

Tilakkhana

World view of Buddhism:

Sabbe sankhara anicca

Yad aniccam tam dukkham

Yam dukkham tadanatta

* The teaching of the Buddha classifies everything that may be said to have an existence into the five aggregates (pancakkhandha), the twelve spheres (dvadasayatana) and the eighteen elements (attharasadhatuyo). This classification is said to exhaust all that exists in the empirical universe.

Anattalakkhana Sutta, SN III

All these components of existence are characterized by change or transience (Anicca), unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha) and unsubstantiality (Anatta). Repeated emphasis is found on these three characteristics.

It is said that material form (rupa) is Anicca. That which is Anicca is Dukkha. That which is Dukkha is Anatta. The same is repeated with regard to other aggregates.

* Insight into these three characteristics of being leads to the liberation of mind, putting an end to all craving that causes misery and conflict in this life, and the continuity of the process of becoming in the future by taking a new birth. Repeated birth involves repeated suffering and until insight into the three characteristics of being is developed there is craving and consequently repeated birth and suffering.

Vipallasa Sutta, AN 4.49

Delusion: About what?

Why?

→ sannavipallasa

→ cittavipallasa

→ ditthivipallasa

* The distortions of the mind work on three levels of scale. First, distortions of perception (*sañña-vipallasa*) cause us to misperceive the information coming to us through the sense doors. We might mistake a rope by the path as a snake, for example. Normally such errors of vision are corrected by a more careful scrutiny, but sometimes these sensory mistakes are overlooked and remain.

* Distortions of thought (*citta-vipallasa*) have to do with the next higher level of mental processing, when we find ourselves thinking about or pondering over things in our minds. The mind tends to elaborate upon perception with these thought patterns, and if our thoughts are based upon distortions of perception, then they too will be distorted.

* Eventually such thought patterns can become habitual, and evolve into distortions of view (*ditthi-vipallasa*). We might become so convinced that there is a snake by the path that no amount of evidence to the contrary from our own eyes or reason, nor the advice of others, will shake our beliefs and assumptions. We are stuck in a mistaken view.

➔ Furthermore, these three levels of distortion are cyclical — our perceptions are formed in the context of our views, which are strengthened by our thoughts, and all three work together to build the cognitive systems which make up our unique personality.

➔ Take note that the particular distortions mentioned correspond to the three characteristics. Taking what is impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, what is inherently unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) as a source of satisfaction, and what is without a self (*anatta*) to constitute a self — these are the primary ways we distort reality to the profound disadvantage of ourselves and others. Seeing the un-lovely (*asubha*) as lovely rounds up the traditional list of four *vipallasas*.

This is the Buddhist view of mental disease and mental health. Delusion is a mental illness that causes all sorts of suffering; mental health can be restored by correcting the flaws in how the mind operates.

* Fact: Although we may intellectually assent to the truth that things are transient, unsatisfactory and lacking self-nature, we still behave as if they are intransient, satisfactory and having self-nature.

* The mere intellectual assent to these truths does not seem to be sufficient. This is because although at the surface level of the intellect,

intransience etc., are admitted, it does not seem to be admitted at the affective level of the mind.

* These three characteristics have been established in the discourse not as a result of any kind of metaphysical inquiry or as an outcome of any mystical intuition. It is a judgement arrived at by observation, investigation and analysis of empirical data.

Anicca

* Sabbe sankhara anicca.

~ The realization that all compounded things are impermanent is a necessary requirement for the disenchantment with the things of the world. We are caught up in the web of becoming because we are enchanted by the things we crave for.

➔ correct understanding of it is a primary condition for right knowledge

* The transient nature of all phenomena finds expression in the canon in numerous contexts.

@ Mahaparinibbana Sutta:

“Impermanent are all component things,
They arise and cease, that is their nature,
They come into being and pass away,
Release from them is bliss supreme”.

@ Buddha’s last words:

“Indeed, O monks, I declare to you, decay is inherent in all component things. Strive for perfection through heedlessness.”

@ Dhammapada:

“Transient are all component things; when this with wisdom, one discerns, then one is disgusted with unsatisfactoriness; this is the path to purity”.

@ Elsewhere in the canon, striking similes have been drawn to bring out the transient nature of the five aggregates:

Rupa – lump of foam

Vedana – bubble

Sanna – mirage

Sankhara – plantain trunk (which is pithless)

Vinnana – illusion

@ Anguttara Nikaya: “Impermanent are all sankhara, unstable are all sankhara, not a cause for comfort and satisfaction are all sankhara, so

much so that one must get tired of all these sankhara, be disenchanted with them and be completely free of them.”

* The Buddha points out that the change occurs in such a rapid succession that we do not perceive their arising and breaking up and tends to regard them as static entities.

* However, the seeming stability of all the phenomena we experience should not make us believe that they are permanent.

* The term sankhara in this context includes all things, all phenomena that come into existence by natural development or evolution, being conditioned by prior causes. There is no being as such but only a ceaseless becoming.

