The Not-Self Characteristic - Part 2

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 58:49

The other night we looked at the opening section of the Anattalakkhana Sutta, the discourse on the not-self characteristic. This is regarded as the second formal teaching of the Buddha, taught after a meditation retreat in which the five companions, now the five bhikkhus, had all attained to the first stage of awakening. He teaches this discourse to take them all the way to full enlightenment.

We covered the first section where the Buddha discusses the nature of self, particularly that self is something that is constructed. It's a project. It's not a thing and it's not a someone. The Buddha goes through the five aggregates with the same argument: "What do you think? Is body permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Bhante." "And that which is impermanent, is it painful or pleasurable? Is it dukkha or sukha?" "Dukkha, Bhante." "And that which is dukkha and subject to change, is it appropriate to regard it in terms of 'this is mine, I am this, this is myself'?" And they say, "Certainly not, Bhante"—which you will be pleased to know is the correct answer. Think of what would have happened if they had said, "Yeah, sounds fair to me." The whole history of Buddhism could have come to a grinding halt.

There are three movements that construct the self: craving, conceit, and view—tanha, mana, and ditthi. Tanha literally means thirst; essentially it's drivenness. Here it's the urge to possess, and in this context this urge to possess has power because I find my reality in my possessions. So as the owner of this, I am. I am the one who owns this. What we possess reflects back on us as the owner, and if the possession is real, well the owner has to be real. This is of course the basic principle in advertising, where what's being sold often is an image of oneself. If I get this or that product, then I become this or that person.

I'm reminded of my last trip to India. I always fly Singapore Airlines, and they show ads repeatedly whenever you want to watch a movie. There were two ads shown again and again, both apparently about finance or some important international industry.

The first ad was for a Western hotel chain. The hero was this very young, good-looking man, nicely dressed, cruising from hotel to hotel where he would do these incredibly significant business deals that would make him lots of money. In between, he'd be leaping into hotel swimming pools and swimming vigorously. He's cruising the planet, going from hotel to hotel, looking incredibly good and making heaps of money. A couple of times in the ad, as he's walking one way through the lobby, walking the other way is this gorgeous young woman, and their eyes meet significantly. But they pass on, because both have money to make, presumably. The message apparently being conveyed is: if you stay in our hotel, you can be like this person, who represents some kind of ideal. He's global, young, good-looking, and rich. He floats above the rest of the planet.

The other ad was for a bank. There was another young man—not quite as good-looking, but pretty good-looking—working in this bank, in charge of a team. He's sitting in his office looking at his team members, who are all working really hard. He gazes at them with a certain sympathetic compassion, leaps up from his desk, and in the next scene he's handing out coffees to them. They gratefully receive them because their boss is obviously concerned for their welfare. In the final scene, he's signing a deal with an older man at the airport where the older man has his private jet. He's just made some incredible deal, helping the older man advance his fortune. Beside the older man is his son, gazing upon this whole sacred event, the signing of the contract. They disappear, and the young banker gazes after them with this benevolent smile on his face.

Again, you get this ideal. Both are variations of the contemporary capitalist ideal. What I found interesting was the two souls being portrayed. Each one was meant to be incredibly attractive. The Western one was utterly alone, totally alienated from every other human being on the planet, just passing through. This was apparently supposed to be really attractive. To me, he looked like a hungry ghost. At least the Chinese banker was connected. He had people in his office who were like his family and he was looking after them. His client, who he was looking after, was definitely family, so he was connected to human families, interconnections, society.

So he was still completely driven by greed, but his self was much more grounded than the self of the Western figure. I found the Chinese one much more attractive than the Western one. But they're both selling selves. Both advertisements are doing exactly that—if you go for that self, maybe you'll buy that product, subconsciously becoming, at least in one's imagination, that person.

So you have the urge to possess. Then māna, which we said is measuring, and this is the sense of separation and identification. I measure something out, then I fix its borders, and I've turned the universe into two. There's this here and that there. Self, other, this, that. This is the fundamental sense of separation that is at the root of the self. I'm the one in here. You all are the ones out there.

