Investigating Anattā: Personality View

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:49

So tonight I want to talk about *sakayaditthi*, which is another aspect of *anattā*, usually translated as identity view or personality view.

I don't know if you remember from last week—it's not a test—but I quoted the scripture, the sutta that Ajahn Buddhadasa quoted about all that one needs to know: having heard that nothing is worth clinging to, one directly knows everything. Having heard this, one fully understands everything. And then Bhikkhu Bodhi's note explains that this means one does not cling once one fully understands everything. One does not cling either by way of craving or of views.

Last week I talked mostly about how craving creates a sense of self. Tonight I want to focus a little more on views. Of course, at the bottom of views is craving and clinging—that should go without saying, but I'll say it. But I want to talk more in terms of how views come to be and how we get lost in views, particularly *sakayaditthi*, personality view.

I like the way that Sayadaw U Lakkhana defined this one time. He defined *sakaya* as the stream of *nāma-rūpa*. *Nāma-rūpa* being mind and form, name and form—basically the five aggregates that, in the way the Buddha describes a human being, make up our experience: the aggregate of form, and then the mental aggregates of *vedanā* (feeling tone), perception, *sankhāra* (which is all the different mental formations, including intention), and consciousness. So he said *sakaya* is just this stream of ever-changing *nāma-rūpa* —the six sense objects, really, and the consciousness of them. And identity view happens when any aspect in any moment of this stream of *nāma-rūpa* is clung to or identified with as being me or mine.

As you can imagine, this happens all the time. It's a mistaken view of this compound, ever-shifting process of *nāma-rūpa*, of name and form—a mistaken view of it as self, as me or mine.

So what do we mean by view? How does a view form?

There's just a stream, for example, of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, mental experience, awareness of consciousness. That's just going on and on and on. And when any particular one of that is clung to through grasping—much as I said last week—any of that *nāma-rūpa*, in that moment, it's like we pick it up, carry it with us with a perception of what it is. We think about it, we get it more complicated, we remember, we associate. And all of these are mental formations that turn into thoughts, which turn into a view—a description, giving meaning to something. And then we take that description, that view as being true, and cling to it. This can be very simple, happening all the time in any aspect of our mental and physical experience.

Like today, I have a thing going on with my shoulder, so I went to the physical therapist and she did her thing—fine, very nice. Came home, and then this other shoulder started hurting. And I could see, in that moment, my mind going, "No, we so much don't want this to be happening." And it really went there. And then I could see—I didn't actually go there too much—but that was the form, the physical experience, unpleasant physical experience. And then the thought: "No, this can't be happening. It's supposed to be getting better, not going to the other shoulder." And then the thoughts and the memories that make up this whole *sakayaditthi* sense of self-personality—I could see them starting. "It's always something. It's this shoulder, it's that shoulder, it's my back, it's my knees. Ever since I was thirty, there's always been something wrong with this body." I could just see it going, along with the appropriate emotions.

Now, that could go without clinging to it. You know what I mean? It could just kind of be running, and it could just be aware of, "Oh yeah, that's thinking." But as soon as there was that "No, we so much don't want this to be happening," and then the whole story—the thoughts, the emotions, and the believing that view, "I'm this kind of a person with this kind of a body, this is my history"—right there, you have basically the history of your whole life, so it would seem.

The thing with views, though, and this we really need to notice, is how limited they are. Because of course, that's not a true and accurate reflection of my whole life. It feels like it.

It seems like it in the moment. And in terms of sakkāya-diṭṭhi, personality view, the point is really that it felt like me—one solid me going back to whenever, the time I was born, having to deal with this particular situation. Obviously, that's not rocket science. That happens all the time.

I want to give you another definition, the way Ajahn Sumedho talks about sakkāya-diṭṭhi. He talks about it in a couple of ways, and I like the way he discusses it informally. He says you can experience it in either a subtle way or a gross way.

The subtle is something I referred to last week. It's just that subtle sense of me here now—not even a specific thought, not a specific memory like I was describing with my shoulder, but just that subtle sense of me. If you had to put more words to it, it could be "the one who is mindful," "the one who is observing," "the one who is making choices." All those thoughts we get into—"the one who is thinking." That's already going further. It can be much more subtle, just that felt sense of me.