* Everything arises dependently. All conditions that combine in the origination of something in the activity of dependent origination are also dependently arisen things.

* Yam kinci samudayadhammam sabbam tam nirodhadhammam:
Whatever has the nature of arising from conditions has the nature of passing away.

Dukkha

* Since everything is impermanent, it follows that everything is unsatisfactory.

* How is impermanence related to Dukkha?

➔ Dukkha is a consequence of the absence of stability.

@ The life of living beings is characterized by birth, old age, disease and death as inevitable certainties. The changeability of things is such that nothing that living beings desire to possess can be possessed forever. Life involves losing what is dear to someone, having to put up with what is unpleasant and not getting what one wants.

@ Not only our desired objects are impermanent, even our desires themselves are impermanent.

@ The nature of the mind is such that its objects of delight themselves shift from time to time (tatra tatra bhinandini).

@ Things received through our senses do not last forever.

* The Buddha says that in brief the five aggregates of grasping are Dukkha (sankhittena pancupadanakkhandha Dukkha) because they are impermanent.

Ratthapala Sutta MN 82

* There are four things about life related to the truth of unsatisfactoriness that the Buddha taught which the wise became convinced of. They are:

- 1) The world is without support and without any Divine providence (attano loko anabhissaro).
- 2) That the world is impermanent and lacking in stability (anicco loko addhuvo).
- 3) That the world is always deficient and that the servile pursuit of desires can never reach a point of full satisfaction (uno loko atitto tanhadaso) and
- 4) That nothing in the world belongs to a person, that nothing can be owned, and that one has to go when death comes leaving behind everything (assako loko sabbam pahaya gamaniyam).

*** Reflection: Is there suffering? Do you think you are suffering?**

* In Visuddhimagga, Dukkha has been classified into three aspects for better understanding

1. Intrinsic suffering (Dukkha-dukkha)
Includes all bodily and mental painful feeling
2. Suffering in change (Viparinama-dukkha)
Includes all bodily and mental pleasant feelings
3. Suffering due to formation (Sankhara-dukkha)
These five aggregates together, which we popularly call a being, are Dukkha itself. There is no other 'being' or 'I' standing behind these 5 aggregates, who experiences Dukkha. These five aggregates are all impermanent, all constantly changing.

* For more details and description on Dukkha, Saccavibhanga Sutta MN 141

* However, the Buddha does not deny that there is happiness in life. He admitted that living beings experience pain as well as pleasure. What he

pointed out was that even these so called pleasures are in the final analysis unsatisfactory as they belong to the sphere of sensation (vedana).

* Whatever is sensed belongs to Dukkha (yam kinci vedayitam sabbam tam dukkhasminti vadami – SN II.53).

* Nibbana is considered as a happiness which does not belong to the sphere of vedayita. The Buddha rejected the view that there could be an absolutely blissful existence (ekantasukham lokam) in the universe in either heaven or earth.

Anatta

* *Donald Watson in “A Dictionary of Mind and Spirit” writes: “Of the world’s major religions, only Buddhism denies or is agnostic about the existence of a soul.”*

* *Richard Kennedy in “The International Dictionary of Religion” writes: “According to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, each soul will be judged at the end of the world.... It is the soul which will determine whether the individual is punished by hell or rewarded by eternal life in heaven... Buddhism teaches that there is no such thing as a soul or true, permanent self.”*

* *The Encyclopedia American writes: “In Buddhism there is no enduring or surviving self such as the atman. Meditation leads to the awareness that the idea of self or atman is mere illusion.”*

* *In A Dictionary of Comparative Religion writes: “Buddhism, in its classic form, rejected the Hindu concept of atman as the essential, immortal self....”*

* The Self was recognized as something permanent and blissful by the other teachers who wanted to realize the True Self. However, taking a very experiential approach and avoiding metaphysical dogmas the Buddha pointed out that within the personality which is observable by us there is nothing that is permanent, or not leading to unhappiness.

* The Buddha takes each aggregate in turn and shows that it is merely a conditioned process, but not any permanent entity. No aggregate of personality belongs to a Self: “that it is not mine, I am not that and it is not my self” (netam mama, neso hamasmi, na me so atta).

* If any aggregate has the nature of the Self, it should not be subject to disease. One should be able to have control over it the way one wants.

But it is not so.

~ if forms were atta, people could abolish pain, disease, and ugliness by merely wishing.

~ we cannot avoid being conscious of ugly sights, sounds, and sensations in the world, although we would like to arrange coming into contact with pleasant sensual objects only.

~ if consciousness were atta, during meditation, we could will our consciousness to be still and concentrated.

~ **Cula Saccaka Sutta, MN 35**

* One has to abandon such thinking to be released from suffering.

