Anattā — Not-Self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Retreat Talks · 25 min read

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samasambuddhasa

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

We've now discussed two of the three characteristics that the Buddha taught to be the fundamental marks of all existence. The first, *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness, pertains to any sentient being and especially human beings, how they contact and make sense of the world, and how a delusive relationship to sensual pain and pleasure causes suffering. We manufacture our own suffering because we believe that happiness is to be found in the sensual world. Then there was the quality of *anicca*, transience, the fact that everything is in process. As we also know from our science, there isn't actually any thing as such in the universe. It's all energy changing from one shape or form into another.

Both of these two characteristics aren't difficult to grasp. The only small difficulty I think we have is to see how indulgence in pleasure always brings dissatisfaction in its wake. The third characteristic, however, *an attā*, or the doctrine of not-self, as it can be translated literally, is more difficult for us to grasp. But nonetheless, we can begin to intellectually understand the Buddha's position that nothing in the universe has substance, and the self, this person, that I feel and experience myself to be, is but a phantasm. It doesn't really have any real, substantial, essential existence.

First of all, we need to see the Buddha was not a philosopher. He was not a philosopher if what we mean by that word is someone who is concerned to convince someone else of an idea, someone who is simply concerned to prove a given premise. For the philosopher, it is satisfying enough to have someone agree with them. For instance, if a philosopher states that happiness is the goal of life, their concern is to prove that premise by various arguments. It matters little whether the philosopher themselves actually lives a happy life or not. It's an ideal, an idea worth striving for, even if the philosopher at heart doesn't really know whether it's possible or not. What is necessary is that they are convinced by reasonable argument.

But in this sense we're all philosophers to a degree. We prefer enticing logic. There's a part of us that feels satisfied that we've understood, accepted, and have faith in a statement. Believing in something is so much easier than coming to know by one's own personal experience. That's what we mean by realization, making it real for ourselves. But this demands effort, a lot of effort.

The Buddha was well acquainted with all the philosophical viewpoints of his day. As the discussions he has with various Brahmins and wandering ascetics show, he was able to do more than hold his own. But

he knew where arguments stopped. What he saw was that these Brahmins and *Samaṇa* were caught up in simply trying to win arguments. They were, he said, ensnared in a jungle of views and opinions.

The Buddha had no reason to win arguments for winning's sake. His aim was not simply to convince people that his understanding was correct, but, and here's the difference, he wanted people to experience what he had experienced. In this sense he was a mystic, not some new age spaced out psychic you understand, but someone who has understood the deeper mysteries of life, someone who has realized, actually experienced for themselves, something beyond the world of apparition, the world of things, the world of sense-data and thought, beyond the phenomenal world.

The Buddha referred to himself as the *Tathāgata*, which translated literally means thus gone, or perhaps arrived there, but it was his way of saying transcendent. The Buddha's concern was to get people to have the same supramundane experience. Hence everything he said had the purpose of getting those convinced to do the practice, to work at the practice in order to experience what he himself had attained. Unlike the philosopher, he really did know that happiness was the goal of human endeavour because he himself lived in perfect contentment and peace.

So now we come to this difficult teaching of *anattā*, not self. The primary confusion is that this is one of those philosophical premises that we can argue about. That *anattā* means there is no self, no soul, no eternal spirit, and so on. This is quite understandable. Even people in his own day accused the Buddha of being an annihilationist, that is, someone who didn't believe in an eternal self and that the human simply vanished in total at death. There was no afterlife, and even if there were, as some annihilationists believed, in the end it would just fizzle out when *kamma* had completed its momentum.

But the Buddha insisted he was not an annihilationist, and that the only annihilation was of greed, hatred and delusion. The Buddha's position was grounded in his present state, which he referred to as *Nibbāna*. Everything was to be measured against that living experience. Perhaps he would have been on easier ground if he had used an expression as not-*Nibbāna* for everything that the unenlightened person experienced.