Or on a more gross and complex level, Ajahn Sumedho talks about it as really what we would classically, in regular speech, call our personality: our ideas about our behavior patterns, our memories, our cultural identifications—who we think of ourselves in terms of nationality, gender, race, family history, all that kind of stuff. Our moods, our particular personal history. Like, "I'm a person with limited energy, I'm tired, I can't do any more than this." That kind of stuff comes up all the time, doesn't it? And all the innumerable conditions that are constantly changing, but we don't often notice how much they're changing.

So, for example, "I'm tired, I'm a person with limited energy, I can only do so much"—as if that is the experience every single moment of every single day. Is anything that we're saying is me—"I'm a person who has a debilitating disease"—is that the actual experience every single moment of every single day and night? Or is it sometimes a physical experience, sometimes a thought, sometimes a mood, sometimes completely absent from the present moment experience? This is just something to hold as a question.

The ideas we get into: "I'm someone who could never really be free. I don't even know why I'm practicing because it's clearly hopeless for me." That's a personality view, which we then believe. And then that belief can actually color our succeeding thoughts and how we act.

Again, Ajahn Sumedho talks about how, on one level, we create ourselves with our thoughts. All these examples I gave—a perception like my perception of pain, then another perception of "now my other shoulder, what's she doing?"—and then all the memories, all the thoughts. We're creating ourselves through our thoughts: "I'm this, I'm that, I was this, I will be that, I've always been and I always will be."

And this is what I love that Ajahn Sumedho says. He says we cannot create an ultimately peaceful self. Not that we ever stop trying, but we cannot create an ultimately peaceful self. The sense of self is intrinsically non-satisfying, non-peaceful.

I think that's just an interesting idea to contemplate and see if we can really look at it that way, rather than, "Well, this particular self is unsatisfying and not peaceful, but if I could rearrange it and get it right, then..." And how much of one's meditation, at times, really, when I come down to it, is about getting myself to be a better self so things are more okay?

But this sense of telling ourselves stories, making it up as we go along, creating an intrinsically unpeaceful, unsatisfying self—this is based literally on inaccurate perception, which leads to wrong view. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi is one aspect of wrong view. I love that translation, diṭṭhi as "view." In the Eightfold Path, the first step is wise view, right view. To me, it's kind of a literal translation: we're seeing accurately, or we're perceiving inaccurately. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi, wrong view, is based on inaccurate perceptions and interpretation of our experience.

Nisargadatta Maharaj said: "Discovery cannot come as long as you cling to the familiar. As long as you have all sorts of ideas about yourself, you know yourself through the mist of these ideas. To know yourself as you are, you must give up all ideas. You cannot imagine the taste of pure water. You can only discover it by abandoning all flavorings."

In some way, what sakkāya-diṭṭhi is, is that we keep putting all different kinds of flavorings into our ideas about ourselves, coloring our perception, throwing out a whole description and taking that description to be the truth—and completely ignoring or overlooking the fact that five minutes later we have a completely different description, a completely different set of ideas, and believing that to be the truth, and believing both of them to be me. We just don't quite look at what we're doing, why we're believing it.

Wrong view.

So how is a view formed? There's saññā, perception, which is just the recognition of a particular sense contact. Like if I hit the bell and you hear it and recognize, "That's the bell"—that's perception.

Perception leads to how we think about something—thinking. And thinking then can coagulate, kind of form itself into one big solid glob of a view. This is how things are.

This is a story a friend told me. She was on retreat in a big old house in Switzerland a few years ago. These big old wooden houses without much insulation are really quite creaky and noisy. Once in a while there's a creak outside here and it's like, "Oh my god, a creak! There shouldn't—god forbid—be any noise in this meditation room!" But in these old houses it's creak, creak, creak all over.

She said the meditation hall was upstairs, and right below it was the room used for walking meditation. It was her first retreat. She's Swiss, in Switzerland, and following the schedule, it was the sitting time. She was sitting, getting into the middle of the sitting, starting to feel, "Oh, I'm really getting with the breath now. I'm really getting quiet, starting to get nice." And then she heard creak, creak, creak. "Oh, somebody's walking downstairs. It's making such a noise." It just kept going and kept going.

