁ samuṭṭhānaṁ kāya,kammaṁ vacī,kammaṁ mano,kammaṁ, ime dhammā bhāvanāya pahātabbā* (Dhs 183 §1007).

[7] The 5 hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual desire (*kama-c,chanda*); (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*); (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna,middha*); (4) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca,kukkucca*); and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*). See ***Nīvaraṇa,*** SD 32.1; **(Nīvaraṇa) Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12.

[8] *Katame dhammā n'eva dassanena na bhāvanāya pahātabbā?*

[9] *Kusalā vyakatā dhammā kāmâvacarā rūpâvacarā arūpâvacarā apariyāpannā, vedanā-k,khandho –pe– vinnāṇa-k,khandho, sabbaṁ ca rūpaṁ, asaṅkhatā ca dhātu, ime dhammā n'eva dassanena na bhāvanāya pahātabbā* (Dhs 183 §1008). For a discussion on *apariyāpannā*, see Fuller 2005: ch 5.

[10] On the 62 wrong views, see **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1) + SD 25 (5); SD 62.10f (1.2.0.3).

[11] PTS wr *rāgadosamoh**a**kusalāni.*

2.2.1.2 If we take views in a purely **propositional**[12] sense, it is difficult to see how right view overcome wrong view. Propositionally, we merely see one view replacing another, even when the former clarifies the latter. However, when the early texts state that right view abandons wrong view and adds that right view abandons the 62 views we must remember that the tradition itself is clearly aware what is implied here: that *all* views are abandoned and the mind is open and free.

An accurate cognitive process does not simply replace an inaccurate cognitive process. Fuller (2005) thus rejects Jaini's argument that "the Theravādins only broke down the cognitive process into inaccurate and accurate (whereas the Vaibhāṣikas distinguish between inaccurate, accurate and free of all judgement)"; this view does not do the Theravāda justice.[13] The Pali texts give a subtler treatment of how views are seen and abandoned.

2.2.2 The vision that is the path

2.2.2.1 Now if we understand what the early texts are stating when they say that right view abandons wrong view, we may see how right view is said to function after **streamwinning**.[14] As scholars have noted, we cannot consider this right view to be *propositional*.[15] While we all begin appreciating Buddhist texts and writings in *propositional* terms (intellectually or cognitively), to really understand **right view** (*sammā,diṭṭhi*), we must clearly bear in mind its affective function.

We must *feel* right view in the sense of fully and directly experiencing true reality. To **feel** means to experience it as reflecting one's *past*, how it works in the *present*, and one's *reaction* to it, as being pleasant or unpleasant, and whether one desires it or rejects it. One notices all these phases as they arise, but one does *not* hold on to any of them.

We can thus say that right view is the non-clinging and free aspect of **wisdom** (*paññā*). Wrong view, on the other hand, is always rooted in greed (*lobha,mūla*). A significant aspect of the right view of the path is that it is *not* rooted in greed and attachment. Hence, a simple way of understanding this would be to say that right view is that wisdom that is free from attachment.

2.2.2.2 Ironically, we may state, for example, that "all forms are impermanent," but worldly right view only takes it *propositionally*, whereas spiritual right view (of the path) sees it with profound depth and beauty, and is liberated by it. "Essentially the same thing may be experienced more fully and deeply," notes Gethin (1997:216),[16] and that right view of the path keeps the cognitive process detached (from all defilements).

Gethin adds the following points:

> In the Theravāda, understanding the tendency to fixed opinion can only exist prior to stream-attainment, since the wisdom of stream-attainment is characterised as *sammā-diṭṭhi*, a form of *paññā* that precisely turns away from the inclination to hold fixed opinions; once the four truths have been directly seen, the mind has no inclination to either eternalism or annihilationism, the mind has no tendency to misinterpret Buddhist theory in terms of either annihilationism or eternalism. (1997:211 = 2004:23)

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[12] On "propositional," see SD 65.6 (2.1.1).

[13] P S Jaini, "Prajnā and dṛṣṭi in the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma," 1977, 2009:407; R Gethin, "Wrong View (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) and Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) in the Theravāda Abhidhamma," 1997:213, 215; Paul Fuller, *Notion of* Diṭṭhi *in Theravada Buddhism, The point of view*, London: Curzon, 2005:106.

[14] On streamwinning, see SD 65.6 (2.3.1).

[15] This is the right view of the path. The propositional distinction between wrong and right view appears to be more pronounced before streamwinning (Gethin 1997:212 f); also Fuller 2005:218 n126.

[16] "Essentially the same thing may be experienced more fully and deeply" (Gethin 1997:216).