In fact, there is a discourse where greater and greater pleasures are described, beginning with the delicious sensual pleasures and rising to the highest bliss of *jhānic* absorption. And he says that all these states are not the highest happiness, that is, not *Nibbāna*.

Although the Buddha's choice of the word *anattā* did and still confuses, he had good reason for choosing this word instead of others. He wanted to undermine the belief that anything a person experienced, whether through the five senses or the mind with its thoughts and images, or the heart with all its emotions and moods, in any way constituted something solid or everlasting.

To do this he would deconstruct the human being, and he did this by looking at the human being in various ways. We shall look at three of them, by way of the aggregates, the spheres, and the four

foundations of mindfulness. By this process of deconstruction, the idea of something, anything, being whole, entire unto itself, an integer, a one, is undermined.

It is natural for the discriminative mind to see things as individual objects, to see objects as isolated, to cut up the world into this and that, and it's necessary we do so. Can you imagine not being able to tell the difference between a cup of tea and a cup of water? Heaven forbid. There's nothing wrong with seeing the world like this so long as we also see it isn't the way things really are. This ability of the mind to create concepts is not destroyed by enlightenment. It is simply put in its proper context.

There's a good example of this in art. Artists are forever trying to show us how the world really is. The Impressionists made us see that objects can only be fully understood within the environment they stand. A tree colours into the countryside. The Expressionists showed us that what we see is coloured by our emotions.

Now let's take a car. That's an object. We see it quite distinctly as separate from its environment. We see it moving as a separate object, and we know if we get in the way it's going to hurt. At an ordinary, conventional level of understanding, a car is hard and solid and is one thing, but we know it's made up. If we laid out all the pieces of a car on the floor, we wouldn't say that's a car. We'd say they're all the parts necessary to make up a car. Then, when we put it together, something quite magical happens. It propels itself. Definitely more amazing is an aeroplane. Tons of metal and what have you just lift so easily, so gracefully into flight.

And what we come to realise is the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts, even at a basic level. Take a few bits of wood and put them together, and hey presto, a chair, a table, a bed, and so on. When we look at the universe, we see it as a collection of wholes, forming greater wholes, until we arrive at the whole which is the cosmos itself.

When we look at a human being, it's the same. If you're a materialist for whom only matter exists, then there's the wonder of consciousness. When all the bits and pieces are put together and functioning, there arises this mysterious capacity to be conscious, to be aware, and in higher primates and human beings to be self-aware. This is something extra that arises inexplicably, accidentally, incidentally. This by-product is called by philosophers an epiphenomena. Once we label something, we think we understand it.

Now it's this very by-product that confuses us. Something that's made up of lots of other things produces a new function. The car made up of bits propels itself, the plane flies. And we see it as a whole, an integer, a one. We forget it's made up of parts. It's only when the car won't start, or the plane drops out of the sky, that we're suddenly pulled up short. It's only when a part of the body hurts or becomes ill that we suddenly realize that wholes are made up of parts.

Now the most common deconstruction device in the discourses is the aggregates or collections or heaps, the *khandha*. You will notice here links with the dependent originations. The Buddha divides the human

into five different aggregates: the physical base, perceptions, feelings, volitional formations and cognition.

The physical base or *rūpa* is again divided into four primary elements we've mentioned before: earth or solidity, fire or temperature, air or movement and water or cohesion. These four great elements are the way that the mind first experiences matter. At that basic percept there is only the object, the sense faculty, and cognition, a knowing. Sound, for instance, at this level, is experienced simply as pressure on the eardrum. Heaviness or lightness, that's the earth element. It's not that the other elements are not present. All the elements are present in any one given percept, but one always predominates. Fire or temperature would predominate in sight. Where there's light, there's heat, and vice versa.

