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Attā'nudiṭṭhi Sutta

The Discourse on Self-views | S 22.155 [Be S 22.156]

Theme: Self-view is the grasping of conceit

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2016; 2018

1 Sutta summary and significance

SD 53.13 comprises two related Suttas—the **Attā'nudiṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta** (S 35.166) and the **Attā'nudiṭṭhi Sutta** (S 22.155). While the former defines **self-view**, the latter shows us how to overcome it.

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 Attānudiṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (S 35.166) instructs on **the nature of self-view**, that is, holding the view of some kind of “self” (*attā*) or essence that is permanent, eternal, some divine essence or immortal soul. We tend to see or look for such an “entity” in 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**. None of these, singly, as a set, or as a whole, or outside of them, have such an essence or entity.

1.1.2 The Attānudiṭṭhi Sutta (S 22.155) instructs on **how to abandon self-view**, that is, to see *impermanence, suffering and non-self in all existence*—hence, it is all without any abiding self or essence. The Sutta teaching opens by saying that self-view arises on account of our **clinging** to any of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness).¹

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.

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*. Nothing in this world is ours—the 5 aggregates are all there is that is the world.² When we understand and accept this, we go on to awaken to liberation.

¹ On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

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

2 Attānudiṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (S 35.166)**SD 53.13(2)****Attā'nudiṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta**The Discourse on the Abandoning of Self-views | **S 35.166** [S:B 35.167]Trad.: **S 4.1.4.1.12** Saṃyutta 4, Saḷāyatana Vg 1, Saḷāyatana Saṃy 4, Catuttha Pṇsk 1, Nandikkhaya Vg 12

Theme: The 6 senses are non-self

- 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 “Bhante, how should one know, how should one see, so that **self-view**³ is abandoned?”⁴

(1) THE EYE IS NON-SELF

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 3 “Bhikshus, | the eye | |
| when one knows, one sees that | is <u>non-self</u> , ⁵ then, | <u>self-view</u> is abandoned. |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | forms | |
| | are non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | eye-consciousness | |
| | is non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | eye-contact | |
| | is non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |

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

(2) THE EAR IS NON-SELF

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 4 “Bhikshus, | the ear | |
| when one knows, one sees that | is non-self, then, | self-view is abandoned. |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | sounds | |
| | are non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | ear-consciousness | |
| | is non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |
| <i>When one knows, one sees that</i> | ear-contact | |
| | is non-self, then, | <i>self-view is abandoned.</i> |

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

(3) THE NOSE IS NON-SELF

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 5 “Bhikshus, | the nose | |
| when one knows, one sees that | is non-self, then, | self-view is abandoned. |

³ Self-view or self-based view (*attānudiṭṭhi*) is essentially a belief in an enduring self or soul, that is, some kind of abiding essence that survives death just as it is. See SD 53.11 (1.2.1.3).

⁴ *Kathaṃ nu kho bhante jānato kathaṃ passato attā'nudiṭṭhi pahīyatīti.*

⁵ S:B (2000:1220) mistranslates the key qualifier here (S 35.166) and in S 35.165 as “impermanent” throughout.

When one knows, one sees that **smells**
are non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **nose-consciousness**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **nose-contact**
is non-self, then, self-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 *non-self*, self-view is abandoned.

(4) THE TONGUE IS NON-SELF

6 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the tongue**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **tastes**
are non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **tongue-consciousness**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **tongue-contact**
is non-self, then, self-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 *non-self*, self-view is abandoned.

(5) THE BODY IS NON-SELF

7 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the body**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **touch**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **body-consciousness**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **body-contact**
is non-self, then, self-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 *non-self*, self-view is abandoned.

(6) THE MIND IS NON-SELF

8 “Bhikshus,
when one knows, one sees that **the mind**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **thoughts [mind-objects]**
are non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **mind-consciousness**
is non-self, then, self-view is abandoned.

When one knows, one sees that **mind-contact**
is non-self, then, self-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 *non-self*, self-view is abandoned.

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

— evaṃ —

Attānudiṭṭhi Sutta

The Discourse on Self-views

S 22.155

1 At Sāvattḥī.

2 “Bhikkhus, when what exists, clinging to what, does **self-view**⁶ arise?”⁷

3 “Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as refuge.⁸ It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the bhikkhus would remember it.”⁹

The 5-aggregate clinging pericope¹⁰

4 “Bhikkhus,

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) when there is form , | |
| on account of clinging ¹¹ to form, by adhering to <i>form</i> , | <u>self-view</u> arises. ¹² |
| (2) When there is feeling , | |
| on account of clinging to <u>feeling</u> , by adhering to <i>feeling</i> , | self-view arises. |
| (3) When there is perception , bhikkhus, | |
| on account of clinging to <u>perception</u> , by adhering to <i>perception</i> , | self-view arises |

⁶ Self-view or self-based view (*attānudiṭṭhi*) is essentially a belief in an enduring self or soul, that is, some kind of abiding essence that survives death just as it is. See SD 53.11 (1.2.1.3).

⁷ *Kismiṃ nu kho bhikkhave sati kiṃ upādāya abhinivissa attā’nuḍḍhi uppajjati.*

⁸ “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.

⁹ *Bhagavam, mūlakā no bhante dhammā, bhagavaṃ nettikā, bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante bhagavata-ñ’eva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantīti.* This is stock: **Mahā Dhamma, samādāna S** (M 46,2/1:309 f), SD 59.11; **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47,3/1:317), SD 35.6; **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68,8/1:465), SD 37.4; **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,19/3:115), SD 11.4; **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 2:24), SD 21.1, **Parivīmaṃsanā S** (S 12.51/-2:81), SD 11.5, **Candūpama S** (S 16.3/2:199), SD 38.2; **Sammā, 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); **(Tika) Añña Titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199), SD 16.4; **Loka, dhamma S** (A 8.6/4:158), SD 48.3; **Kiṃ Mūlaka S** (A 8.83/4:338), SD 32.10; **Sambodhi Pakkhika Dhamma S** (A 9.1/4:351), SD 82.1; **Bhagavā Mūlaka S** (A 10.58/5:106), SD 57.20; **(Ekādasaka) Samādhi S 2** (A 11.20/5:355). See S:B 404 n227.

¹⁰ On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

¹¹ On the significance of clinging, see (1.1.2).

¹² *Rūpe kho bhikkhave sati rūpaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ abhinivissa attā’nuḍḍhi uppajjati.*

- (4) When there is **formations**,
on account of clinging to formations, by adhering to *formations*, self-view arises.
- (5) When there is **consciousness**,
on account of clinging to consciousness, by adhering to *consciousness*, self-view arises.

The aggregate-characteristic pericope¹³

5 What do you think, bhikshus:

- (1) **Is form permanent or impermanent?**"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [suffering] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?"¹⁴

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"But without clinging to what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, would self-identity view arise in it?"¹⁵

"No, bhante." [Mv 1.6.42]

- (2) **"Is feeling 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."

- (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."

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ *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.)

¹⁵ *Yaṃ pañāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināma,dhammaṃ, api nu taṃ anupādāya sakkāya,diṭṭhi uppajjeyyāti.*

“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.”

Revulsion

6 Seeing thus, bhikshus, the tutored noble disciple
 is revulsed [disenchanted]¹⁶ 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!’¹⁷

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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¹⁶ On revulsion, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

¹⁷ *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).