



2023-03-04 - Selves and Not Self: Afternoon Talk / Q&A

Ajaan Thanissaro (Ajaan Geoff)

Ajaan Thanissaro 00:07

I talked this morning about how on the path you need to use perception of self and the perception of not-self selectively. After all, you're engaged in the process of becoming already and that process involves creating a sense of self around a desire and also having a sense of the world in which that desire can be attained. So as you're practicing part of the path is that you generate the desire to abandon unskillful qualities and to develop skillful qualities. So you're creating a temporary becoming as part of the path and there will be a sense of self involved in it. That's let go, totally only at arhantship. Several passages in the canon indicate that even non-returns have a lingering sense of "I am" around the five khandas. They don't explain it much. But it seems to indicate the fact that you still have a sense that you can exert some control over the aggregates. So you might as well learn how to use that sense of I am, to put it to good use as part of the path. In other words, you have to train your senses of self to be good before you give them up. Get use of them and then you let them go not out of aversion, or a sense of appreciation for what they've done. But realizing that you have reached the point now, where you go beyond them. I've often found that people who talk about how horrible the ego is or how bad self is, tend not to develop a sense of self properly in the course of path and as a result, their letting go tends to be a little bit more neurotic.

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So you have to learn how to, as I said earlier this morning, learn how to delight in a sense of agency. And this is something that you can do, you can see yourself improving as you develop more and more skills along the path. And that's a healthy sense of self to develop. When the Buddha talks about using the sense of self in a skillful way, he gives it basically three roles. There's the self as producer. In other words, you have that desire, you know, the sense of you as the person who will be able to attain that desire. There's the self as the consumer, the person who will benefit from attaining that desire, who will enjoy that attainment. And finally, the self as commentator who watches over the other two selves, and makes suggestions for how they might do things better to get a better form of happiness. All of these play a role already in the state of becoming, for example, you have a desire for some ice cream, okay, there's a sense of you who will have the resources to either buy the ice cream, or has the skills to make the ice cream. That's self as producer, or the self as agent. And there's the self as consumer, the person who will actually enjoy the taste of the ice cream when you get it. And then finally, there's a self who's commentator talking about, "well do you really need that ice cream? What kind of ice cream would be best for you?" Makes suggestions about how things are going with the other two roles of self. And we create these senses of self around everything that we do. Here, the Buddhist saying, Well, you do the same thing with the path. In terms of the self as a producer,



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he talks about the self in terms of conceit. There's a passage where Ananda is talking to a nun. And he's telling her basically, that even though we try to overcome conceit, the conceit that "I am" as part of the path is part of the goal. As part of the path you need to cultivate that sense of I am in the sense that I see that other people can do this. They are human beings, I'm a human being; they can do it, why can't I?

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So you try to develop a sense of competence. This is why the Buddha talks about developing the self as a mainstay or the self as a refuge. That you can depend on yourself in order to be able to attain this, and you have it within you that you can do this. This is definitely a sense of self that you need on the path. Then there's a self as the consumer, the one who's going to enjoy this. There's a passage where the Buddha talks about a monk who's getting discouraged in the path and is thinking of giving up. So he talks about different ways in which you can motivate yourself to stick with it. He calls it, there's the self as a governing principle. There's the world as a governing principle and there's the dharma as a governing principle. The world as a governing principle; it's an interesting one, he says there are people out there in the world who can read minds. If they see my mind as I'm thinking of giving up. What are they going to think? Partly you think about the compassion they would have for you. And secondly you would feel the feeling of embarrassment that your thoughts are being known by others. The dhamma as the governing principle is realizing, well, you found an excellent dharma you'd be ashamed then if you abandoned it. The self as a governing principle is basically the realization: I came to this path, I entered on this path because I wanted to put an end to suffering. If I give up on it does that mean I don't want to put an end to suffering? The Buddha is basically asking you, do love yourself? If you really love yourself then you will stick with the path. A sense of self love is actually useful, then as part of the practice.

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There's also what they call renunciate grief, when you realize that there are others who have attained this wonderful goal, total freedom of suffering. I'm not there yet. That's the consumer who's feeling deprived, who would like to have some more of this, it's meant to act as a impetus to the producer as well to get going on this path. So that you can actually attain that attainment yourself. The self as commentator, I mentioned that earlier this morning, the Buddha's teachings to Rāhula. I would like to go back to them again, this is when Rāhula was seven years old. And after the Buddha gave some lessons on being truthful, he says you should look into your actions as you would look into a mirror. And before you do something, ask yourself, what is my intention, do I anticipate that this action that I intend to do, will cause harm to myself or to others or to both? If I do, I should stop, I should not act on that intention. If you don't see anything wrong with the intention, go ahead and act. While you're acting, you look at the results of the action. So this action that I am doing, is it leading to harm for myself or others or both. If you see some harm coming up immediately, while you're doing the action, then you stop. If you don't see any harm, you can continue. Finally, when you're done, you look back on the long term results. And then you realize, again, you ask, this action that I did- notice all these steps you're taking, you're taking responsibility for the action. This action I intend to do, this action I am doing, this action that I did, or that I have done: did it lead to harm for myself or others or both? If it did, you go and talk it over with someone else who is more advanced in the path to get some idea of how not to repeat that mistake and then you determine not to repeat that



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mistake. If you don't see any harm, then you take joy in the fact that you're getting better on the path. And you use that joy, that sense of self esteem, to motivate yourself to continue on the path. So the self as commentator here has been trained in the proper values it should have.