So the whole experience of sense contact can be deconstructed into these elements. Now whether these elements actually exist outside the mind is not relevant, for these are simply the way the senses sense the world out there. And in our meditation, we can do it in a more obvious way by experiencing the different parts of the body from this point of view. Bones can be felt as solid, just the quality of hardness. The heat or cold we feel can be seen as just temperature. The sponginess of muscles and flesh can be experienced as elasticity, cohesiveness. The feeling of movement caused by breathing can also be isolated.

Why do this? Simply to break down the concept of wholeness. For with the concept of wholeness comes the concept of substance, real independent existence. The me, the I. Such as, I feel, therefore I am. I think, therefore I am. And of course, I suffer, therefore I am. And that's the delusion.

Then there are all the perceptions that the mind produces every moment. This is the second aggregate, *saññā*. From this basic contact we get our perceptions of taste. Whether something is salty, sweet, bitter, astringent or sour, that's why I like to stress the importance of eating, because we get in touch with this ever-present flow of perceptions and we can begin to see how they build up into the concept of a particular dish. If we were blindfolded, we'd still be able to tell it was spaghetti and not curry. But when we eat mindfully, we become aware of the different tastes that go into making up the supposed one taste, such as the hardness of spaghetti, the sweetness and saltiness in the sauce, and so on. It again breaks up for us the delusion that there's only one taste in the taste of spaghetti.

Then there's feeling, the third aggregate, *vedanā*. What is meant here is the secondary response to sensations. Feelings arise when we experience all these perceptions as likeable or unlikeable, pleasant or unpleasant. This also includes how we experience the feelings in our body caused by emotions. Again, when we concentrate inwardly, we can see that we divide our experience of life into pleasant and unpleasant. Although we also talk about neutral feelings, if we get close up to them, we will discover some delicate shade of liking or disliking there.

These three *khandha*, aggregates, are the materials upon which the fourth *khandha* works, the *saṅkhāra*, the volitional formations. It's here that self steps in and tries to take control. A world is created out of all the percepts, perceptions and feelings. Our whole emotional and intellectual life springs out of this. And it's all manufactured by self for the pleasure of self, when we're deluded. And the creator is our will,

which empowers all the intentions we make throughout our life. It's with these *saṅkhāra*, volitional formations, fabrications, creations, that we go out and do things. For the enlightened person, of course, it becomes a way of expressing wisdom into the world by way of compassionate action and service.

And finally there are the acts of cognition, *viññāṇa*. This is a discriminative consciousness. It sees everything as separate, whether it be by way of contradiction or comparison. *Viññāṇa* is the mind's ability to hold a frame up that is then understood. It's like a mirror which holds all the images together as a whole and gives us the impression that we live in a solid world. We simply couldn't function if all we were aware of was the storm of perceptions coming through the sense doors. It is the primary knowing, it is the faculty that tells us there's a bell ringing and it's lunchtime. It's not to be confused with the understanding or the intuitive intelligence, *satipaññā*. That, as we shall see, is something else.

So this is one way the Buddha deconstructs our experience of the world by way of the *khandha*, the aggregates of form or matter, basic perceptions, feelings in the body caused both by the body itself and the mind, volitional formations which are all our emotional and thought life, manufactured by our power of will, and finally cognition or a primary knowing.

And we can use this in our practice. We can simply note things from this point of view. We note movement in the breath, heat or cold, a fire element, pressure, the earth element or the tightness we feel, the air element, the sheer movement, the lightness of joy, the warmth of love, and so on. Perceptions we note as images or thoughts. Feelings we feel directly, experience intimately and note. The *saṅkhāra* are all our intentions that manufacture the fantasies and thoughts, both consciously volitional or habitual, throughout the whole day. And cognition can be recognized in the act of noting of any object, no matter what it is, as the object we come to note.

The second way the Buddha deconstructs the human experience is by way of the avenues or spheres of cognition. Each avenue or sphere being distinct, exclusive and discrete. The five senses and the mind itself. When it comes to the five senses, we can't mix them. We can't smell with our eyes and we can't see with our ears and so on. They are quite different avenues of consciousness or spheres of experience and this is what the Buddha calls them, the *āyatana*, the spheres.