And finally, view—diṭṭhi. This is the narrative, often comes out as the narrative of myself. The story that I tell myself, the stories that I tell myself that define me and define the world that I live in.

So the self is a project. It's something that we're doing. This is mine. I am this. This is myself. And it's always—again we mentioned last time—it's always specific for the Buddha. Like this is mine. This recorder. These glasses. These clothes, this position, this body, this, this, this, this. The Buddha's not saying that there's this something out there which is a self. He's saying that for each experience that arises, awareness lands on it and seizes it. This—this is my self.

But of course that project can't stop because this, whatever it is, turns into something else. It disappears. So what happens to me? Well, this is my self. But that disappears. So this is my self. So there's this quality of restless drivenness in the construction of a self. This of course is craving. Always there's this sense of, on the one hand, separation and the flip side of that is the sense of all this is happening to someone.

And view is the stories that we weave around this whole process. And out of these movements we create an identity.

So then the Buddha moves on from there. He says, therefore—and again he goes through each of the five aggregates—therefore for any kind of body, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, near or far, all body should be regarded with penetrating understanding realistically in this way: This is not mine. I am not this. This is not myself.

For any kind of feeling, for any kind of perception, for any kind of construction, for any kind of awareness, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, near or far, all awareness should be regarded with penetrating understanding realistically in this way: This is not mine. I am not this. This is not myself.

So here we have the heart of the sutta. And what he's presenting is a practice. Again he's not presenting a doctrine. Self is a practice. It's a construction project. Not-self is a practice. It's taking apart.

It's deconstructing. We become intimate with this whole process of constructing a self and we learn to recognize the clinging inherent in this project, and therefore the pain and the unsatisfactoriness of it, and then we start letting it go.

So a lot of what we're doing when we meditate is actually seeing ourselves construct ourselves. This process begins in the very mundane experience of distraction. Once we become sensitive to the movements of the mind, we realize distraction has a tremendous amount to teach us because often what we're doing in it is busily creating someone. We're basically creating someone who's far away from here having a good time. Or, more frustratingly, we create someone who's far away from here having a bad time, having a worse time than the one who's actually sitting here. But we find this attractive because we keep doing it. There's something attractive about this self.

There's something attractive about being miserable. It gives a sense of certainty, a sense of stability, solidity. "This is me, I'm the most miserable person on the planet. Other people try for the title but they don't get there."

I remember many years ago when I started meditating, what I wanted was a bit of bliss. That's all. I didn't think it was a great deal to desire. I was miserable, I wanted some bliss, and I had read these books and apparently you meditate, you attain deep absorptions and you're blissful. So I thought this sounds fair enough. I started meditating and for some strange reason I never got to the bliss. My body hurt, my mind hurt, my mind was restless, it was a struggle, but I kept slogging away because I thought one day the bliss will come.

As I got to know people who were also doing meditation practice, I discovered, to my horror, that other people were getting the bliss. I remember one time I was going to this meditation retreat and I was being given a lift by this young woman who was also going. We were both quite new in meditation. I was

shocked to discover that from the first time this woman sat down and meditated, she went into bliss. I was horrified. It was almost like a personal betrayal. But she was horrified to discover that every time I sat down there was just nothing but pain and anguish. We were horrified at each other. Some people have this karma. It's amazing.

I cultivated this whole situation into a particular bizarre form of identity. Years later I'm at Mahasi Centre doing relentless meditation practice week after week, month after month. Every now and again an experience which looked, smelled, tasted and felt suspiciously like bliss would arise. I would note it, secure in the knowledge that this won't last. And sure enough, it didn't. Then every now and again an experience would arise which looked, smelled, tasted and felt suspiciously like misery, pain and anguish and I thought, this will stick around. And it did. All of it showed my depth of understanding of the human citta until finally it dawned on me that I was making it happen.

