

1 **Anatta/Anatman****The Buddhist Teaching of Not Self**

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2 **The Buddhist Teaching of Not Self (*anatta*)**

- 2 ways of understanding
 - Philosophical—what exist or doesn't exist
 - Psychological—the process that comes into play re: suffering—THIS is most important for Buddhist practice
- Unfortunately, the philosophical understanding gets the most attention in basic introductions to Buddhism

"Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of a Soul, Self, or Ātman."

(Walpola Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*)

WHY?

3 **The Doctrine of Not Self (*anatta*)**

- Historical Context—Early Indian Religion
- *Ātman* and *Brahman*
- *Ātman* = *essence, breath, self*; "real self" of the individual; innermost essence or soul
- *Brahman* = Universal Principle, Ultimate Reality, Cosmic Principle
 - "That truly whence all beings were born; that by which they live once born; and that into which upon deceasing they enter. Be desirous of that o pupil. That is Brahman." (*Taittiriya Upanishad*)
- *Moksha* = Freedom/liberation from *Samsara*
- Core of the Hindu ascetic ideal

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4 **2nd Noble Truth: Arising/Origin of Suffering**

"And this is the noble truth of the arising of suffering. It arises from desire (*tr̥ṣṇā*), which leads to rebirth, which brings along pleasure and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the desire for sensual pleasure, the desire for continued existence, the desire for non-existence/existence to end."

NOTE: Skt. *tr̥ṣṇā*/Pali. *taṇhā* = craving/unwholesome desires

tr̥ṣṇā/taṇhā → attachment → suffering

5 **Four Kinds of Attachment**

1. Attachment to objects of sense desires
2. Attachment to views
3. Attachment to precepts and vows (i.e., rules)
4. Attachment to "self" (*atman*)

6 **Arising/Origin of Suffering**

- Two fundamental problems of attachment
 - Nature of the world (impermanence)
 - Nature of the self
- Doctrine of Not-self: (*anātman; anattā*)

- *Skandhas* = aggregates, heaps, groupings
- Psycho-physical constituents of personhood
- Include: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations [volitions], consciousness

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 - Include: form, sensation, feeling, mental formations [volitions], consciousness
- Where is an eternal, unchanging, self-existing “self”?

9 **Buddhist Teacher Joseph Goldstein on “Selflessness” (9 min.)**

10 **The Problem of “Selfing” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)**

“I,” “me,” and “mine” are products of our thinking. [I’ll call it] “selfing,” that inevitable and incorrigible tendency to construct out of almost everything and every situation an “I,” a “me,” and a “mine,” and then to operate in the world from that limited perspective which is mostly fantasy and defense. Hardly a moment passes that this doesn’t happen, but it is so much a part of the fabric of our world that it goes completely unnoticed, much as the proverbial fish has no knowledge of water, so thoroughly is it immersed in it. You can see this for yourself easily enough whether you are meditating in silence or just living a five-minute segment of your life. Out of virtually any and every moment and experience, our thinking mind constructs “my” moment, “my” experience, “my” child, “my” hunger, “my” desire, “my” opinion, “my” way, “my” authority, “my” future, “my” knowledge, “my” body, “my” mind, “my” house, “my” land, “my” idea, “my” feelings, “my” car, “my” problem.

Source: Kabat-Zinn, John. *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion Books, 1994.

11 **The Problem of “Selfing” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)**

“If you observe this process of selfing with sustained attention and inquiry, you will see that what we call “the self” is really a construct of our own mind, and hardly a permanent one, either.”

“When you inquire in this way as deeply as you can follow the thread into who you are or what you are, you are almost sure to find that there is no solid place to land.”

“Then there is the problem of outside forces. The ‘I’ tends to feel good when outside circumstances

are supporting its belief in its own goodness, and bad when it runs into criticism, difficulties, and what it perceives as obstacles and defeats. Here perhaps lies a major explanation for diminished self-esteem in many people. We aren't really familiar with this constructed aspect of our identity process. This makes it easy for us to lose our balance and feel vulnerable and inconsequential when we are not propped up and reinforced in our need for approval or for feeling important."

12 **The Problem of "Selfing" (Jon Kabat-Zinn)**

"No-self does not mean being a nobody. What it means is that everything is interdependent and that there is no isolated, independent core "you." You are only you in relationship to all other forces and events in the world—including your parents, your childhood, your thoughts and feelings, outside events, time, and so on."

"Awareness itself can help balance out the selfing and reduce its impact. ... The elusive nature of a concrete, permanent, unchanging self is quite a hopeful observation. It means that you can stop taking yourself so damn seriously and get out from under the pressures of having the details of your personal life be central to the operating of the universe. "

13 **Thanisarro Bhikku on Not-Self**

"There is no self" is the granddaddy of fake Buddhist quotes. It has survived so long because of its superficial resemblance to the teaching on *anatta*, or not-self, which was one of the Buddha's tools for putting an end to clinging. Even though he neither affirmed nor denied the existence of a self, he did talk of the process by which the mind creates many senses of self—what he called "I-making" and "my-making"—as it pursues its desires.

In other words, [the Buddha] focused on the karma of selfing. Because clinging lies at the heart of suffering, and because there's clinging in each sense of self, he advised using the perception of not-self as a strategy to dismantle that clinging. Whenever you see yourself identifying with anything stressful and inconstant, you remind yourself that it's not-self: not worth clinging to, not worth calling your self. This helps you let go of it. When you do this thoroughly enough, it can lead to awakening. In this way, the not-self teaching is an answer—not to the question of whether there's a self, but to the question that the Buddha said lies at the heart of discernment: "What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?" You find true happiness by letting go.

14 **Vacchagotta the Wanderer—Is there a Self?**

Vacchagotta asks the Buddha, "Is there a self?". The Buddha is silent. "Then there is no-self?" Again, the Buddha remains silent. Vacchagotta got up and left.

"Ananda, if I — being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self — were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those brahmans & contemplatives who are exponents of eternalism [the view that there is an eternal, unchanging soul]. If I — being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self — were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those brahmans & contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationism [the view that death is the annihilation of consciousness]. If I — being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self — were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?"

"No, lord."

"And if I — being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self — were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: 'Does the self I used to have now not exist?'"

15 **"There is no-self"****Why the Granddaddy of Fake Buddhist Quotes?**

- The debate culture of early India
- Buddha warned followers not to participate (couldn't refuse to answer useless questions)
- Later generations forgot the warning
- Popular literary works the *Buddhacharita* and *Malinda Panha* (1st century CE) expound at length on "no-self"
- And here we are.... "Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of a Soul, Self, or Ātman" (Rahula).
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