~ one should not consider the body as the Self (rupam attato na samanupassati)

~ one should not consider that the Self is found in the body (na rupasmim attanam)

~ one should not consider the body to be found in the Self (attain va rupam)

~ one should not consider the Self to be possessed of the body (na rupavantam va attanam)

* The notion of a self is considered as one of the most difficult delusions to be overcome. It is a consequence of craving and clinging. The thought that there is no self gives the feeling that all is lost. Living beings want to cling to something that could be called one's own.

* Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man: self-protection and self-preservation.

~ For self-protection, man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety and security, just as a child depends on its parents.

~ For self-preservation, man has conceived the idea of an immortal soul which will live eternally. According to the Buddha, man's behaviour as well as his outlook on life are determined by several instincts such as 'desire to live', 'desire to avoid death', 'hankering for happiness' and 'aversion to pain'.

* In his ignorance, weakness, fear and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence he clings to them deeply and fanatically.

* Bhavatanha (the instinct for survival) is so strong in living beings that the very thought that in reality there is no substantial self which survives in any form causes tremendous fear and dread.

* The Buddha redefines the concept of man. According to him, this was merely a ‘bundle of perceptions’ (sankharapunja) or a group of aggregates, not discrete and discontinuous, but connected and continuous by way of causality.

* Buddhism traces all human evil to this delusion of the self. Nibbana is thus “the total destruction of the conceit that I am” (asmimanasamugghatam).

* Also, it is pointed out by the Buddha that most of human sickness at the mental level is a consequence of clinging to the notion of the Self.

* The notion of “I” is due to our ignorance and the result is suffering.

* **Alagaddupama Sutta MN 22:** the Buddha asks the monks to point out any belief in a Self, which by clinging to, no suffering will result.

Is Consciousness or mind Soul?

* Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta MN38: a monk Sati misunderstood the teaching of the Buddha and held that the view that consciousness is a permanent entity that passes from one existence to another. The Buddha stated categorically that there is no arising of consciousness without relative conditions.

* The Buddha says that it is better for a man to take his physical body as self rather than mind, thought, or consciousness because the former seems to be more solid than the later, because mind, thought, or consciousness changes constantly day and night even faster than the body.

* Buddhagosa: ***“Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found; The deeds are, but no doer is found.”***

There is no unmoving mover behind the movement. It is only movement. In other words, there is no thinker behind the thought. Thought itself is the thinker. If you remove the thought, there is no thinker to be found.

* versus Cartesian ***“cogito ergo sum”***

Conventional use of language

* There are two kinds of truths: sammuti-sacca and paramattha-sacca. When we use such expressions in our daily life as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘being’, ‘individual’ etc, we do not lie because although there is no self or being

as such, but we speak a truth conforming to the convention of the world. But the ultimate truth is that there is no ‘I’ or ‘being’ in reality.

* *Conventional vs. ultimate reality*

* The self that we are conditioned to see as real and permanent, is simply only a concept or fabrication.

* However, in order to function in conventional reality, we will still need to see ourselves as enduring and distinct entities.

* The Buddha did not discard the meaningful use of the term “self” in his teachings. He often spoke about the necessity of self-development.

* On one occasion a certain disciple interpreted his teaching in such a way that it would make moral responsibility incompatible with it. But the Buddha immediately rejected such a consequence of his teaching and said that it is an attempt to draw unwarranted conclusions from his teaching.

* It is often argued that if there is no self, then the spiritual life would not be meaningful. But the Buddha’s response to this was that if there is a permanent self, the spiritual life would be meaningless.

* It is important to point out that the Buddha did not want his teaching about the absence of a Self to lead to the other extreme of annihilationism (ucchedavada). His teaching took the middle way. It avoided both the eternalist view (sassatavada) and the annihilationist view.

➔ That is why the Buddha remained silent when the question whether there is a Self or whether there is no Self was raised by the wanderer Vacchagotta.

Rebirth

* This happens because kamma leaves a potential for those traits of anger and ill-will to arise, not because any kind of self of the person is continuing.

Nibbana

* In the absence of a soul, who or what is it that enters Nibbana?

➔ We can certainly say that there is no *atta* or self which realizes Nibbana. What realizes Nibbana is insight-wisdom, *vipassana-panna*. It is not the property of a personal or universal self, but is rather a power developed through meditative penetration of phenomena.

Note:

Sotapanna vs Arahant

The Ten Fetters

1. Belief that nothing survives the body after death, at one extreme or belief in a permanent unchanging entity (immortal soul) that survives after death, at the other extreme. (sakkaya ditthi)*
2. Sceptical or irrational doubts regarding the teachings of the Buddha, in particular the teachings on kamma and rebirth.
3. Belief that one can be purified through sacrifices, rituals or ceremonies.
4. Attachment to sense pleasures.
5. Anger and ill-will.
6. Desiring existence in a fine-material realm (a heavenly existence).
7. Desiring existence in a formless realm (an even more refined heavenly existence).
8. Conceit and pride.
9. Restlessness and discontent.
10. Ignorance and delusion.

* This should not be confused with the delusion of self which is completely overcome only by Arahants when they attain full enlightenment.