My determination to identify with the misery was feeding it and extending it, and my determined belief that anything pleasant wasn't going to last because it wasn't me, it wasn't for me, it wasn't my possession, of course encouraged it to disappear. My identification completely influenced the whole experience that I was undergoing. But what I found the weirdest of all was my determination to identify with pain. Where did that come from? But I was constructing, I had constructed an identity out of it. And the thing is, I was familiar with it. It was comfortable. I knew who I was. I knew what was going on. I could understand the whole process.

The self is deeply attractive, even when it's painful. The job that we have is to deconstruct it.

And this is what the Buddha was talking about when he offers this formula: this is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself. The "not" is the center of this discourse. Essentially, what it's about is not-self, and the "not" starts to cut through what we take to be real, what we assume is real and me.

Notice that the Buddha, in his usual thorough way, tells us exactly what kind of experience should be subjected to this examination. What is it that we should look at in terms of "not mine," "not this," "not myself"? It's any kind of experience—past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, near or far.

This covers a lot, obviously, but basically it's any experience that can be characterized by location in space, in time, or in quality. Internal, external, near or far—these are categories based on space: Where is it? Past, future, or present—this is based on time. Gross, subtle, superior, inferior—these are qualities. So any experience that can be characterized by being located in either space or time or quality is covered by this discourse.

This boils down to any experience subject to māna, to conceit. Because it's conceit that creates the fundamental sense of separation that enables an experience to be experienced as "this" rather than "that." It's māna which enables an event to be experienced as here rather than there, past rather than future, and

so on—as important rather than trivial, or trivial rather than important.

These categories create meaning and significance. Every experience that provides me with some kind of meaning, some kind of significance, is raw material for creating a self. What this practice is all about is just tearing all that apart, deconstructing it, knocking it back: not, not, not. This is a very radical teaching. It's designed to cut away everything.

The Buddha goes on: "Seeing in this way, the trained, cultivated student is disenchanted with body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with constructions, disenchanted with consciousness. With disenchantment, obsession fades, and from the fading of obsession comes liberation. With liberation comes the understanding of liberation, along with the knowledge: birth is exhausted, the highest life is fulfilled, what should be done is done, there is no more this." This describes the practice all the way to full awakening.

The practice of not-self is essentially cognitive. It's a wisdom practice, all about seeing and understanding. We investigate, we see what we normally don't look at because we take it for granted as obvious. In practice, as the practice develops, one of the challenges is that we are becoming increasingly intimate with the experience and going deeper and deeper into the citta. Things are becoming more subtle and more refined, and therefore they can be difficult to actually pinpoint. But also we're getting deeper into what we normally never see because we simply assume it. We take it for granted. It's so obvious we don't pay it any attention.

If I'm disturbed, for example—today I'm disturbed, today's a difficult day, I'm quite disturbed—here are the symptoms: boom, boom, boom, boom. This is what I'm thinking about it. These are the conclusions that I've drawn. That seems to be what's important. That's what's going on. But what we don't see, because it's so obvious, is that all of this is the product of the citta in a certain state—a certain sensitive, vulnerable, painful, disturbed state.

We don't actually examine that state, partly because it's so subtle that it's not immediately obvious, and it's not immediately obvious largely because we take it for granted: well, this is me, I am disturbed. So what's important when I am disturbed is my disturbance. That's where all the attention goes. This is what I want you to fix. I'm disturbed. Can't you do something about it?

So all of this is coming out of the self and it assumes the reality of the self and the world created by the self. But the practitioner's job is to recognize: ah, there's disturbance, then what's in here, what's happening in the citta, deep down, that's creating, that's feeding this sense of disturbance? And what that is actually has nothing to do with me. It's something much more elemental.

We emphasized in the beginning of the retreat the relationship to body. We talked about the elements. We practiced the elements. So there's hardness, softness, movement, hot, cold, and so forth. When we examine the experience of the body, it resolves into these elements. Now the thing about these elements is that

none of them are me. I am not the hardness. I am not the softness. I am not the movement. So even then we're breaking apart the project of the self.

