# SD 65.8

# Attā'nudiṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta

The Discourse on Abandoning Self View | **S 35.166**
Theme: Reflecting on nonself helps us abandon self view
Translated and annotated by Piya Tan, 2009, ©2026

## 1 Sutta summary and significance

### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

**The Attā'nudiṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** (S 35.166) is a "meditation lesson" the Buddha gives to "a certain monk" on **the nonself** 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, "**self view is abandoned**."

### 1.2 SUTTA NOTE

Like the 3 Koṭṭhika Suttas (S 35.161-163) [SD 65 (3-8) (1)]—**the Attā'nudiṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** is a "meditation lesson" on abandoning identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*; here a near-synonym for self view)—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 is the "Self." Thus self view is to be abandoned.

## 2 Self view

### 2.1 ALL VIEWS ARE ROOTED IN A SELF NOTION

#### 2.1.1 What is the "self"

**2.1.1.1** Children first begin to develop a sense of "other" between 6 and 12 months, when they realize they are separate from their caregivers. However, a true cognitive understanding that others have thoughts and feelings independent of their own emerges gradually between 3 and 5 years.[1] The human progress toward understanding "other" unfolds in distinct developmental stages as follows:[2]

- **6-12 months**. Babies learn that they are separate beings. They begin to recognize emotions in facial expressions and show stranger anxiety, clearly differentiating between familiar caregivers and "others."
- **1-2 years**. Toddlers begin showing basic empathy (such as trying to comfort someone who is crying). However, they still largely view the world entirely from their own perspective.
- **2-3 years**. Children start to realize that others have different likes and dislikes, though they often project their own feelings and thoughts onto others.
- **3-5 years**. The concept of an "independent other" solidifies as children develop "theory of mind." They now understand that others can have thoughts, beliefs, and emotions completely different from their own.

[1] Emotional and social development in babies [HealthyChildren]. 28 June 2026.
[2] Xu Fen, "Perceptual development," *ECPH Ency of Psychology* [2021], Singapore, 2024:1073 f. L Cherry, "The 7 most influential child development theories," [VeryWellMind]. 28 June 2026.

**2.1.1.2** Because human consciousness operates from a distinct first-person perspective, every view, belief, and perception is filtered through the lens of one's self-concept, which is the framework of "who you believe yourself to be." A dynamic philosophical and psychological construct representing an individual's conscious awareness of their own identity, agency, and continuity encompasses one's beliefs, values, and social roles, serving as the central framework through which a person organizes experiences, interprets the world, and interacts with others.[3]

### 2.1.2 Dimensions of human experience

The concept of "**self**" is rooted in several dimensions of human experience, such as follows:

- **our sense of identity shapes our view**. The way we experience reality is determined by our current state of being. Our self-concept creates a sense of identity which constructs or interprets external situations.
- **cognitive filtering**. Psychology explains that self-schemas dictate what we notice, how we process information, and what we remember. We selectively accept data that confirms our preconceived notions of who we think we are.[4]
- **subjectivity vs objectivity**. Philosophers like Thomas Nagel argue that all objective descriptions in the universe are originally rooted in subjective experience. We cannot have a definition of the outside world without an internal "self" acting as the observer.[5]
- **a "constructed" reality**. Spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, emphasize that this "I" or sense of self is not an unchanging entity, but rather a mental fabrication constructed repeatedly over time. Suffering or attachment can stem from confusing these fabrications for reality or absolute truth.[6]

### 2.1.3 A triad of selves

**2.1.3.1** The notion of a "**self**" (*attā*) points to a profound spiritual, psychological and philosophical tool and truth. All religions speak of some kind of self, an idea of who or what "I" am. Psychologically, the self-idea encompasses one's beliefs, values, and social roles, serving as the central platform and framework with which a person organizes experiences, interprets the world, and interacts with others. Although early Buddhism rejects any idea of an abiding Self or eternal Soul, the early texts describe the prevalent beliefs common amongst the unawakened, especially non-Buddhists, in generally similar terms to those used in other religions.

**2.1.3.2** One's view of the self arises basically in 3 ways, as "I," "me," and "mine." We thus have a triad of **self views**, "I am," "this is mine," and "that's me." Due to their nature of grasping at whatever they see as desirable—meaning "self-affirming" (in a broad sense)—they are called the "**3 graspings**" (*ti,vidha gaha*); they simply keep clinging to these views.

Essentially, **self view** comes in 3 forms, traditionally stated in this well-known formula:

"I am this; this is me; this is mine."

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[3] M L Wandrei, "Self," 2024. [EBSCO]

[4] Self-concept [Wiki]. 28 June 2026.

[5] R R Rickets, "Subject and object: Explorations how we construct meaning and language," 2019 [Ricketts]. Subject and object [Wiki]. 28 June 2026.

[6] M A E Van Der Gaag et al, "Understanding identity development in context," *Frontiers in Psychology* 15, 8 Jan 2025 1467280 [pmc]. 28 June 2026.