2.2.3 Propositional view and experiential vision

2.2.3.1 When we understand the nature of propositional language [2.2.1.2] and experiential reality, and their differences as shown in the early texts, we will also see the reason for there being both **ignorance** (*avijjā*) and **wrong view** (*micchā,diṭṭhi*), and both **wisdom** (*paññā*) and **right view** (*sammā,diṭṭhi*). While ignorance means a lack of knowledge, wrong view refers to knowing a wrong thing, usually something negative, or knowing a right thing but in the wrong way or incompletely. Wisdom and right view, on a higher level, usually mean the same thing; but may initially differ in that *wisdom* may refer to some level of *right view* but not yet fully liberating.

On the other hand, we cannot always distinguish between cognitive propositions and affective statements of true reality, especially when it is spoken live by someone. In a sense, the statement itself is not always fixed as being propositional or affective. Perhaps, it may be safe to say that when a person speaks from experience with a wholesome mind and truth, it is effectively an affective statement. When a unawakened person speaks with *greed, hatred or delusion*, even what sounds truly real, we cannot be sure of the speaker's understanding of the words or his intention.

This also may explain why even when **an academic scholar** (an unawakened non-practitioner) may seem to have profound insights into Buddhism, but he may at some point give up "Buddhism," or he never had any faith in the Dharma in the first place. Yet a humble forest monastic teacher, without any academic attainments, may have attained liberating insights into true reality and may inspire us, even change our lives, with his simple yet penetrating words and composure.

2.2.3.2 To reach the higher stages of the path, calm and insight must work together. Indeed, calm and insight are vitally necessary for us to gain the path. Here, right view, through **mindfulness**, keeps our learning and practice on an even keel harmonizing **faith** with **wisdom**, and **energy** with **concentration**.[17] Without this balance, there is no "middle way"; even what is spoken of as "right view" can be held in such a way as to bring the effects of wrong view.

Only with a harmonious mind and practice do we become aware that right view abandons *wrong view* not simply by replacing one proposition with another. The view's content, what it proposes, the way it is held and its effect are all interrelated to make it right view.[18]

The role of right view stresses on the freedom from mental rigidity or barrenness (*ceto,khila*).[19] An essential version of the 5 kinds of mental barrenness[20] are the **3 fetters** (*saṁyojana*): those of *clinging to the self-notion, spiritual doubt and superstition* (relying on some external agency for solution or succour) [2.1.1.2]. Thus we see **streamwinning** as the turning-point (*vivatta*)[21] or breakthrough (*abhisamaya*)[22] into the path. Here, the mind lets go of the cognitive habits of *identity view, of doubt and of attachment to rituals and vows*. Right view is aware of cognitive propositions but rises above and beyond them, and sees true reality in one's own mind and experience; right view comes from experience which then shapes our experience wholesomely.

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[17] On the 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*), see ***Pañc'indriya,*** SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

[18] See Fuller 2005:222.

[19] The 5 forms of mental barrenness (*ceto,khila*) are: (1) sensual craving, (2) craving for the body, (3) craving for form, (4) gluttony, and (5) aspiring for heavenly rebirth: **(Dasaka) Ceto,khila S** (A 10.14), SD 51.10 (8) (10e).

[20] They are said to be "barren" called because they each prevents our mind from developing in a wholesome way. See prec n.

[21] Pm 1:110 f passim (tr Pm:Ñ 110-112).

[22] SD 49.9 (4.3.2 passim); SD 52.4 (1.2.2); SD 57.21 (2.1).

2.2.4 Is right view a view?

2.2.4.1 Is right view itself, in fact, a view, too? **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Mahā,vagga Diṭṭhi,kathā),[23] after answering 5 questions on wrong view, asks the 6th question thus:

"What is the uprooting of all the bases for views?" (*katamo diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna,samugghāto ti*, Pm 1:135).[24]

The answer is that the path of streamwinning is the uprooting of all the bases for views. It then cites a verse to explain this, which states that rationalists (*takkitā*)—those who depend on propositional language—use the extreme views of being (*bhava,diṭṭhi*) and non-being (*vibhava,diṭṭhi*)—or the notions of "something" and of "nothing"—as their only foundation (*nissitāse*). They have no knowledge of cessation,[25] causing the world (those who listen to them) to have perverted perception (*loko viparīta,saññī*, Pm 1:159).