The mind itself is seen as the sixth sense in this case, for it makes sense of all the other incoming data. What is actually received into the mind is quite minimal. The mind has to work hard to put it all together. But it is quite discrete from the sense-bases, for if all the five senses were to disappear, the mind would have nothing to do but mess around in the library of its own images, thoughts, moods and emotions.

Now when we experience an event, it is experienced again as a whole. At the cinema or watching a video or TV, it's all one experience. We see the film, hear the dialogue, the music, we taste the popcorn or biscuits. It's all one big experience. It's only when we start concentrating on the moment that we realize there are a myriad of mental processes going on. In fact, there can only arise one act of cognition at a time. The mind can only perceive one piece of data at any one given moment, but it's all going so fast and

cognition is so good at manufacturing pictures out of that data that we experience life as one continuous whole, not as a series of discrete perceptions.

Can you imagine watching TV, where at one moment you see the picture, that goes out, and then you hear the dialogue? You put a biscuit in your mouth, and on the taste you lose both the vision and the hearing of the program. It would be impossible to live like that in a sort of stroboscopic universe. Thanks to the speed of cognition, it's all magically formulated into one piece. But there lies our delusion, because we believe that's the way things really are.

The point of insight meditation is to see beyond the apparent and to see that everything is only a compendium, a collection. There's nothing real or solid about any experience whatsoever. As the Buddha says, it's all like bubbles in a stream. By noting our meditative experiences along these lines, the avenues of consciousness, and realizing how discrete they are, we get in touch with how we fabricate the world and undermine the delusion of wholeness or substance. And this, of course, rebounds upon the concept of the self, of the me. What is this me? Where is this me to be found if everything I believe to be me is nothing but a collection of sensual and mental data?

Now there is another way the Buddha deconstructs our experience by way of the elements, the *dhātu*. I want to mention it briefly here because it tells us how far this deconstruction can go. The last two of the 24 elements are called the mind object and the mind cognition elements. These go into a moment to moment detail of how the mind manufactures a single thought. And believe it or not, this can actually be experienced. That's how profound this meditation can take us into seeing how the mind works to generate a world and ultimately how we come to be deceived by it.

Now apart from this process of deconstruction, there is another way in which we can see that the self is a false identity. The self likes to think of itself in control, the agent, to have power over. It wants to do my own thing, in my own way, in my own time.

The Buddha, after he became enlightened, sought out his five companions. He found them in Isipatana Park. There, he first talked about the Four Noble Truths, and one of the company attained the first level of enlightenment, stream entry, *Sotāpanna*. But when he gave his second discourse, they were all fully awakened. This discourse is called the discourse on the characteristic of not-self.

Here's the gist of it. Meditators, the body, form, the sense bases, are not-self. If the body was a self, it would not lead to suffering. For one could say to the body, let the body be healthy, let the body not be sick. But the body isn't like that. It is because we can't tell the body what to do that suffering arises.

We feel we have control over the body, don't we? I mean, we can make it walk and talk and eat and so on. But this is like the driver of a car who can make the car start and stop, turn left or right. But what control has the driver over the car in itself? And how much does a driver know about the workings of a car? We find ourselves in a similar position with the body. On closer inspection, we experience little of the internal

workings, never mind know about them. Indeed, the body, for the most part, takes care of itself.

What do I experience of the digestive system? What control have I got over it? What about the circulatory system? I haven't a clue in terms of real experience what my blood is doing. I've read about it, but I've never experienced hemoglobin turning red when it meets with oxygen in the lungs. I feel my abdomen and chest moving when I breathe, but I've never experienced the blood exchanging carbon dioxide for oxygen. The whole thing just works altogether without me interfering. In fact, it's when I don't recognise that I'm not the body that I'm in danger of doing it harm, when I push the body too hard or overeat and drink intoxicants and so on.