This triad of self-views arises from **the** "**3 graspings**" (*ti,vidha gaha*) and keeps us clinging to these views that induce us to react in selfish ways towards objects of the senses and the mind. The basic ideas connected with these 3 graspings can be tabulated graphically as follows:

| | | | causal conditions | fetters (*saṁyojana*)[7] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | "This is mine" | *etam mama* | habit of craving: | *taṇhā*[8] |
| (2) | "This I am" | *eso 'ham asmi* | habit of conceit: | *māna*[9] |
| (3) | "This is my self" | *eso me attā ti* | habit of views: | *sakkāya,diṭṭhi*[10] (also self view) |

**2.1.3.3** The range of concepts and speculations of the various self-view frameworks and dimensions in the different religions and philosophies is vast. However, a common thread runs through all these self notions is the idea that the self is something abiding. In the Western frameworks, the pioneer American psychologist William James (1842-1910), sees the self as having two inseparable components:[11]

- **the "I" (self as subject)**. The active, conscious knower or observer. It is the part of us that thinks, experiences the world, and holds a sense of personal agency.
- **the "me" (self as object)**. The self that is known. It includes our physical traits, social roles, personal history, and everything we can objectively observe about ourself.[12]

We can see that the notions of the self as "I" and "me" constitute the first 2 of the Buddha's triad of selves. In early Buddhism, the "I" (subject) and "me" (object) are not fundamental realities or entities, but rather conceptual habits and cognitive processes. Suffering (*dukkha*) arises when our awareness fixates on any of the 5 aggregates (body, feelings, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) and mistakes them as being or having a permanent "something," as "my," that the "I" has created, and therefore is "mine." [2.2.1.3]

**2.1.3.4** The 3rd component is the "self-creator" that is present when the "I" operates or when "me" is observed. We can see this working with the 5 aggregates thus: the "I" is **the self-conscious body**[13] (*rūpa*) which comprises all the sense-faculties (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching). These processes act as **the "I-maker"** (*ahaṅ,kāra*), with the "I" as subject [above].

The other 4 aggregates are collectively the mind. However, its active aggregates are only those of **feeling** (*vedanā*), **perception** (*saññā*), and **formations** (*saṅkhārā*), they last of which we will mention later. Technically, perception occurs first: we connect what we experience to a memory. However, we seem to feel this recalled likeness *as pleasant or as unpleasant* so prominently that it dominates our experience; hence, feeling is psychologically placed first.

It is **formations**—mental formations (they form mental images) or karma-formations (they create karma) —that is the creator or maker. Through memory and karmic habit, formations as the I-maker creates the "I." The mind sees an illusion of an unchanging, central observer behind the experience. The memory of the process is mistaken as an enduring self or agent, the Soul.

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[7] For details on the "fetters," See SD 60.1f (5.3.1.2).

[8] **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

[9] **Me: The nature of conceit,** SD 19.2a.

[10] **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

[11] Exploring the self concept [Psychology.Town]. The concept of the self in Eastern and Western philosophical tradition [Aimiehinor]. 29 June 2026.

[12] Illusion and self-identity [Wilson]. 29 June 2026.

[13] The "conscious" means that the mind is working behind each of these senses.

Through ignorance and craving, formations as mine-maker then project the notion of "mine." The self wants these as "my" pleasure, "my" power, and so on. It rejects the unpleasant or painful as unworthy of being "mine"; hence it is "not mine," which functions as *hatred*.

Formations work as both "I-maker" and "mine-maker." These twin functions of formations are the dynamic 3rd component the Buddha discovered; that is, the creative[14] and appropriative aspects of self, the "mine."[15]

### 2.2 Structure of self-concept

#### 2.2.1 Core components of self-concept

**2.2.1.1** When we ask the question, "**Who am I?**" in a reflective and investigative way, we can actually see at least 3 primary aspects of the answer:[16]

- **self-image**. How I currently see myself, shaped heavily by my personal views, past conditionings and social roles.
- **self-esteem**: How much I value, accept, and like the self that I see of myself. It is an evaluative and emotional component of our identity.
- **ideal self**. The person I ultimately want to be or imagine becoming, or the potential I strive to reach. In terms of the previous 2 aspects, this is likely to be some form of eternal Self or pervasive Soul that experiences eternal joy and so on. This becomes the basis for an external Being, such as God, to legitimize this notion of an abiding self.

**2.2.1.2** Now let us examine what the question, Who am I? really implies. The pronoun **who** has 3 primary senses or usages:[17]

(1) it is used in questions to ask about the name, identity or function of one or more people;
(2) it is used to show which person or people we mean;
(3) it is used to give more information about somebody.

What is asked here seems to assume some kind of "person" or entity whom one knows or is referring to. In fact, we can even say that we are only seeking some personal information for social reasons, for communicating; not for any in-depth reflection or investigation. In short, who assumes a *fixed* idea of a person or being.

Simply put, the question "*Who am I?"* is one that is wrongly asked. When we ask a wrong question, we will get a wrong answer, or we will fail to understand even if the answer is right. For example, we may be told that everything in this world is impermanent. We then rationalize that there is something "out of this world" that is eternal and which we will attain.

**2.2.1.3 How then do we learn to ask the right questions?** When seeking answers of a broader, even universal, nature, we would want to know about the nature of not just human beings, but of both **beings and being** in general; that is, the kinds of sentient beings and the nature of their existence. At least this is the kind of awareness that the suttas inculcate in us: we need to learn to ask the right kind of questions.

The pronoun and determiner **what**—used in questions to ask for particular information about someone or something—is more appropriate in such a broad and important question regarding true reality.

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[14] "Creative" is here used in a negative sense of projecting what is not really there.
[15] Ajahn Amaro, "The I-Making, Mine-Making Mind." *Mindfulness* 12, 2021:1839-1844.
[16] Self-concept [Wiki]. 29 June 2026.
[17] These definitions are based on the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1948, 9th ed, 2015.

**2.2.1.4 What am I?** That is the question.

Firstly, we are sentient beings inhabiting the sense-world; like any sense-world being, we humans are body and mind. Our **body** comprises the 5 sense-faculties: *the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body*. Our **mind** comprises consciousness, memory, feelings, and karma. Through consciousness, the mind experiences the sense-based world, that is, the *external* realities of *sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches*.