But as we go deeper into the citta this becomes more and more evident. And again, it's often through what we would normally call distraction, what we would normally dismiss as not worthy of our concern because I'm busy with my meditation and so the distraction is just trying to get in the way—it's that which actually reveals the project.

So the practice of not-self is cognitive, but the result is affective. The heart is transformed. The heart calms with the fading of obsession, and with that liberation becomes possible. So the Buddha presents first the cognitive: see what's going on in order to gain an entry into the heart, into the citta, so that the realm of what we've talked about as vedanā can start to transform. But that's the deeper realm and it's actually more difficult to get to and to transform.

And the turning point is nibbidā, disenchantment. So we're going to have a look at this term. Nibbidā comes from the root vid, to experience, to find, and the prefix nir, which means out. So nibbidā is a finding out, it's a discovery of something.

Enchantment always implies delusion. When we are enchanted by something, we are intoxicated by it. This happens only when we don't fully understand it. So we are enchanted with something, for example, when we feel that if only I get this, then all my problems will be solved. If only I do that, then I'll be okay.

So it might be a job. If only I get the job that I've always wanted, then everything will be all right. It might be the appropriate partner. If only I get him or her, then everything will be all right. It might be the latest computer or whatever. It can be anything from the most trivial to the most significant. But the basic relationship is: if I can only get this, then everything will be all right.

So this is enchantment. And it's based on delusion because in fact when we get whatever we get, it doesn't solve all the problems. Whatever it is turns out to be impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. So it's just part of this endless cycle.

So the experience of nibbidā, of disenchantment, reveals the disappointment in our expectations. Ultimately, compared to what I wanted, I find myself disappointed. So nibbidā, or disenchantment, is a finding out. It also implies an experiencing out, a moving out, away from our normal way of experiencing something to something quite new.

So we think something is going on, but we're wrong. And then at some point we suddenly realize: no, something else is going on. I've been completely mistaken about this all this time. Now I can see something else is going on.

It might be, for example, we're having problems with someone because this particular someone is a complete total bastard—not to put too fine a point on it—because they've done something which is totally

unacceptable and they could have no motive other than the desire to cause me personally great distress. Otherwise they wouldn't have done this. What other possible motive would there be?

But then we might find out that what we thought was going on was not, that something completely different is going on and that we had no idea what this person's situation actually was. We had no idea what their motivations were or what they were trying to accomplish. And suddenly we realize this and the experience is: oh, that's what's happening. And immediately all that aversion and distress and so on—it's gone.

Because we can see that something else is going on. So the whole relationship changes. Nibbida, disenchantment, has this quality as well. We realize something else is going on, and then our whole relationship to it changes.

Some classical examples of nibbida: when Siddhartha was a young man and he had his famous experience when he realized the universality of aging, sickness, and death. So he's living his life and there's a certain reality that he takes for granted—his own reality, that of his family and that of his people. And suddenly, bang! He sees differently and everything has changed. The whole world within which he has lived disappears and he's in another world and he needs to be doing something completely different. This is nibbida, this is disenchantment. And in his case, that experience set him off on the search for awakening.

Then the second classic example, again with Siddhartha: his disillusionment with asceticism. Remember we talked about that. One day he realized this is a complete waste of time. This doesn't work. And again it would have been this profound shift, this moving out, finding out, where he suddenly realized that everything he took for granted in terms of his whole spiritual identity—the great ascetic, champion ascetic—and it's clear from what he was telling his students years later that he really had built up his identity as the champion ascetic of all time. And he suddenly realized the whole thing is a crock. It doesn't work, and he's in this completely different world. And like the first time, he doesn't know what to do about it. All the rules have suddenly changed and he has to work out what he's doing within this new world. And so that propelled him off to the Bodhi tree and awakening.

So nibbida, disenchantment, has this quality. And it can be quite powerful, as in these two examples, but it can be very, very subtle as well. But it's both cognitive and affective. It's both head and heart.