And she said, "How can they do that? It's not the walking period. It's the sitting period. We all agreed to follow the regulations here and..." She wouldn't mind if I said this, but she's Swiss. You definitely follow timetables. You do it as you're supposed to do it. And she was getting really worried. "They're ruining my concentration! I was finally getting somewhere on this retreat. Really, they're completely wrong. This is the right way to do it."

So it went from perception to thinking about what was happening to a view of "I'm right, they're wrong. This is how things are supposed to be done."

And then she said, "Well, let me just come back and feel my breath again." She felt her breath. And as she felt her breath just being there, she realized she was leaning against the wall. And whenever she breathed, her back went out into the wall and made it creak. That was the sound she was hearing.

Wrong perception, inverted perception, leads to all kinds of thoughts and a view that we totally believe and get emotional about and act on. Then the correct perception—well, as you can imagine, all those thoughts went away. She really couldn't hold on anymore to how bad that person walking was. It's gone. It's free. I mean, she could have added another set of thoughts about what a stupid jerk she was and then got into hating herself for always jumping to conclusions. That's another thing, which isn't accurate either.

But you see what I mean? If the perception is inaccurate, but we don't recognize that, and the thoughts that follow from it we take to be real, and then the thoughts form into a view, and we already believe that—we maybe never even know anymore what the original perception was—and then we're off and running. This is basically, moment to moment, a very simplistic way of describing how sakkāya-diṭṭhi gets

created in our mind stream, moment to moment.

It's of course not a steady state thing. It's not like you're sitting here with a solid personality that maybe somehow you're going to change to something else and then you'll be better. It's being created moment to moment.

So according to the Buddha—and I want to use some sutta references tonight—according to the Buddha, he talks about how we practice self-identification, how in the moment we practice creating sakkāya-diṭṭhi, and also ways we can practice that lead to the cessation of sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

First, one set definition. I know it's a little fiddly, but I want to put it out there because it's the way the Buddha talks about it. He describes the creation of sakkāya-diṭṭhi in any particular moment. When an uninstructed worldling—basically an unenlightened, normal person—in any particular moment, there are four different ways that one could regard form, or any of the other four aggregates, to create the sense of self. He says in any moment, one regards form as self,

Like regarding the body as self. The commentarial example is that form and self would be indistinguishable, like the flame and the color of a candle—you can't separate the two. That would be regarding form as self.

Another way is regarding self as possessing form. These are subtle, but they're different ways we relate. That would be like taking the mind or mentality as self, and it's possessing form the way a tree has a shadow.

The third one is regarding form as in self. That would mean the self is the formless, the mind, and form is within that, the way scent is within a flower.

And the fourth is self as in form, which would mean that the formless is like a self located within form—as if the self was a little jewel inside a box.

You see what I mean? A little fiddly. You don't need to remember all that. I just like to share it because these are slightly different angles that lead to the inaccurate perception of self in any relationship to form—either being form, having form, form within self, or self within form. And then the Buddha applies the same formula to vedana, feeling tone, to perception, to all the volitional formations, the sankharas, and to consciousness itself.

Then he goes on to describe how this brings us suffering and agitation: "How, bhikkhus, is there agitation through clinging?" Here he goes through that same analysis—basically an unlearned, unawakened person regards form as self, or self and form, the whole thing I just described. That form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, his consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of form.

Can you relate to that? Just the slightest change of form and the consciousness becomes preoccupied with it. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain

obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is frightened, distressed, and anxious. And through clinging, he becomes agitated.

I love that passage because it's such a straight-out description of what the mind does—well, what my mind does all day long. A little twinge in my shoulder and the mind becomes obsessed with the change of form. A whole constellation of emotions and thoughts arise. It gets agitated. There's anxiety. And then, you know, it stops hurting. The mind forgets all about it, goes on to something else, and starts the same process all over again.

And it might not be about form—it might be about a thought. "Oh, I'm feeling so agitated, and before I was so calm. How did this restlessness get into my practice?" It's just the same thing. It may not be form; it may be a mood, it may be a feeling tone. We do that over and over and over. This is the creation of sakaya-ditti when we don't recognize it—in such a way that one is afflicted in body and afflicted in mind.