The mind experiences these "**bodily** sensations" (or sense-experiences) as *eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness and body-consciousness*. The mind also has its own experiences, that is, as mind-consciousness (or thoughts) and also memory, feelings, and karma.

**2.2.1.5** Simply put, when we are **conscious** of a thought (a mind-object) we recognize it through our memory (**perception**). Whether we recall a pleasant memory or an unpleasant memory, it will shape the respective kind of **feelings** that arise. When we go on to like the pleasant feelings or dislike the unpleasant feelings, we form **karma** which shape our habits and being.

As already explained [2.1.3.4], these are the 5 aggregates that form our whole being: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhārā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Our sense of **self** can arise from our rooting in any of these 5 aggregates. In other words, our self-centred views can be based in form (the body), in feeling, in perception, in formations or in consciousness. [2.1.3.3 f]

We then go on to regard these aggregates as "I" (as subject) [2.2.2.1], as "me" (as object) [2.2.2.2 f], or as "mine" (as projection) [2.2.2.4].

## 2.2.2 When language creates a sense of self

**2.2.2.1 The "I" as subject** refers to how our sense of self is constructed from the functioning of our sense-faculties; when we do things (self as subject). Our sense of being (self as object) comes from our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching (feeling) and thinking. We thus get the following notions: "I see, therefore I am," "I hear, therefore I am," "I smell, therefore I am," "I taste, therefore I am," "I touch [feel], therefore I am," "I think, therefore I am."

Since the moment of birth, our sense of being is further built up when we are with someone else, especially when we interact with others. As we experience others and the environment, our sense of self is constructed and consolidated by what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think.

Our sense of being is being built up even as we speak. We use **verbs** to link our sense of self to an action or a state: "I *am* this," or "I *was* that," or "I *will* be so," and so on. We express ourselves through verbs: "I want this," "I hate that," or "I don't care about it."

**2.2.2.2** We use **nouns** to refer to persons (such as someone we know), things (such as something we like) and experiences (such as feeling pleasure). Nouns create the illusion of fixity and permanence by "naming" dynamic, shifting processes into static, "solid" things or objects. Because human language relies on nouns (eg, "mind," "wealth," "country"), it tricks us into perceiving fluid, changing events as concrete, unchanging entities that exist independently.

Nouns (and words generally) delude us by **freezing time**. An event like "walking" is an active process, but calling it "a walk" projects a mental boundary, treating a process as a thing that can be owned, measured, or controlled.

Nouns create **the "thing" fallacy**. Giving something a name, such as "table" or "rainbow," gives us the false impression that it is a permanent entity. In reality, all these things are made up of constantly moving atoms and shifting sounds. A "table" is simply a flat top with some kind of support. A "rainbow" is not really "there," but depends from where we are looking.

Psychologically, nouns give us **a false sense of mastery** by pinning a complex, ongoing concept down to a single word or words. Finishing an AI or programming tutorial, for example, can trick us into thinking we have some kind of control over people and things. We feel we have acquired a definitive, tangible object, even though true mastery actually requires continuous, active use of verbs.

**2.2.2.3 Language**—the linguistic phenomenon—often shapes our daily lives.

The way we speak about our feelings and emotions significantly shapes the kind of person we are. For example, saying, "I am hurt," or "I have a desire," or "I want to be wealthy," we treat these thoughts as foreign objects inside us. This creates the delusion that the *hurt* is permanent rather than a temporary emotional state that arose from experiencing a certain event or from thinking about something. When we let go of those thoughts, the hurt too goes away.

Similarly, when we think we want something or want to do something, we should consider whether it is real or mere fancy. Or when we want to be wealthy, we should consider how we act to properly gain wealth; we should also examine what is meant by wealth, and what we really want in life that is more vital, such as happiness.

Then, there is the way that we imagine how things work; such as "**business**." When we call a massive web of human interactions and transactions a "business" or "economy," it creates the illusion that it is an uncontrollable, physical machine rather than a dynamic process of people simply exchanging services.

Buddhism teaches us that this is actually the experience of **language** (*nirutti*) and the fact that we are conscious (we have a mind). We should not confuse "objects"—the words and sounds—as abiding entities. What we experience when we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think is not a thing that is always "there." The word or sound is gone but the mind retains that re-presentation of the past. We are dealing with memory-constructed images or reflections of a similar past experience; they arise and pass away dependent on causes and effects. When we carefully examine this conditionality, we will better understand how our mind works, and how we should deal with the situation.[18]

### 2.2.3 The triad of selves is rooted in grasping

**2.2.3.1 The "me" as object** refers to the sense of self when we are the recipient of an action. "I see the sunset." "I hear music." "I smell vanilla." "I taste honey." "I feel warm." "I have an idea." What is really happening is a rapid, seamless sequence of biological and psychological processing. Our **eye**, for example, **sees** the sunset; we notice it (**attention**). So there is **contact** (sense-stimulus); we recall something similar (**perception**); we feel a delightful peace (**feeling**); we like it (**karma-formation**). The object becomes a thought or concept to which we continue to react over time; it becomes a habit, good or bad.

A similar process occurs with each and every other sense-experience or thinking.

These are all momentary experiences, but we tend to have memories of them, which makes them seem to last or, when they are pleasant, we *want* them to last. Or, when they are perceived as unpleasant—they still last—but we wish that they would *not* or we try to forget them.