07:35

Most people complain about the internal judge, the internal critic. And you see a lot about not listening to the internal critic, or silencing the internal critic. Actually, the Buddha doesn't say to silence the critic, he says basically, learn how to train it. So it's actually useful, have it focus on your intentions, focus on your actions, focus on the results of your actions. And take a mature attitude toward mistakes, The Buddha is basically saying, try not to make a mistake. But if you do make a mistake, this is what you do. Years back, I was giving a retreat in Santa Fe. And there was a therapist on the retreat who was leading a mindfulness based therapy group. And she took the copy of the sutta that I just told you about and gave it to the people in the group as part of their last meeting, and then she asked them, "What do you think of the Buddha as a parent?" And all the people in the group said, you know, "If we had parents like this, we wouldn't need this therapy group." He is basically teaching them a mature attitude to have toward the internal critic, training the internal critic, so it actually is helpful on the path. That's a sense of self that you really need. So these are the roles that the Buddha gives. And what are the values that the Buddha teaches to the commentator? Well, one is that you are observant and honest, in fact those were the first two requisites that the Buddha said he wanted in any student, he said, Let the person come who is observant and no deceiver and I will teach that person the dhamma. Because you want a student who is honest with you about what he or she is doing, and you also want this person to be honest with him or herself about what he is doing, or she is doing. So that you can actually see what you're doing, where you make a mistake, and then learn how to correct it. But you're also being taught to be heedful, realizing that your actions will make a difference, so you have to be careful about how you act; compassionate: you don't want to harm anybody. We have a healthy sense of shame. In other words, the shame that is the opposite of shamelessness, we're not talking about the shame that's the opposite of pride. The Buddha's actually teaching you to have a sense of pride around your actions that you are capable of doing good things.

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You realize simply that certain actions are beneath you. That's the kind of shame he's trying to have you develop, and most importantly of all, is a willingness to learn. If you come here with the attitude, "Ok, I'm the sort of person who just cannot make mistakes." You're going to be hiding all your mistakes from yourself, which is not healthy. But if you realize, okay, I'm here where I can learn, I'm willing to learn, and you make that part of your self image, okay, that's gonna actually help you on the path. Now the Buddha has you apply these selves to the activities that are useful for making merit, and for the practice of concentration. In terms of merit, you're talking to yourself about what a better person you become as you become generous, as you practice the precepts. As you develop thoughts of goodwill. And you're not just talking to yourself to give yourself self esteem, but you're actually doing things that are conducive to self esteem when you are generous when you are virtuous. When can cultivate thoughts of goodwill, even for people you don't like. There's a strong sense of your own nobility, your own honesty, your own integrity, it comes with that. And as you develop a healthy sense of self in these ways,



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it's a lot easier to start approaching the difficulties of training the mind in concentration and discernment.

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Years back when Ajaan Suwat was teaching at IMS, I think it was the second or third day of the retreat, he turned to me and he said "Have you noticed how everyone here is so grim about the meditation?" (There's a notice that YouTube is not working.) And he attributed the fact that they were so grim in their meditation because they didn't have a background in the Buddha's teachings on generosity and virtue. Because a lot of the teaching's about generosity, virtue say that you're going to be happy by giving things away, you're going to be happy by refraining from doing things. And when they're small, they're very counterintuitive. But as you're practicing, you develop a sense of self worth and also a sense of trust in the teachings, and sense of your own capability to do the practice, which will serve you in good stead when you start meeting up with your defilements directly in the practice of concentration.