In other words, although we have a certain amount of control over the body, it's quite superficial. I can make it walk and talk but I can't make it grow one way or the other. Or make it beautiful. I can't will myself to become a great athlete. I can't stop it growing old and I can't stop it dying. My control over the body is superficial. And yet I'm utterly dependent on this body for my existence on this planet. A humbling thought.

In the same way, we can go through the other *khandha*, the aggregates, and see that it's the same with the perceptions we have, the feelings, the emotions, and the thoughts we have. Eventually, we have very little control over the type of personality we have. Even when we become fully enlightened, we don't change the flavor of our personality radically. The Buddha was still recognizably Siddhartha Gautama. His five companions recognized him as such, but that personality was then purified of all malevolence.

This lack of power can be seen even in the way we perceive the world. Humans can see only a particular band within the whole spectrum of colour, and each of us has our own experience of colour. Some of us are colourblind, some of us have poor sight. Our emotional life is also conditioned, and our thought life too. For instance, certain types of music will affect us, other types won't. Our thought is bound up with the language we speak and the culture that's produced it. European people, for instance, have very different cultural values to people in the East. With insight, of course, we do begin to create a better interior life. But it will still be greatly conditioned by our culture and environment.

We've now discussed two aspects of how the Buddha undermines the self-delusion. By deconstructing a seeming whole and by questioning the power that self presumes to have. In this way, the Buddha tries to undermine the belief that the body and mind are some sort of eternal person, soul or spirit.

But our delusion doesn't stop there at the obvious, so to speak. He also wanted to undermine the belief that beneath these attributes, the body and mind as we experience them, lies any other real self whatsoever, something which is eternal. Take a hand, for instance. Let's look at it and feel it. We see it has certain colour, a certain shape. We feel it has soft parts and hard parts, and so on. Let's presume that we've seen and felt a hand to an ultimate degree. We know all its attributes. We realise it's made up of bits and pieces. But let's say this isn't the real hand. To discover the real hand, we must, as it were, slip these attributes away. Can you imagine taking off your hand as you would a glove to reveal another hand which

was real, substantial, unchangeable, eternal, indestructible, and so on?

It was this sort of idea that the Buddha also wanted to undermine. For this was the more subtle meaning of the word *atta*, self, in his time, as it is today for people who believe in an afterlife, namely that there is a subtle body beneath or within the material body that is substantial, immortal, and will go on to live forever.

At the time of the Buddha, the scriptures of the Brahmins, now called Hinduism, had been developing along similar lines, but in the general understanding of things, the *Atta*, the Self, had come to mean both the empirical Self and the Eternal Self, the capital S. The empirical self is how we experience ourselves now as personalities, as persons with thoughts, emotions, sensations, relationships and so on. But the eternal self posited some self beneath or transcendent of this, like the real hand beneath the apparent hand.

Whatever later Hinduism came to believe, it was all confusion in the Buddha's time. So the Buddha simply swept that confusion aside by telling everyone that anything they conceived of, an eternal soul, spirit or self, was but wishful thinking. Put another way, anything they experienced by way of the body, heart and mind was not self, *anattā*. Whether physical, psychological or ethereal, whatever self a person experienced themselves to be, that self was a construct and had no real, substantial or essential existence.

Now let us remember that the Buddha is concerned to get us to experience this, to come to know this for ourselves. We have to have practical, direct, personal experience. Remember, to be convinced of all this by way of thought, by way of a philosophical proposition, just won't do. We might be able to write deep philosophical books about it, but that won't bring us to the end of suffering.

So the Buddha now deconstructs the human being, this psychophysical organism, into yet another division in order to lead us to an experiential understanding, a direct realization of not-self. He now teaches us to look at ourselves from the point of view of the four foundations of mindfulness, the *satipaṭṭhāna*. They can be seen as four frames of reference, whereby we can experience this psychophysical organism I call me, break down its illusion of wholeness, and discover indeed that there is no other reality beneath them, within them, above them, or anywhere around them.