Or, we have no idea what the experience is. For example, we hear a teaching on nonself and simply could not understand or accept it because we are so used to the idea of an abiding entity or external

[18] Related readings: S **Pinker**, *How The Mind Works,* Penguin, 1997; some of the mind's poorly understood functions and quirks explained in evolutionary terms. G **Lakoff** & M Johnson, *The Metaphors We Live By,* Chicago, 1980; how everyday unconscious language shapes our time, love and discourse. G **Deutscher**, *Through the Language Glass,* NY, 2010; our language shapes our perception of colours, direction and time. B L **Whorf**, *Language, Thought, and Reality,* MIT, 1956, 2nd ed 2012; how language conditions us in local and cultural ways.

agency that succours us. So we ignore it; we thus remain ignorant: we go on to seek "something" that we are so used to imagining about, or "something else" when that imagination fails.

**2.2.3.2** It becomes interesting and often insightful when the object becomes the subject, or the subject becomes the object. A good example of this is when we become aware of ourself—a reflexive awareness—such as when we look into a mirror or hear a recording of our speech. When we experience this, it triggers a meta-cognitive loop. Instead of just living through a moment, we observe our own mental processes, emotions, or bodily sensations in real-time.

Depending on how this awareness is directed, it can lead to two very different outcomes:

**(1) Unbeneficial: Overthinking and paralysis**

If our reflexivity shifts from objective observation to harsh judgment or endless replaying of events, it can become problematic. Unbeneficial examples of such behaviour are:

- **rumination**. We obsessively analyze past mistakes or worry about the future, which can lead to psychological distress.
- **analysis fixation**. By constantly monitoring our feelings and scrutinizing every possible choice, it can become incredibly difficult to make decisions or act in the present.
- **emotional detachment**. We may become so focused on observing our feelings that we fail to actually experience and live through them.

One good way to neutralize cases of overthinking (if you think this is the case) is to *smile* at it, and reflect, "This is just a thought"; or "What shall I do about this?" Just keep smiling at it (with lovingkindness) and you will notice a positive difference in that process.

**(2) Beneficial: Self-growth and mental clarity**

When applied objectively, reflexivity becomes a tool for growth. We gain deep, grounded insight into our thoughts, motivations, biases, and emotional triggers. Self growth and mental clarity are thus enhanced by:

- **mindful choices**. We stop operating on autopilot, allowing our actions to align with our core values.
- **regulation**. We can recognize a negative reaction building and intentionally de-escalate or prevent it.
- **connection**. Reflexivity builds self-compassion and improves how we relate to others.

**2.2.3.3 The "mind" as projection** is a concept that explores how our perceptions and thoughts can be influenced by our own internal experiences. This idea is often discussed in the context of psychological defence mechanisms[19] and the mind's tendency to attribute its own thoughts and feelings to external sources or to others.

Some problematic situations that such a projection can incur include the following:

**(1) Mental projection fallacy.** This is when we believe that our experiences are inherent properties of "something" (including a thought) rather than being related to personal perception. It can lead to the assumptions that others share the same perception or that they are irrational or misinformed if they do not. For example, someone imagines that all that exists is "something"; then he asks, "Why is there *something* rather than nothing?" Surely then a God must have created this *something*. Therefore, he concludes, God exists!

[19] **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14) + SD 7.9; SD 24.10b (2).

**(2) Psychological projection fallacy**. Psychologically, projection is the mental process by which we attribute our own thoughts, beliefs, emotions, experiences and personality traits to another person or group. This is often a defence mechanism used to justify prejudice or evade personal responsibility. For example, we hate someone or some group so much that we claim that that person or group is violently hateful; a common scenario in religious history.

**(3) Behavioural projection**. Sigmund Freud[20] (1856-1939) introduced the concept of projection in psychology, where individuals attribute their own undesirable thoughts, feelings, or motives to another person. This can be a defence mechanism to cope with anxiety and internal conflicts.

**(4) Language projection fallacy**. This fallacy occurs when someone expects an overly direct resemblance between the intuitive language of the mind and the language of physical reality. It can lead to misconceptions about the nature of reality.

A classic example of this fallacy is assuming that uncertainty is a physical property of an object rather than a limitation of our own knowledge. Suppose we flip a coin, slap it against our wrist, and hide it before peeking. We may state that there is exactly ½ or 50% chance the coin is heads. However, the coin itself is already resting solidly on one side; it is clearly heads or tails. The 50% probability does not exist as a physical property within the coin. It is purely a projection of our *mental state*—an internal measure of our own ignorance or lack of facts. By treating a ½ chance as a real feature of the physical coin, we commit a mind projection fallacy.[21]

This fallacy can apply in other areas as well (perhaps, of less philosophical significance), such as projecting the subjective idea of beauty onto a sunset, or tastiness onto chocolate, assuming those qualities belong to the physical world rather than to human perception.[22]

These concepts illustrate the complex relationship between our minds and our perceptions, highlighting the importance of understanding our own thoughts and feelings before attributing them to others.

### 2.3 PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SELF

#### 2.3.0 Three key ideas

The nature of the self has been debated upon for centuries since the Buddha's time. Numerous theories and speculations about the self have been proposed [2.1.1.2]. Essentially, there are 3 key ideas or interpretations of the self, which are as follows:

- **Continuity of memory**. Thinkers like the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) argued that our identity over time is anchored by our memories, linking our past experiences to our present self.[23] [2.3.1]

[20] Freud first introduced the concept of psychological projection in his 1894 paper, *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence*. He later developed the idea as a formal defence mechanism primarily in his 1911 paper, *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, and in his 1895 letters to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess. This concept was elaborated by his daughter, Anna Freud, in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936). Freud's work on projection became a cornerstone in psychoanalytic theory.

[21] "Mind projection fallacy" is a term coined by physicist and Bayesian philosopher E T Jaynes (1922-1998). It highlights our tendency to confuse the "map" (our mind's model of reality) with the "territory" (reality itself).