So in terms of the heart, the affective, the heart is moved to say, "Enough." And this happens through cultivating an intimacy with the experience. People who are oppressed by particular obsessions, for example, when they meditate, sometimes it can become very distressing because it just goes on and on and on and on and on. And when will it end? And the answer simply is: it will end when we've had enough. It's that simple. Once I've had enough, I will stop. But until I've had enough, I'll keep going.

But how do I reach this point where the heart—not the head, but the heart—knows that's enough? It comes through this intimacy of experience with it. So not being separated from it by constructing yourself

out of it, but again by this developing intimacy into the heart, into the citta, going deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper into it. And when we're intimate with it, then that move naturally occurs. At one point we realize that's enough. And at that point it simply stops. And sometimes that is very sudden.

So people report, for example, they have a particular obsession that arises in the mind. And sometimes a meditator will come into an interview kind of a bit spaced out because they've been harassed by this obsession for years, and they'll report: "It arose, I recognized it, and I just thought, 'No.' And it stopped. And I haven't seen it since."

And this is nibbida. This is disenchantment.

"Could that be applied to drugs and alcohol?"

Yeah. It's the same process. It's like, when do people stop? It's literally when they've had enough. Actually, there's one Sydney barrister, the guy who created the series about the... Rake? Rake, yeah. He's got a column in Fairfax. And in one of his columns he said, "I wish somebody had told me when I was young that the human body can only consume so much alcohol in one lifetime. Because if I had known, I would have paced myself. But as it is, by the time I was forty, I had already consumed it."

So that was nibbida. What he was describing was nibbida. It's like at forty he suddenly realized, "Oh, I've had enough now."

And at that point he stopped. And it's a completely natural development. That kind of insight lasts. He'll stay sober. If the disenchantment is deep enough, then he won't go back. There's no need to go back. Been there, done that. This is an expression of nibbida, of disenchantment.

So nibbida is affective—the heart is moved to say enough. It's also cognitive—a finding out, an understanding that arises through that response. Now I can see what's been going on. Now I understand it. It's affective because the heart changes. What previously seemed desirable now is not. I just don't want that anymore. Other things become desirable, and these are what I pursue. The heart changes.

One of the transitions that practitioners go through is when old pleasures drop away but new ones haven't yet taken their place. A kind of affective confusion can arise. I remember once when I was in Hawaii, one of my Zen friends who was a very interesting character—if you wanted a typical example of the Zen personality, or one particular kind of Zen personality, it was him. He embodied this total directness and almost fierceness of engagement with whatever was happening.

We were walking down this country road in Maui one day when he suddenly stopped. A look of complete confusion and bewilderment came over his face—totally uncharacteristic. I stopped and asked, "What's the matter? What's the problem?" And he said, "Suddenly I realize I don't know what I want." It really hit him.

It can be quite a profound experience when you actually realize that. Our whole life is geared around

what we want. But what if we suddenly realize, "I don't know what I want"? Who am I then? Where do I go? Sometimes we find that what we used to want, what used to be pleasurable, is gone. Maybe we're not quite sure about what's replacing it.

When one set of desires drops away, along with it could well drop away a whole social network. Friends call asking, "Why don't you want to come out? You haven't come out with us for months. What's the problem?" Well, I just don't want to. And then the social network is gone. The person is left wondering, "Where is my social network? I haven't actually found other people who want what I want."

The heart changes, desire changes, and with it the world within which we live. When our heart is changed, the world that we live in is different. And this, again, is cognitive. The world is different. What previously was hidden is now obvious. What previously we could never have seen is now as clear as day.

This disenchantment has this transformative, turning-around effect. And again, with this discourse, if you read it superficially, you might get the impression that disenchantment happens just once. But it happens again and again at different levels.

One way of looking at it is as a process of simple maturity. I used to challenge my audiences by asking: "How many of you today follow or chase the same desires that you had when you were ten?" They've all changed now. We're all chasing different things because we've matured. What was desirable when we were ten is no longer desirable today.

There was one Englishman in the audience who immediately objected and said, "Except football." So maybe that's the exception to the Buddha's teaching—there's always an exception to something.