This is Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation: "He swallows these ideas with craving and views and takes his stand upon them and grasps hold of them."

Really, that's it. We take our stand. We fight to the death. "This is what's happening. I really am this kind of person. My body really is this. It really is my body." It's just so hard to see through the misperception, the thinking and the views.

So our practice really is to cultivate accurate, wise, right view. I mean, obviously, that's the whole practice of mindfulness. It's what we always say: just meet experience as it is, connected, without preconception, without confusing our ideas about the experience for the experience itself.

But we can't make the right perception arise just because we want it. Have you ever noticed that? We can't make the right view come. We can think in our mind, "I know that I'm identified here with these thoughts," but that doesn't really do a lot of good, does it?

I mean, it doesn't really let go of the clinging, because the clinging is there precisely because we're not recognizing accurately.

So the shift of perspective—and again, like I said, we can't make it happen—but I'm sure you know, I absolutely know you all know, over and over, the mystery of that moment when that shift happens.

For example, I'll just make up another particular story. There's an unpleasant sound. There's aversion. Just like my friend, it's bothering one's practice. One gets annoyed. And at some point in there, one's taking some part of that to be me or mine. Maybe it's the annoyance. Maybe it's the anger. And then the memories: "I'm such an angry person. This is my personality. It's because of X, Y, and Z reasons going back to when I was three. I understand it, but this is who I am."

And even when we try to say, "Okay, anger—it's really okay. Anger, anger. I can just be with anger. That's okay." We know the rap. But it's not really working, because at some point we're not seeing that view that

really, "This is who I am, an angry person." Or "The anger is mine," you know, sort of like the shadow of the tree. "I'm not the anger, but somehow it's mine." Some way that there's that sakkāya-diṭṭhi, that personality view.

Or we even go to the space of, "It's okay, I'm really equanimous, just being with the anger." And you really are equanimous—but still, you're the person who's equanimous. You're the person.

And you can feel, as Sumedho says, there's no self that the thoughts can create, that our experience can create, that's really ultimately peaceful. So even being the equanimous person—"Okay, so I have this history of anger, that's okay"—it isn't really ultimately freeing. And somewhere back in there, we know it. Somewhere there's that feeling of still being kind of glitched up.

And then what I'm going to say, we all know: that shift that happens, sort of like magic, what we call insight, that aha moment where somehow, magically, the clinging to the view, the belief in the view just disappears. It releases, and it absolutely goes—that shift of perspective, that real shift from "I'm an angry person," or "I'm an angry person being equanimous," or whatever particular view, to just—oh, the way Sumedho says—"anger is like this." Not my anger. "Equanimity is like this." Not my equanimity.

No identification. No need to relate it to past or future. No need to make any story whatsoever. No need to move away. No need to move into. No need to fix. Just the "oh, anger's like this." Just a saṅkhāra arising and passing.

And it's so, as people say, it's so obvious, so simple, so peaceful. Why the heck do we get caught up again? That's to me the big question of spiritual practice. Why, for the love of God, do we get caught up again when it's so peaceful, so obviously free?

It's kind of a shift from being the personality to being the knowing. It's the way Ajahn Sumedho talks—I like it a lot. Nothing has to change. It's not about fixing the personality. But it's kind of a shift of loyalty, maybe, you know? From being so loyal to me being the angry person, to me being anything. "Anger's like this." Nothing to refer back to. Being the knowing.

That moment of insight, that moment where the perception shifts from that inaccurate, upside-down perception—perceiving any arising experience as being "me" or "mine" is one of the inverted perceptions that the Buddha talks about. Seeing anything coming and going as "me" or "mine." And it's one of the most subtle and pervasive, I would say.

And so what shifts, in really not putting our loyalty so much into our sakkāya-diṭṭhi, into our ideas about ourselves, what shifts is—oh, we just recognize more accurately.

And that's not something we can make happen, but it happens through steady, non-clinging attention.