You will by now be familiar with all the terminology but it's looked at in a slightly different way. This is important because up till now we've looked at ways of deconstructing the human being but they've had an intellectual bias. With the *Satipaṭṭhāna* the Buddha is being immediate and practical. This is the way we can note, observe, feel and experience and so come to understand the way we really are by the direct path of Vipassanā.

The first is *Kāyānupassanā*, investigating the body. It means we need to be mindful of all our daily actions, standing, walking and so on, and to see that no action is one thing. It's made up of a myriad of movements. This includes the action of breathing. At its most profound level is to see how the mind contacts the body.

That's when we experience those four great elements of earth, fire and so on we discussed earlier.

Then there's a whole area of feeling in the body. That's *vedanānupassanā*. These feelings, remember, can be caused by the body, as when our knees hurt, or by the mind, as when an emotion comes up.

Then there's *cittānupassanā*. Here we note, feel, observe, and come to know our states of mind, all the moods and emotions, thoughts and images, whether it's concentrated or not, suffering or not, and so on.

And finally, there's *Dhammānupassanā*. This refers to certain teachings which are specific to the Buddha Dhamma. The five aggregates, the five hindrances, the six sense spheres, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths, which include, of course, the three characteristics of existence, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. We have, of course, touched upon all these during the last few days.

These *satipaṭṭhāna*, establishments of awareness, are the frames of reference by which the intuitive wisdom, *paññā*, can investigate and come to see, to realize the human condition from an enlightened point of view.

In meditation, through the process of *vipassanā*, we can begin to experience directly this doctrine of *anatt ā*, not self. The most obvious way is through the noting technique. Whenever something comes into our attention, be it the breath, a sensation, a feeling, a thought, we mentally point to it as it were. We note it. We say, rising, falling, itching, anger, joy, and so on. This pointing at it distances us from it. What we are really saying is, there are the feelings of the breath, rising and falling. There are the feelings of itching, and so on. There, over there, not here. Not here within the knowing. We are objectifying the inner world in the same way as babies and toddlers we began to objectify the outer world by pointing. At the inner objects, the sensations, feelings, thoughts, we're distancing ourselves from them, and the noting technique helps us to do that.

As our meditation deepens, then thought disappears, the noting stops, and we learn to perceive that what we experience within ourselves is not the same as the knowing which is experiencing it. At this point, the true nature of the knowing begins to dawn upon us. What is this awareness? What is this intuitive intelligence? What is *satipaññ*a? Now that's the question, and this meditation is leading us directly to that answer.

Now here's the paradox. Why is it that the Buddha says that *Nibbāna* is just as we would want any eternal self to be, but it is not self? Unlike everything in the phenomenal world, which is *anicca*, transient, *Nibbān a* is *nicca*, not transient. It doesn't arise and pass away. It is the deathless, immortal, just like an eternal self. Unlike the enlightened state where everything is eventually unsatisfactory, *Nibbāna* is a state of complete contentment, perfect peace, yet it is not an eternal self.

This is expressed most clearly in the three verses we chant every morning. All conditioned things are impermanent. All conditioned things are unsatisfactory. But all conditioned things and the unconditioned

are not self. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

When we think about it, is there ever a time when the idea of me doesn't come up without a self-awareness? Indeed, isn't that what we mean by a self? The feeling of a me. Is there a self in deep sleep? We just presume it, don't we? I presume that since I went to sleep feeling myself to be me, and wake up feeling the same, my self must have been there all through sleep. But it's an inference, isn't it? An assumption. How can we prove it?

In meditation we feel ourselves to be an observer. There seems always to be somebody watching, doing, experiencing. In pure *vipassanā*, this feeling vanishes entirely. Yet there is still the watching, the doing, the experiencing, but no sense of a self doing it. That's why the Buddha says, In the seeing, there's only the seeing. In the hearing, there's only the hearing. In the cognizing, there's only the cognizing.