The Buddha says that with disenchantment, obsession fades. And from the fading of obsession comes liberation. This fading of obsession is *virāga*, which we've already discussed. *Rāga*, usually translated as lust or passion, literally means color. *Virāga* is literally the fading of color.

The image is of a dyed cloth. When you wash it, it looks the same. You wash it again—it looks the same. You wash it, wash it, wash it, and at some point you look at it and realize it's not the same anymore. It's faded. Then it progressively fades further. This is the fading of obsession.

Again, what we're talking about is a natural process of maturity. We're not so driven; we have some distance that we didn't have before. And it comes about gradually. Part of the gradual aspect is that we don't notice the step-by-step progression.

This is especially true when we're doing meditation—it's like we're at the coalface, looking at the details and specifics. It's a very in-your-face kind of relationship, which is characteristic of mindfulness. And we don't notice the changes happening because they're so slight day by day. It's like we don't notice ourselves growing up. We don't notice ourselves getting old until something happens—"Oh, I used to be able to do this but I can't do it now." We don't notice how that happens step by step by step.

It's the same with the fading of obsession. We don't notice every step of the way, but there are points when we realize, "Oh, things are different now. My relationship to the world is different from what it used to be. My relationship to others, to myself, has changed. It's different now." So this is a gradual process.

With disenchantment, obsession fades, and from the fading of obsession comes liberation. Liberation is *vi mutti* in Pali or *vimokṣa* in Sanskrit. *Vimutti* comes from the verb *muñcati*—to release—and it's the same verb used in archery. If you imagine firing a bow, we pull it back to its maximum tension and then release. The arrow is released and goes away very suddenly.

So liberation has this implication of suddenness—a sudden shock of awareness. It's like suddenly, "It's different. I've never seen this before. This is new." We suddenly know something quite new. And again, it's unexpected. It always appears as if by accident.

My old Zen teacher, Robert Aitken Roshi, used to say that awakening always comes about by accident. The practice makes us accident-prone—and that's the causal relationship. Nothing that we do in the practice causes liberation, but it sets up the conditions in which the accident might occur. And of course the Zen stories are full of these accidents. They really like these accidents.

And unless you know the backstory, you get the impression that awakening just falls from heaven. But of course it doesn't just fall from heaven. It comes about through years of preparing the conditions.

So liberation implies this sudden shock. Again, it can be gross or very, very subtle. Suddenly something is new, perhaps undefinable, perhaps we can't even pinpoint what it is. But it's no longer normality. Something has changed.

With liberation comes the understanding of liberation. And here, I think this kind of move is typical of the Buddha. Liberation could be seen as affective, but also cognitive. But understanding definitely implies a reflexive distance and looking back on the situation. We know ourselves and we know ourselves to be different, so we have a sense of what happened or the significance of what happened.

We've been talking about this before in terms of the meaning of an experience. Something happens, and then we get a sense of what this means. So I might recognize, I might read the experience in some way: "Oh, I've just seen impermanence, or I've seen dukkha, or I've seen not-self." Now what we're doing is putting a meaning on the experience. And with that meaning comes a sense of, well, this is who I am, and this is the world.

So in a sense, we're creating a new self. But it's a different self. And it's a self held differently than before. But it's the meaning that gives the experience significance and therefore changes the way that we live.

So with liberation comes the understanding of liberation, along with the knowledge: "Birth is exhausted, the highest life is fulfilled, what should be done is done, there is no more of this."

Now this is—in a linear sense, this passage will be read as full awakening. In a non-linear sense, this is

more like the experience of emptiness that can occur a number of times. But each time that it occurs, it has this quality of "there is no more of this." And the "this" indicates the place where we ground ourselves—the final layer of concept that tells us who we are and what this means.

So the "this" here indicates the "I am this." It's what the awareness lands upon to create something and someone out of. And it's taken away. There is no more "this." Pull out the rug. And there's nothing.

We've looked at the self as a process. The self is a project. A project never completed. So we define ourselves through story, and our story is never completed. It's never finished. How many people here have actually completed the last chapter? Or is there another one that's going to come? It's always another one that's going to come. There's always another episode in the drama of our lives.