It's just like those magic eye visual games—you know what I mean? They used to be very popular. They had books of them, just a page of two or three colors, graphic art with nothing representational about it at

all. It's just design. There's nothing realistic about it. And if you look at it very steadily but without clinging, without focusing, without looking for anything—you just have to look very steadily and softly—suddenly a particular image will jump out. It'll look as though it's three-dimensional. That's part of the magic. And the other part is that where before you just saw little yellow and blue squiggles, little yellow and blue shapes, suddenly there are dinosaurs or hockey players or UFOs or whatever. And you really see it.

Now, it was there all the time, right? You didn't create it by doing something. You just allowed it to emerge through steady, non-conceptual attention. When you go back and look hard, it goes away. Or if you look away and look back, it's gone. But it's still there. Did it really go anywhere? It's still there. Both ways of perceiving are still there.

It's sort of like that when we've been perceiving something as me or mine—my anger, my history, my story—and then, oh, it's just this. All the dynamics might still be there. You could call up the same memories. There's the same physical sensation. You might still be experiencing anger. But that view, the thoughts and views leading to "this is who I am, my personality"—they're just gone.

So that shift of perspective is really what we're talking about when we talk about insight. A shift from being the personality to being the knowing.

I like the way Krishnamurti describes that quality of looking: "When you look totally, you will give your whole attention—your whole being, everything of yourself, your eyes, your ears, your nerves. You will attend with complete self-abandonment, and then there is no room for fear, no contradiction, and therefore no conflict."

You attend with complete self-abandonment. Basically, there's no room for self. It's just what there is.

So how do we keep getting tripped up, seduced back into identity view, into self-view, into the perception of any aspect of experience as self? How can we practice not to create this?

Here's something else from Sayadaw U Tejaniya that I found really interesting. This is from a retreat I sat with him. He was talking about how, in over thirty years as a monk and many years teaching Westerners, in his opinion one of the biggest hindrances for Westerners—really for people with a materialistic upbringing, a scientific type of mind—is self-doubt. Self-doubt in terms of trusting our insights into awareness, in terms of trusting the real liberating power of awareness.

He sees the cause of this self-doubt partly in how strong our personalities are and how strong our belief in and reliance on our personalities is. Even as much as we may not like our particular personalities, in a way it's like our refuge. It's the thing we absolutely believe. The personality, he says, is so often our reference point for who we are, for what things mean. And I would say ditto for our thoughts, which are what's creating our personality.

And so we get caught back into our personality—believing it, reacting to it, trying to fix it, relating to it over and over and over.

A story just came to mind that Steve Armstrong tells, and I've seen this too when I was in Burma. You put your shoes out when you go into the meditation hall. He said he came out once, and he had a really very nice pair of sandals, which would stand out among all the old, rubbery, corroded flip-flops. As Steve came out of the hall, a Burmese man was putting on Steve's slippers, about to walk away. Steve just kind of said, "Oh, what?" And the guy just said, "Oh, well," left them, and went away. He wasn't upset about it at all.

Now, for me at least—maybe not for you—but if I was doing something like that, I would be incredibly furtive about it. Checking around, making sure no one was watching. And if I got caught? Where my personality would go with that... it would be all about me and how I felt. Either way, it would be about me.

But for this guy? Just, "Oh well, I guess I won't take them," and he walked away. No problem. The personality, "who I am," wasn't the center of the world for him.

I don't know about you, but in here, this personality is a lot of times the center of the world. And it's a pretty limited, up-and-down, cockamamie world, I'll tell you.

Why do we choose to make our personality the center of the world? I don't know. Maybe you know somebody with a perfect personality. I don't. Nothing personal—I didn't mean anybody here.

See, don't we right away think it's about me? It's just stuff happening.

So, another sutta from the Buddha. Someone comes to him and says, "Venerable Sir, how should one know, how should one see, for the view of identity—*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*—to be abandoned?"

Abandoned.

Now, this isn't going to be anything big that you haven't heard before, but that's no reason not to listen to it.

The Buddha says, "Bhikkhu, when one knows and sees the eye as impermanent, identity view is abandoned." And of course, he goes through all the six senses, but I'll just go through with the eye.