[22] See C Taliaferro, "Mind projection," in R Arp et al, *Bad Arguments,* Wiley Blackwell, 2018:369 f.

[23] Memory can define individual beliefs and identity—and shape society [Madan]. 29 June 2026.

- **The social self.** Many contemporary sociologists and psychologists argue that the self is an ongoing, lifelong process strongly influenced by culture, society, and our relationships with others.[24] [2.3.2]
- **"Nonself" (*anattā*)**. In early Buddhism, the self is not considered a permanent or solid entity. It is seen as a fluid, ever-changing aggregate of physical and mental processes that the mind mistakenly projects.[25] [2.3.3]

## 2.3.1 Memory

**2.3.1.1 Memory** is both useful and vital for life; it is "useful" because it helps us to connect with experiences through the causes and effects of our actions and those of others as we navigate our daily lives. Memory is vital for life as it shapes our identity, powers our ability to learn, keeps us safe, and connects us with the people around us.

Memory is a dynamic, constructive process. Our brain encodes sensory inputs, consolidates them into neural networks, and retrieves them through cues like emotions and smells. In fact, we can potentially remember whatever we sense (see, hear, smell, taste or touch) or think. The cue for such a memory is a sense-experience or thought connected with that past event.

It is the foundation of nearly everything we do, from recognizing our own face in the mirror to deciding what to eat for dinner. Memory influences every aspect of life, from daily tasks and education to careers, relationships, and emotional well-being. It is a cornerstone of intelligence, self-awareness, social connection, and success. Memory allows us to learn, grow, love, laugh and live.

**2.3.1.2** Memory is itself neither a still photo nor a fixed video recording, but a dynamic evolving constructive process of *learning, knowing and processing*. Our memories change over time, losing some details, and new details, often more dramatic, get added, depending on our current mental state or drives, or the current situation we are in. Often what we do remember not only changes, we may feel differently about what we recall. We do, however, remember, almost effortlessly, certain lessons, like those on the alphabet. So, we spell words, use them in sentences and communicate with others, record our thoughts or simply listen to ourselves. Once we have communicated, we move on; we continue to experience the world and know ourselves better.[26]

## 2.3.2 The social self

**2.3.2.0** We will here examine how the notion of **self** is commonly held and is projected in our interaction with others, or how we present ourselves to the society around us. While the personal sense of self is only known to ourselves or affects us *personally*, the **social self** is what we try to project publicly or to *others* for various reasons.

**The social self** is the aspect of a person's identity shaped by interactions, relationships, and social contexts, influencing how we perceive ourselves, how others perceive us, and how we behave around others. It encompasses how we see ourselves in relation to family, friends, colleagues, and society at large, and includes the roles we play, social norms we follow, and expectations we hold for ourselves and others.

The social self develops primarily through interactions with others and the social situations we encounter. Our self-concept and self-esteem are shaped by social comparison, where we evaluate our

[24] The social self [opentextbc.ca]. 29 June 2026.

[25] **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2 (2); **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16; **Self and selves**, SD 26.9.

[26] Memory [Cleveland]. How memory works [Youtube]. How are memories stored in your brain? [Youtube]. 30 June 2026.

abilities, opinions, and social status relative to others. Philosophers and sociologists, such as George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley, emphasized that our sense of self emerges from role-taking and the "looking-glass self," where we imagine how others perceive us and adjust our behavior accordingly.

**A healthy social self** contributes to healthy relationships, empathy, effective communication, and self-confidence. It enhances mental well-being, social competence, and the ability to pursue life goals. For instance, individuals with a positive social self are more likely to initiate relationships, set boundaries, and navigate social challenges successfully. Conversely, a fragile social self can lead to insecurity, social anxiety, or difficulty forming meaningful connections.

Psychologists often describe the social self in 3 ways:[27]

**(1) Identity influenced by social interactions**, for example, identifying as a member of a community or as a fan of a sports team, which affects social behaviour and relationships. [2.3.2.1]

**(2) Characteristic social behavior**, such as being outgoing or reserved, which can vary depending on the social context. [2.3.2.2]

**(3) Social façade**, the persona we present to others, which may differ from our private self, like hiding anxiety or animosity in social settings. [2.3.2.3]

#### 2.3.2.1 Identity influenced by social interactions

Identity shaped by social interactions is best explained by Social Identity Theory,[28] which states that a person's sense of who they are depends on the group they belong to. By identifying with a community or a sports team,[29] a person integrates group traits into their self-concept, which dictate how they behave and build relationships.

This personal dynamic functions through 4 core psychological and behavioural mechanisms:

**(1) In-group favouritism and out-group differentiation**

When we adopt a social identity (eg, a supporter of a local sports club or a member of a religious community), we see ourself as an "in-group" member. We naturally develop positive biases toward our members, and creating boundaries against the "out-group." This builds instant camaraderie with strangers who share our identity, while breeding rivalries or suspicion toward competitors.[30]

**(2) Normative social influence and behaviour**

To keep membership and feel accepted, people conform to the spoken and unspoken norms of their reference groups, namely:[31]

- shared values. Community members adopt the language, habits, and political or moral stances of their group;
- synchronized action. Sports fans often adopt shared rituals, chants, and wear team jerseys on match days to publicly identify with the collective.

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[27] Suggested readings: A D Barnhart, "Erving **Goffman**. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,*" 1959 [Barnhart]. A L **Strauss**, *Mirrors and Maska: The search for identity,* London, 1969, 1997. R **Jenkins**, *Social Identity,* Routledge, 2008. **Capozza** & Brown (eds), *Social Identity Processes,* Sage, 2000.