And so part of the meaning of this experience right now is always the fact that it's the prelude to something else which is going to come next. And this is why death is such a challenge to the self. Because death represents a sudden cutting off of the story. Suddenly, chop—story's cut.

And it always arrives as a cheat. It's like following a TV drama which you're really invested in, and they suddenly stop it before the end. There are definitely several more episodes, at least, that could be squeezed out of this. And then suddenly it's all over. And you can't help but feel cheated before everything's wrapped up.

And death is like this. So we may be ready to die, but never today. Because we haven't wrapped up the loose ends yet. There's another episode that has to come first. But the final episode never does arrive. And so when it comes to an end, it's always a shock and it's always a cheat.

Have you seen people ready for death?

Like those who have come to a point of peace. They've been sick for a long time perhaps, and they are actually quite ready. I'm talking about the normal human condition rather than someone who's been practicing and preparing for it.

And this is the power of the "no more" - na param. In terms of the practice, in terms of realization, right now already in the middle of the drama where one day succeeds another, there is no more. This is the realization that there really is no next. That this is all that there is and this is all that there ever has been or ever will be. There never has been any past and there never has been any future.

This understanding can happen now. In fact, it can only happen right now. And when it happens, it's bleeding obvious that nothing is going to happen next because there is no next. Nothing ever did happen because there's no past.

The understanding of anatta always arrives with a sense of completion, that there's nothing further needed. There's nothing extra that has to be added. There's no possibility of anything extra. And this is the abandonment of the conceit "I am" - the abandonment of asmi mana.

Again, mana is measurement and comparison. Past and future depend on mana, because past and future can only exist when they're measured against the present. The present can only exist when it is measured against past and future. I can only exist measured against you, and you can only exist measured against me. Good can only exist measured against bad, and bad can only exist measured against good.

But when mana drops away, all positions cease. They're just gone. No past, no present, and no future. No duality. Mana is all about duality. The cessation of mana is all about non-duality. Duality and non-duality are terms that entered later, but the Buddha's talking about the same thing.

This is why the Anattalakkhana Sutta ends with silence. "This is not mine. I am not this. This is not my soul." The "not" is the most we can say, and even this is too much. As soon as we reach out and say, "this is what it is," then we're back in mana, in conceit, because "this" can only exist measured against "that." As soon as we move in to make something out of the experience, we're back in mana, we're back in conceit.

All we have is silence, or at least that's the culminating point of this discourse. It's not a passive silence. It's action in the world but without an actor. It's movement but without someone who moves. It's life but without someone who is living. A path without anybody walking it. But at that point, there is nothing to be said about it. Even "not" is too much.

"This is what the Blessed One said, and the group of five bhikkhus rejoiced in the Blessed One's words. And as he spoke, the hearts of the group of five bhikkhus were fully liberated from the taints. Then there were six arahants in the world."

Arahant - fully awakened. Now there are six people fully awakened: the Buddha and the five bhikkhus. The Dharma wheel is turning and Buddhism is taking shape. There's now a community of awakened ones that exists.

Then there were six Arahants in the world—the Buddha and the five bhikkhus, all fully awakened. The Dharma wheel was turning, and Buddhism was taking shape. There was now a community of awakened ones in existence.

The transformation was complete. What had begun with the Buddha's solitary awakening under the Bodhi tree had blossomed into a sangha of realized beings. The first disciples had received the teaching, practiced with dedication, and attained the same liberation their teacher had found. The three jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—were now established in the world.

This marks a pivotal moment in Buddhist history. No longer was the Buddha walking alone with his realization. The teaching had been transmitted, understood, and embodied by others. The possibility of awakening was proven not to be unique to one extraordinary individual, but accessible to sincere practitioners who followed the path with right effort and understanding.

From this humble beginning—one teacher and five students gathered in a deer park—the Dharma would

spread across continents and through millennia, offering countless beings the same possibility of liberation that these first six awakened ones had realized.

Thank you for listening.

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