Then he says, "When one knows and sees forms"—in other words, there's the eye and there's what the eye sees, the objects of sight—"when one knows and sees forms as impermanent, view of identity is abandoned. When one knows and sees eye consciousness"—that moment of knowing, when eye and form come together and there's consciousness, that moment of seeing—"when one sees that as impermanent, the view of self is abandoned. When one knows and sees eye contact as impermanent, when one knows and sees whatever feeling tone, *vedanā*, arises with eye contact as conditioned, as impermanent, the view of self is abandoned."

Then he goes through the same thing with the ear, with smell, with taste, with body and tactile

phenomena, with the mind and mental phenomena. So that's pretty much everything. And that's a high bar, right?

But we don't have to sit here thinking, "I have to see everything as impermanent all the time." Rather, it's about having the contemplation, the idea, kind of in the back of our mind—the power of the perception of *anicca*, of impermanence.

He's basically saying here that when one perceives these aspects of our experience—seeing, eye contact, the feeling tone, the form, the eye itself—as impermanent, when that perception of impermanence is accurately perceived, the view of self, or in that moment the sense of self, the personality view, is basically not created. You could say it's abandoned, but it's really more that it's not created.

So this is, again, that inverted perception the Buddha talks of so much. We have such a deep habit to perceive what is impermanent, what is constantly changing, as permanent. To perceive what is not-self as self. To perceive what is inherently unsatisfying as satisfying, as capable of giving us happiness.

Now, I'm saying this, it's a thought—we can think of it. That's a concept. But the concept won't really help us abandon the personality view, the construction of a sense of self.

Because on an intellectual level, impermanence—maybe even personality view, but certainly impermanence—is pretty understandable, isn't it? Not too many people would really argue that eye contact is permanent, or even that their eye is permanent. We can all at least give lip service to the idea that however solid I seem, I know at one point I was born and at another point I'll die. However solid this experience of anger and this personality view seems, I know I go through different moods throughout the day.

But what we're actually perceiving in the moment may not at all correspond with this idea of "Well, I know it's impermanent." We can say that. But what we don't recognize—something I heard the Dalai Lama say once in a teaching—he said, "When we talk about the perception of *anicca*, of impermanence, we may think we understand it, that we can really see things arise, they last for a while, they go away. Arising, persistence, going away. And you think, 'Yeah, I really understand impermanence.'"

But he said, "No. Things don't exist for a while in between arising and passing away. There is no steady state." Impermanence means experience is in constant flux. Constant flux. There is no little stability in between the moments of arising and passing. And that's what we don't often really let in through our perception.

It's too radical. It's too unsettling. And it gives rise to all sorts of questions. We start thinking, well, if everything's impermanent, how can I do this? If there's no steady state at all, how can I get up and walk out of here? Who's walking out of here if it's not the same person who walked in? We go into all of that.

This is the same as the magic eye. It's the same as no self. It's not that things are permanent until we allow

the perception of impermanence and then suddenly everything goes into constant flux. It's not that if you allow in the perception of impermanence, you can't find your feet anymore. It's not that everything's just arising and passing in molecules and you can't find your mouth when you're trying to eat.

Things are impermanent. There's not even things—I mean, that's already saying it wrong. "Things" is already taking a bunch of changing energy and putting it together and calling it a thing. I know that's going a little far, but that's what the scientists tell us. And there are moments when that's our actual experience. It's true. There are moments when you can be in retreat, sitting, and really there isn't a mouth, there isn't a body. But most of the time, it's like the magic eye—that's one level of how things are: constant flux.

But it's useful, this conventional perception. Even though this body is in constant flux, I still can recognize it when I get up in the morning. When I walk out of here, I don't get it confused with Viranyani's body. I know what I'm supposed to do. She knows where she's supposed to go. We can go and eat and find our mouths. It all works.

But just because there's this perception of lastingness doesn't mean it's accurate at the deepest level. And so, knowing that it's a convention—a useful convention—we don't need to be afraid of the perception of no self or the perception of impermanence. We're still going to be able to function, because it's only the way things already are.

The only thing that goes away is that burden we're dragging around of me, me, me—everything about me, every thought, every sound, everything that happens connected to my whole history back to when I was in second grade, or before I was born, everything. Who needs all of that? The sense of our personality being so important, the sense of having to fix ourselves, change this personality, get a better one—or at least put on such a good mask that no one can tell how really disgusting you truly are, right? How much of our time do we spend doing that?