[28] The Social Identity Theory is a psychological framework stating that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from the social groups they belong to. Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, the theory explains how group memberships drive "us vs them" mentalities, in-group favoritism, and intergroup bias. [Wiki] 12 July 2026.

[29] The formation mechanism of "sports fandom circle" in the digital media era [PLOSOne]. 30 June 2026.

[30] A social identity approach to understanding and promoting physical activity [pmc]. 30 June 2026.

[31] Social identity theory [Madeson]. 30 June 2026.

**(3) Impact on relationships and social ties**

Our social identity dictates whom we interact with. This identity actively seeks out relationships with similar others (a concept known as homophily). Shared identities create *collective ties*—bonds based not just on personal chemistry, but on unified values, goals, and a shared history (eg, cheering for the same national team).[32]

**(4) Self-esteem and emotional stakes**

Identifying with a group intrinsically ties our self-esteem to the group's success. Psychologists observe 2 common reactions based on group performance:

- BIRGing (Basking in Reflected Glory): Publicly associating with a victorious team or a successful community to boost personal pride.
- CORFing (Cutting Off Reflected Failure): Distancing oneself from the group when it fails to protect one's self-image.[33]

### 2.3.2.2 Characteristic social behaviour

Characteristic social behaviour refers to the typical, predictable ways that members of the same species interact, react, and communicate with one another. In humans, it is shaped by a complex mix of biological drives, psychological personality, and societal norms.[34]

Core characteristics of social behaviour are defined by several unifying elements such as:

- **interaction and communication**. This fundamentally consists of verbal and non-verbal exchanges. It enables individuals to share feelings, coordinate efforts, and transmit culture.[35]
- **adherence to social norms**. Unwritten rules and collective expectations dictate acceptable conduct within various situations and communities.[36]
- **adaptability**. Human social behaviour is highly flexible, allowing us to navigate everything from intimate family dynamics to coordinating within massive, fast-paced societies.
- **prosocial actions vs competition**. Social behaviours exist on a spectrum that includes cooperation, altruism (helping others), and parental care, alongside competition, dominance, and territoriality.

Because they are both an evolutionary mechanism and a learned skill, an individual's characteristic social behaviours directly influence their psychological well-being and societal integration.[37]

### 2.3.2.3 Social façade

A social facade is a carefully, sometimes involuntary, constructed outward persona or "mask" that individuals wear to negotiate social situations, conform to cultural expectations, or protect themselves from judgement. It involves presenting an idealized, socially acceptable version of oneself while hiding true thoughts, emotions, or vulnerabilities.

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[32] Social identity bias and communication network clustering interact to shape patterns of opinion dynamics [RoyalSoc]. 30 June 2026.

[33] Why do we say "We"? Basically (1) psychological distance: it helps us to be objective; (2) internal teamwork: a self dialogue that helps resolve problems; (3) task motivation: helps to start or finish a challenging task; (4) social and cultural framing: a communal perspective from teamwork, teaching and parenting.

[34] Social behaviour [Wiki]. Human behaviour in a social environment [SharmaGupta]. 1 July 2026.

[35] Social behaviour [APA]. 1 July 2026.

[36] What is social behaviour? [focuskeeper]. What determines social behaviour? [fnhm]. 1 July 2026.

[37] Social interaction and prosocial behaviour through the lens of social psychology [Dirgha et al]. 1 July 2026.

While a degree of social adaptation is normal, understanding the different types and contexts of a social facade is highly valuable and helpful in understanding and improving social interactivity. These include:[38]

- **public mask/courtesy**. Basic, everyday courtesies (like saying "hello" or "thank you" or just smiling) used with strangers to ensure smooth, civil, and neutral public interactions.
- **sympathy mask**. Behaviour designed to project warmth, empathy, and interest to make a positive impression, invite wholesome response and open up opportunities.
- **facades of conformity**. Particularly common in the workplace, where employees may hide private values, cultural beliefs, or personal difficulties (eg, family responsibilities) to avoid stereotypes and fit into the dominant corporate culture.

**Why do people put up a facade?** According to broad psychological and sociological consensus, maintaining a social facade serves several key functions:

- **self-preservation**. It protects one from the vulnerability of rejection, disapproval, or social friction.
- **anxiety management**. Wearing a structured persona can help someone with neurodivergent traits or social anxiety manage interactions.
- **social harmony**. It ensures that one's behaviour remains within acceptable societal norms, preventing awkwardness or conflict.

**Negative effects**. While occasionally necessary, constantly maintaining a social facade can be exhausting and isolating. It often disconnects a person from their genuine self, as they may feel that people only like their "mask" rather than who they truly are. In the digital age, this is highly prevalent on platforms where users curate perfect, exciting lives that do not reflect their everyday realities.

**2.3.2.4** In essence, the social self is a dynamic and relational aspect of identity, reflecting how we perceive ourselves through the lens of social interactions. It highlights that our sense of self is not formed in isolation but is continuously shaped by the people and social environments around us. Understanding the social self is crucial for healthy personal development and wholesome social engagement, since identity, behaviour, and social relationships are closely interconnected.

### 2.3.3 No self, no-self, not self, non-self or nonself

**2.3.3.1** Since I have briefly explained elsewhere[39] why I came to choose the English spelling **nonself** as the translation of ***anattā***, I shall here only add some comments as necessary. Firstly, it is possible to translate noun or adjective, *anattā*—technically, the abstract noun is ***anattatā***—as "nonselfhood," "nonselfness" or simply "nonself."

**Nonselfhood** as a rendition of *anattā* would refer to it as a state, like buddhahood (*buddhatta*)[40] or arhathood (*arahatta*); that is, it refers to *anattā* as a *state* of total lack of self.