Can we, unenlightened beings as we are, get a taste of what that selfless state might be? Yes, indeed we can, but again a paradox. We can't do it by an act of self-will. It's not within the power of self to go beyond self. All we can do is set up the conditions whereby we might have a not-self experience. And here is where the Buddha shows the depth of his gift as a teacher. He asks us only to be concerned with establishing right awareness, not to bother about experiencing *Nibbāna* or not-self, which we simply can't achieve by an act of will.

So what is right awareness? First of all, it's not intellectual knowledge. If everything said in this talk has been fairly new, you may very well be confused by the five of these and the four of those. Well, don't worry. If you're interested in it at all, then after this course you can read and study it all. But here in meditation, it's not even necessary to know it. So I go on about it because through these arguments we can at least become intellectually convinced of our insubstantiality. Being convinced intellectually, hopefully we have more faith in *vipassanā* and more eagerness to see if it's really true. In other words, it's about getting a right attitude.

Now, presumably we have it now. So we can concentrate just on the practice, which is simply to be aware of all that arises and passes away. As we begin to centre in on what we are experiencing, let's say the sensations caused by the breath, using the noting to keep the thinking mind from making us lose our focus, *sati*, awareness begins to concentrate on, gather around a smaller and smaller event, a smaller and smaller unit of time, drawing itself into the immediate present moment. And at that point there is no time to think, no time to reflect. The thinking mind has no time in which to think. The noting stops.

As the interval of time decreases, so the time interval is so small we can experience single sensations arising and passing away. This *sati* awareness doesn't even have the time to recognize its own presence, seeing itself, feeling itself mirrored within the mind like a shadow. It constructs an image of itself. That image we experience as self-awareness. But as this awareness sits simply in the presenting instant, even that feeling of self-awareness disappears.

And there is the experience of just observing, just watching. The feeling, the idea, the belief that there is a soul, a self, a spirit, disappears. For that moment, and for longer periods of time, if the practice is good, the meditator experiences pure awareness, unadulterated by the view or feeling of a self.

We can see now that the *Anattā* teaching is not saying there is nothing, but that whatever ultimate reality is, it is not a self or a feeling of a self. In ultimate reality, just as in the phenomenal world, there are no things. And the feeling of self-awareness is the feeling of a thing, but the subtlest of things, and therefore the most difficult of things to perceive as insubstantial and not self.

So how do we get a glimpse of this? By doing the practice according to the Buddha's instructions. Forget about *Nibbāna*. Forget about trying to have a spiritual experience. Forget about the *vipassanā* insights. Forget about achieving anything. Save a moment-to-moment attentiveness. Just place all our energy into observing the presenting object, be it a sensation, emotion or thought. Ultimate truth is to be experienced in the presenting event, the here and now. Hence, our whole effort is simply to be present. Ultimately, we will have that glimpse.

The Buddha says there is a consciousness which has no characteristics, no attributes, beyond the realm of scientific measurement. A consciousness that is without boundary, in all directions, lustrous, full of light, awake. Just this is the end of suffering.

Let's pause here for a moment. Whenever we look at something, that becomes an object. Being an object, it cannot be the subject. The knowing cannot be what it knows. Even the feeling of a self, when we are self-aware, self-conscious, must also be an object. It cannot be that which knows. Grasping this, at first a fear and anxiety may arise in us. Who are we if we're not this body, these emotions, these thoughts, this personality? But when we begin to see things as they really are, and where our true nature actually resides, then a real peace, a real happiness begins to flower.

And where does our true nature reside? It resides in our ability to discover a relationship to the world without and the world within, wherein we find intimacy without identity, where we are utterly engaged, utterly involved and yet detached. Such paradox can only be solved by that knowing the Buddha within. So we have to keep working

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