In the perception of impermanence, on this level that the Buddha is speaking of—and it doesn't have to be on that level all the time, it doesn't even hardly most of the time—but just let it in as you're walking around: sight is impermanent, constantly changing. Walk out of here and you see a plant, then you see the window, then you see a shoe, then you see the hall, then you see the light. It's constantly changing. You don't have to flip out and get all trippy about it, but you can just notice that. Thoughts are constantly changing. Moods are constantly changing. Physical sensations are constantly changing.

How does it work that this seeing, this perception of impermanence, starts to erode the habit of sakkāya-diṭṭhi, of creating a sense of self? What it does is this: when we see how things actually are, the clinging that arises due to our confusion, our inaccurate perception, simply drops away. Sort of like my friend in the house in Switzerland. As soon as she knew what was true, the aversion and the clinging were gone. The view was gone. You don't have to abandon it. It just goes away.

There's a model that the Buddha uses frequently—you could call it three movements in an unfolding process of insight—where we recognize more accurately, then we begin to see, in terms of the six senses, in terms of the five aggregates: the gratification, the danger, and the escape in any aspect of our experience. He uses this all the time.

For instance, in terms of seeing, the gratification in seeing a pleasant sight is the pleasure and joy that arises in dependence on that. That's the gratification. The danger, obviously, when we see that it's always changing, is that it is subject to change. It's unsatisfactory. We can't place any lasting sense of self or hope for happiness in that experience. And the escape is the abandonment of desire and lust for that form, for that particular experience.

It's not that we have to get rid of anything. We don't have to get rid of our personalities. We don't have to get rid of pain in the body. We don't even have to get rid of anger.

But what goes away when we recognize accurately is the desire and lust for whatever the particular experience is. It's that word that's often translated as "disgust"—*nibbida*—but "disenchantment" is really a better translation.

Just to describe how that works: when we see accurately, "Oh, this can bring me this pleasant feeling, this brings a moment of pleasure, and then it's gone. Placing all my eggs in the basket of more pleasant feelings—completely, it can't do it for me." It's not a "should." It's not "I'm so stupid" or "I'm bad." It's like a disenchantment with pleasant feeling, for example. Seeing with that disenchantment, we go, "Ah, this can't do it," and just put down the clinging.

The description that Andrew Olendzki gives of this in the *Insight Journal*—he wrote a whole piece about *ni bbida*—I just want to read the metaphor he gives. He says that knowing things directly as they really are and seeing what is impermanent as impermanent with right view, when one sees as it is with right view, then one becomes disenchanted with the aggregates, with all five aggregates.

What does this mean, disenchanted? Because as I said, as he said, it's often been translated as "revulsion" or "disgust." And often when people hear that—"I should be developing revulsion for the five aggregates, that means revulsion for the body, for forms, revulsion for perception"—no, to us that's subversive. That doesn't sound right. Certainly it doesn't really inspire one too deeply. "Yeah, let me work towards revulsion."

But if you think of it as disenchantment, and then use this simile that's in the texts about a dog that comes across a bone that has been sitting out in the desert for months and months—where it was once a really juicy bone, now it's just bleached white and bare. The marrow is gone. It's just a dried-up old bone. So the dog comes running up to it, all lathering, slathering, happy, starts chewing on it. He's enchanted by the prospect of gratification as he scrapes away furiously at the bone. But when he wakes up to the fact that the bone is empty of anything that will offer him any satisfaction, he becomes disenchanted. He just spits

it out and walks away.

There's no aversion necessary in that. No revulsion. It's just, "Oh, this isn't what I thought." Puts it down and walks away.

That, I know, is actually an experience of real equanimity—the equanimity that allows us to recognize our experience ever more accurately. Not push it away. Not distance ourselves. Not have revulsion. But the clinging of wanting anything to last, of perceiving anything as "me," just becomes abandoned in that moment. And more and more frequently, as the perception is accurate more and more frequently, the abandonment of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* gets stronger, gets our loyalty. Our belief in personality view really begins to weaken.