**Nonselfness** would then refer to the activity that is related to *anattā.* If nonselfhood is what *anattā is,* then nonselfness is what it *does.* These 2 renditions look somewhat awkward and contrived, but may prove useful in some involved modern discussion on *anatta.*

[38] It's difficult to breathe behind a façade [delve]. 1st July 2026.
[39] See SD 2.16 (1.2).
[40] More often, the term for buddhahood is *bodhi,* "awakening."

Other more cogent English renditions of *anattā* include "**no self**" [2.3.3.2], "**not self**" [2.3.3.3], "**non-self**' [2.3.3.4], and "**nonself**" [2.3.3.5]. I shall discuss each of these renditions in turn, and finally conclude by explaining my preference for the last one.

**2.3.3.2** The renditions **no self** or **no-self** (with the hyphen) are clearly negative terms: they negate the existence of the self. This is not totally true since the conventional self or the grammatical self-referents "I" (*ahaṁ*), "me" (*maṁ*), and "mine" (*mama*) are frequently used in the suttas. What the Buddha rejects is the notion of an abiding self, such as the Vedic *ātman*.

The Vedic notion of "Self or Soul" is rejected simply because there is no such abiding entity. Secondly, the notion of such an abiding entity entails the existence of its Creator or Source from which it emanates, that is, the Brahman, the Cosmic Soul, which is also rejected by the Buddha. Such an idea also has a fatalist or determinist undertone; since we are this Soul (Skt *tat tvam asi*)[41] we need not make much effort for liberation except to have faith in Brahman and perform the proper rituals of the brahmins so that we "return" or are absorbed back into it.

The term "**no self**" or "**no soul**"—also "no-self" or "no-soul"—too, sounds like a drastic quantum leap for Soul-believers to make, especially when they lack grounding in the formative and supportive teachings to prepare them to eventually see that the Self or Soul is naturally non-existent and thus unnecessary for life or for salvation.

We need a friendlier and less traumatic term for those who are conditioned by the notion of an abiding entity or Cosmic Soul to be able to completely give up such a false view.

**2.3.3.3** The term "**not self**" or "**not-self**" is similarly problematic since it actually implies that there *is* an abiding self and that the Buddhist idea is *not* one. A cunning theological casuist may use just such an argument to distract and confuse even an "open-minded" tolerant Buddhist.[42] A related pair of English terms for *anatta* is "**no self**" or "**no-self**"; but these pair of terms similarly deny the self—which implies **annihilationism** (*uccheda,diṭṭhi*).

**The (Vaccha,gotta) Ānanda Sutta** (S 44.10) records the wanderer Vaccha,gotta asking the Buddha whether there *is* a soul or *no* soul. To both these questions, the Buddha simply remains silent. After the wanderer Vaccha,gotta has left, when Ānanda asks the Buddha why he does not answer both these questions, the Buddha's reply us instructive:

> **5** "If I, Ānanda, when asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' were to answer, 'There is a self,' this would be siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are **eternalists** [who believe that the self or soul survive death].[43]
>
> **6** And if I, Ānanda, when asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there no self?' were to answer, 'There is no self,' this would be siding with those ascetics and brahmins who are **annihilationists** [who believe that there is no afterlife].[44]
>
> **7** If I, Ānanda, when asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there a self?' were to answer, 'There is a self,' would my (reply) be conducive to the arising of the knowledge[45] that '**all things are nonself**'?"
>
> "Certainly not, bhante!"

[41] SD 65.2 (3.2.1.2).

[42] See SD 2.16 (1.2.1).

[43] On the eternalist view, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,9.12), SD 1.1; SD 19.3 (2.2).

[44] On the annihilationist view, see **(Vaccha,gotta) Ānanda S** (S 44.10,6), SD 2.16(5); SD 40a.1 (7.2.2.2).

[45] "Would my reply be conducive to the arising of the knowledge ... " *api nu me taṁ anulomaṁ abhavissa ñāṇassa upādāya ...* . See S:B 1456 n384.

> **8** "If I, Ānanda, when asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta, 'Is there no self?' were to answer, 'There is no self,' the wanderer, already confused, would become even more confused, thinking, 'It seems that formerly I had a self but now it does not exist!'"
>
> (S 44.1/4:400 f), SD 2.16

Here, the Buddha explains to Ānanda that to accept "a self" is to fall into an **eternalist** view, and to reject that there is "no self" is to side with the **annihilationist**. Moreover, for those who have long and dearly held to the idea of a Self or Soul, it is difficult, even traumatic, for them to even consider its non-existence. Hence, the Buddha rejects all notions and discussions on such a self as being unhelpful and unrelated to the spiritual goal.[46]

Essentially then we can say that the Buddha's teaching has nothing to do with the self or self-notion.

**2.3.3.4** It's interesting how a tiny mark, the hyphen, actually can enhance or change the meanings of the hyphenated compound in at least 3 ways:

(1) the hyphen combines the senses of the 2 words hyphenated; thus non-self here means "something that is not" and "the self";
(2) the hyphen incrementally combines the senses of the components of the compound; thus, "it is not" and "it is the self";
(3) the hyphen combines the 2 components to form a single unit of meaning; thus, "that which is not self."

What is even more fascinating is that we have a 4th situation, that is, we take the 2 components of the compound literally as "that which is non-self."