The foundations of wrong view, *being and non-being*, are removed by the right perception of cessation. Throughout the discussion of the function of right view earlier in that chapter, it was this idea that of seeing of the rise and fall of phenomena that was held up as constituting right view.[26]

The Paṭisambhidā,magga then explains how the monk (that is, the meditator) aims to overcome the extremes of *being and non-being*. It is stated simply that the monk sees true reality (*bhūtaṁ bhūtato passati,* Pm 1:159), such as by way dependent arising or simply as suffering. Having seen this, the monk will have entered on the way to *dispassion* (*cessation of sense-desire*), *to the fading away* (*of lust*), *to cessation* (*of suffering*).[27] It is the seeing of this, of things as they are, and the cessation of craving for it, that constitutes the way to the overcoming of all wrong views (Pm 1:159).

2.2.5 View: imperfect and perfect

2.2.5.1 Reality has to do with **time**; we tend to live in the past or dream into the future; we rarely live, is ever, in the present. This tends to happen because of the way we learn, that is, how we connect with our experiences and make sense of them. In other words, we depend on our memory of similar events that happened in **the past** to reconstruct or evaluate a present one. Thus, the present experience becomes merely a replay or mimic of the past; and then the present goes into the past. This process is called **perception** (*saññā*) in early Buddhist psychology.

However, we tend to react even to memories; we often judge the perceived present.

- When the present experience reminds us of a *pleasant* past experience, we tend to see the present experience as pleasant; or
- when we the present experience reminds us of an *unpleasant* past experience, we tend to see the present experience as unpleasant.

This cognitive phase is called **feeling** (*vedanā*); that is, a hedonic state, one that is *pleasant, unpleasant or neutral* (including a bored feeling). If were to stop here, taking it as nothing more than just "feeling," we do not create any bad karma.

Things then take a dramatic turn when we take the next step, that of **karma-formation** (*saṅkhārā*):

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[23] "Great chapter, talk on views." Paṭisambhidā,magga (Pm) is the 12th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya.

[24] Tr Pm:Ñ 140, 158 f.

[25] *Tesaṁ nirodhamhi na h'atthi ñāṇaṁ* (Pm 1:159,3). The statement from **(Nidāna) Kosambi S** (S 12.68) should be remembered: "to know and see *nirvana* is the cessation of existence" (*aham etaṁ jānāmi, aham etaṁ passāmi, bhava,nirodho nibbāṇan ti,* S 2:115-118, SD 70.11). This constitutes right view.

[26] See eg Pm 58 (§§295-298).

[27] *Nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti*, Pm 1:159,20 f. This is the *nibbidā* formula: ***Nibbidā,*** SD 20.1; short pericope, **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,29), SD 3.13; long pericope, SD 20.1 esp (2.2.2).

- we see *the pleasant feeling* as desirable; we then arouse ***greed***, which feeds the latent tendency of sensual lust. In other words, we will *want* this feeling again (and again); or
- we see *the unpleasant feeling* as undesirable; we then arouse ***hatred***, which feeds the latent tendency of aversion. In other words, we will *hate* or *reject* this feeling again (and again).

And when if we ignore the feeling, we then arouse ***delusion*** (since we are not making sense of the experience). Ignoring the feeling feeds the latent tendency of ignorance.

This is how the 3-root cycle works: greed feeds *lust*; hatred feeds *aversion*; delusion feeds *ignorance*.[28]

The strategy of wholesome response here is for us to stop cognizing at the phase of perception; we then leave the past where it was, and let go of the future as not happening. We are then able to see the present as it arises and falls away. We are then literally *present* in the moment, living it.

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[28] On the basic latent tendencies (*anusaya*), those of sensual lust (*kāma,rāgânusaya*), of aversion (*paṭighânusaya*), and of ignorance (*avijjā'nusaya*): **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,65-67), SD 11.14; ***Anusaya***, SD 31.3 (8.2).

Sakkāya,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta

The Discourse on Letting Go of Identity View

S 35.165

1 [Thus have I heard. At one time …]

2 Then a certain monk approached the Blessed One approached the Blessed One, and having approached, saluted him and sat down at one side.

3 Sitting at one side, the monk said to this to the Blessed One:

"Bhante, how should one know, how should one see, so that **identity view** is abandoned?"

4 "Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the eye** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **forms** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **eye-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **eye-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

5 Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the ear** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **sounds** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **ear-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **ear-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with ear-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

6 Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the nose** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **smells** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **nose-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **nose-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with nose-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

7 Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the tongue** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **tastes** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **tongue-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **tongue-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with tongue-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

8 Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the body** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **touches** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **body-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **body-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with body-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

9 Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the mind** as **suffering**, *identity view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **thoughts** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **mind-consciousness** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **mind-contact** as suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees whatever **feeling** arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant—that too is suffering, *identity view is abandoned.*

10 Bhikshu, it is when one knows and sees thus that identity view is abandoned."

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