But one point I want to make is in our practice here—and not just on retreat, in daily life—I find this really personally: often I can access this level of seeing. "Okay, seeing the moment of eye consciousness, seeing all the aggregates as impermanent." There are times when that is the level of perception, especially when we're on retreat.

But there are other times when the *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*—you know, the perception, the clinging, the thoughts, the view—that all happened really fast and quite a while ago. We couldn't even say what was the original perception that led to the view. But we wake up really caught in some personality view. And it might be a really familiar one—any of the examples I've been giving—but we're really in it. Sometimes you can say, "Well, I'm such an angry person and I can say all of this," or "I've always been unhealthy," or "Wow, I'm really doing great," whatever it is. "I'm this kind of person, I'm shy, I'm introverted," whatever it is.

Sometimes you can't say what it is, but in daily life I'll just start to feel really kind of contracted. I look, and it's all complicated, and I can't tell what the belief is, I can't tell what the perception is, but I can tell that *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is really strong right now.

And that is actually enough.

In that moment, rather than, "Oh, there's eye consciousness and there's clinging and there's identification"—I can't get there. I can't even say, "Is this anger? Is this fear? Is this back to my childhood?" All I can say is, "Wow, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* feels like this." Just naming it in that way that Sayadaw U Tejaniya uses. And it actually is very powerful.

Instead of getting in there, fighting it out—"Oh no, here I am being selfish, I want to be compassionate, I better start doing the Chenrezig mantra, I better do this, I better sit more"—you know, how we're going to fight? Wait a minute. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is like this.

It's not magic—I wouldn't say it's magic—but sometimes it's so powerful. Because just in that moment, you don't have to figure it all out. You just shifted loyalties right then, from total belief in *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* to "Oh, it feels like this." Just that movement into awareness receiving *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*. Just another complicated,

messed-up *saṅkhāra* that's arising in this moment, and it's going to pass away if I don't keep feeding it fuel.

That—you don't need to be incredibly concentrated, and you don't need to be incredibly quiet and peaceful to do that. It's just to have that willingness to recognize, "Oh, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*." Just to have the sense that that's something that arises and passes.

It's not who I am.

Are we, as I said the other night, willing to be without self-referencing? Are we willing not to be our personality? Are we willing just to be with what is without having our personality be the center of the show? Are we willing not to be the center of the show?

Because it's peaceful.

And what's interesting—sometimes we find out peace isn't really the thing we're wanting. A little more action, a little more glitziness, a little more interest, a little more sense of *me*, basically.

So I say, "Oh, sakkāya-diṭṭhi is like that." I mean, just in yourself, how did that sound? Really lame? Like, "Oh yeah, right. I'm going to go through life saying 'sakkāya-diṭṭhi is like that.'"

But you know, then what? What are we left with?

Just awareness. Awareness, when it's not colored by craving or delusion or fear or anger—in that moment, of itself, it's pure. It's just this. Just what is in this moment. Nothing to do. Nothing to fix. Nothing to be.

And it's just a moment. It's not some big explosion. It's very, as Buddhadasa says, normal and natural. We all have many, many moments in a day when there's not the misperception of something as self. Many moments when sakkāya-diṭṭhi is not being created or clung to. They're normal, natural, and simple.

So we could just, as Buddhadasa says, generate a contentment with that. And then on the other side, notice when there is the perception of permanence, when there's the perception of self, when the thoughts are creating a view—just notice how that happens. And notice you don't have to go back and deconstruct the whole thing. At any point, we can just go, "Ah, it's like this," and simply step out of believing that whole thing. Step out of the magic eye altogether.

That's accessible to us now, just as we are. You don't have to wait until you're better. You don't have to wait until somehow you've rearranged everything so you can be completely enlightened. It's not some other place. It's right here, right now, no matter what's happening. Just a shifting of allegiance.

I want to close with a short quotation from Master Sheng Yen. He's a wonderful Chan master from Taiwan, from China. He's not so healthy now, but he's really a wonderful being. He said:

"True liberation does not come from wanting to be liberated. In true liberation, there's nothing to want, nothing to discard, no place to go, and no place to avoid. It means not being moved by the environment,

not having likes or dislikes. True liberation does not come from wanting to be liberated."

Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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