In this connection, we also have the word non-ego, "all that is not the ego or conscious self; the object as opposed to the subject" (OED). However, we can also read this word as meaning "the absence of an ego," depending on the context. In such an open situation, it is wise for us to state the sense of the word as we use it.[47]

**2.3.3.5** Although "nonself" is neither officially listed as a header or lemma in the 2nd edition of the Oxford English Dictionary nor in its list of new words (March 2023), we do have a quotation of its usage in the OED, thus:[48]

"**1949** Koestler *Insight & Outlook* viii, 120, 'Our understanding of other personalities, of the nonself by the self'."[49]

Koestler, in his seminal work writes regarding the formation of "the boundaries of the self" that "Even Freud … admits that they might be the very clue to 'our understanding of other personalities, of the non-self by the self.'" (1949:120).

**Nonself** is thus the opposite of the self; it is *not* the self, the absence of the self. Early Buddhism applies the term *anattā* to all our experiences. All our experiences have really nothing to do with the "self." The Buddha goes on to explain how our various experiences—whether of the body, of feelings, of

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[46] S 44.10/4:140 f @ SD 2.16(5). Cf **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,7-14/1:484-486), SD 6.15.

[47] For numerous other possible senses of "non-" as a prefix, see OED entries for examples.

[48] OED 2nd ed: "**non-**" 2a "Prefixed to agent-nouns and designations of persons and objects." (Vol 10, 1989:477).

[49] *Insight and Outlook* is a major philosophical work by Hungarian-British author Arthur Koestler (1905-1983). It is a sweeping inquiry into the common foundations of science, art, and social ethics, famously recognized as the first step in his "trilogy of the human mind." 2 July 2026.

perception, of formations, or of consciousness—have nothing to do with the "self." Our experiences, no matter how personal, should be understood from the principle of *anattā,* "nonself."

By the phrase "**should be understood from the principle of *anattā***" means the unawakened person tends to think in terms of the self. In doing so, one does not see what the experience really is; one does not see true reality; one lives a false life that brings suffering. When this principle of **nonself** is understood and applied, one then goes on to see things as they really are: as impermanent, suffering and nonself. One will then be able in due course to see the path of awakening.[50]

## 3 Views: imperfect and perfect

### 3.1 THE IMPERFECT VIEW

From all this, we can say that, in seeing things as they are, we fully and deeply connect with true reality; when we do this, we are transformed by that experience. Even if we do not break through into the path, such an experience is said to be "accomplished view" or "perfect vision" (*sampanna,diṭṭhi*). When we fail to do this—we live in the past or in the future, we exist "out of time"—we do not see true reality; this is "unaccomplished view" or "imperfect vision" (*vipanna,diṭṭhi*).

**The imperfect view** is that of seeing what is not there—it is the past or not yet happened—and we try to identify with that mental construction, thus: "This is mine," "This I am," "This is my self."

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • "This is mine" | *etam mama* | is rooted in **craving**, and | it feeds craving. |
| • "This I am" | *eso'ham asmi* | is rooted in **conceit**, and | it feeds conceit. |
| • "This is my self" | *eso me attā* | is rooted in **self view**, and | it feeds self view. |

These are together known as "the 3 graspings" (*ti,vidha gāha*).[51] Right view thus functions as a form of non-attachment. (Pm 1:160)

### 3.2 THE PERFECT VISION

The accomplished or **perfect vision** is thus:[52]

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "This is not mine" | *n'etam mama* | **wrong view** | *micchā,diṭṭhi* | is abandoned. |
| • "This I am not" | *n'eso'ham asmi* | **identity view** | *sakkāya,diṭṭhi* | is abandoned. |
| • "This is not my self" | *n'eso me attā* | **self view** | *attânudiṭṭhi* | is abandoned. |

We should here recall the 3 seminal Suttas—**S 35.164-166**—that we first studied in this series on selections from **the Nandi-k,khaya Vagga** (S 35). These 3 Suttas state that (1) the 6 faculties, (2) its object, (3) its contact and (4) the feeling arising from the contact as the basic template. **These 4 aspects** of their cognitive process differ only with each sutta referring to one of the 3 universal characteristics—as impermanent, as suffering, and as nonself, thus:

[50] On "nonself" as the preferred tr: SD 2.16 (1.2); "no-soul," SD 2.16 (1.1). See **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2 (2); **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16; **Self and selves**, SD 26.9.

[51] See **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; and **Mine: The nature of craving** SD 19.3.

[52] For the application of these 3 reflections to the 5 aggregates, see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16), SD 1.2.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • **Micchā,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** | S 35.164 | they are *impermanent*— | "wrong view is abandoned"; |
| • **Sakkāya,diṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** | S 35.165 | they are *suffering*— | "identity view is abandoned"; |
| • **Attânudiṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta** | S 35.166 | they are *nonself*— | "self view is abandoned." |

(SD 65.6-8)

— — —

# Attā'nudiṭṭhi-p,pahāna Sutta

## The Discourse on Abandoning Self View

S 35.166

**[148]**

**1** Thus have I heard. [At one time … ]

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

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

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

**4** "Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the eye** as **nonself**, *self-view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **forms** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **eye-consciousness** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **eye-contact** as nonself, *self-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 nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

**5** Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the ear** as **nonself**, *self-view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **sounds** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **ear-consciousness** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **ear-contact** as nonself, *self-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 nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

**6** Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the nose** as **nonself**, *self-view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **smells** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **nose-consciousness** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **nose-contact** as nonself, *self-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 nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

**7** Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the tongue** as **nonself**, *self-view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **tastes** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **tongue-consciousness** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

When one knows and sees **tongue-contact** as nonself, *self-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 nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

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

**9** Bhikshu, when one knows and sees **the mind** as **nonself**, *self-view* is abandoned.
When one knows and sees **thoughts** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **mind-consciousness** as nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*
When one knows and sees **mind-contact** as nonself, *self-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 nonself, *self-view is abandoned.*

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

—evaṁ—

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