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And as I said, concentration as part of the path is part of the state of becoming, the Buddha describes it in terms of the five aggregates. There's form, feeling, perceptions, thought fabrications, and consciousness, all there in the concentration you're trying to develop. Form in the sense of the body, breath, that you're are focusing on. Feelings, the feelings of pleasure, that you're trying to develop. Perceptions and the images you hold about how the breath moves through the body, how you can adjust the breath. When it comes in, how does it come in? When it goes out? How does it go out? You can play with various perceptions here. You can perceive the breath as originating from outside or you can perceive it as originating inside the body, if it originates inside the body (and here we're talking about the breath as one of the aspects of the wind element in the body- the in and out breath) where does it originate? And you can focus on different parts of the body and see which area the breath energy begins to originate as you breathe in, each time you breathe in. And then there's a question: "Does it really originated any one spot, or does it originate all over the body? You can hold in mind the perception of all the cells in the body Breathing in, breathing out in unison. And that can really get you into strong states of concentration. As with thought fabrications, there's directed thought and evaluation as you're adjusting the breath, adjusting the mind so that the two of them fit together well. And then there's consciousness, which is your awareness of all these things. And you are creating a state of becoming as you do this, you the meditator who's watching over things, who is able to master the skills of meditation. Could be the part of you that's enjoying the pleasure or joy and equanimity as they come. And then there'll be the commentator. The commentator especially is there in the directed thought and evaluation, working on getting the concentration to be really good. So it's in these ways that the Buddha talks about self, a healthy sense of self, as being an important part of the practice. Even with discernment that you are motivated by your desire to understand the problem of suffering. To see how you're creating the cause, how you can put an end to it. So you use your sense of self in a wise way, this way. And as I said this is the best way to learn how to get beyond your sense of self is to train yourself to be skillful. And see how far a skillful sense of self can go, you'll finally reach a point, of course, where you can only go so far, and you have to go beyond it. But when you go beyond it, you're going beyond it not out of a sense of hatred or aversion. But simply out of a sense of, okay, this has taken me as far as I can



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go, I need something better, I need a better strategy. Because remember we talking about the sense of self as a strategy for happiness.

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The point I didn't make this morning is many people don't like the teaching on not self because they feel that the Buddha's trying to deprive them of their strategies for happiness, it's better to see that he's actually telling you: these are better ways of finding happiness, and not-self will be an important part of that strategy. We'll get to this later. It's also useful to look at the Buddhist teachings in terms of what modern psychology identifies as healthy ego functions. You see that these two are areas where the Buddha would emphasize that it is important to develop a sense of self. According to modern psychology, your ego is the part of your mind that negotiates between the various needs in the body, for the sake of your happiness. The needs of the body, your social needs and learning how to deal with other people. Freud would analyze these things in terms of the id, the ego and the super ego. The super ego is basically what society tells you you should do. Your id is your raw desires, and then your ego is negotiating between the two. From the Buddhist point of view, the shoulds there are replaced by the harsh shoulds in Freud's world, with the shoulds of the Four Noble Truths. In other words, you should try to comprehend suffering, you should try to abandon its cause, you should try to realize its cessation, and you should try to develop the path to cessation. These are shoulds that are entirely aimed at your happiness. So from the Buddhist point of view, you don't have quite the sense of inevitable and unending conflict that you have in Freud's view of the mind. But there are parts of the mind that do have to negotiate between the various desires that you have, because after all, you do have skillful desires and unskillful desires, and you have to learn how to negotiate.

17:30

Modern psychology identifies five healthy ego functions, I'll just give you a list first, and we'll go down them in detail. There's anticipation, altruism, suppression, sublimation, and humor. Anticipation is when you foresee certain dangers that you have to prepare for. This requires a sense of self, altruism realizing that your happiness cannot depend on the suffering of others, if it does depend on the suffering of others, they're going to put an end to it. So if you really want to be happy, you have to take their well-being into consideration. Suppression is when you realize there are things that you want to do. But if you do them, it's going to be harmful to you in the long run. So you learn how to say no. And then sublimation is when you try to find an alternative happiness for the mind so you don't feel starved by the process of suppression. Then finally humor is sort of the lightness that you can bring to this process. The ability to distance yourself from yourself; this is training your commentator to step back, having a good natured attitude towards your foibles. And learning how to laugh at your foibles is often an important part of learning how to go beyond them.

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Now, the Buddha teaches all of these functions as part of the path, sometimes you hear that Buddhism teaches egolessness. And I know therapists who roll their eyes when they hear that, because they think that we're teaching people to deprive themselves of important functions of the mind. But the Buddha never talks about the ego as being a bad thing. He certainly does encourage these five processes, but then he adds a sixth one, which is another healthy ego function we'll get to in a minute. But first, you've got the anticipation. For Buddhism, and of



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course, the word here is heedfulness, you see that there are dangers that lurk in the future that depend on whether you're going to act skillfully or not if you act skillfully you can avoid those dangers. Sometimes we hear heedfulness and the emphasis seems to be on the dangers there, but it's also important to realize that when the Buddha is saying these dangers can be avoided if you're careful: he's pointing to the power of your actions to make a difference in your life. Because you have that power to take advantage of it. Be careful in what you do and say and think and think about the long term. Remember that the training and discernment, he says, begins with asking that question, "What when I do it will lead to my long term welfare and happiness? What when I do it will lead to my long term harm and suffering?" That's training in heedfulness essentially. And that underlies all the strengths that you're gonna have to develop on the path.

20:15

As for altruism, the Buddha's teaching, of course, is on compassion: you have to have compassion for others. Again, because if your suffering depends on their harm, they're not going to stand for it. There was a famous story in the canon: King Pasenadi is in his palace, in his private apartments, one on one with Queen Mallikā, his favorite queen. And in a tender moment, he turns to her and he says, "Mallikā, is there anyone that you love more than yourself?" You can think about what he's anticipating, typical man, who wants to hear to say "Yes, your Majesty, I love you more than I love myself." And if this were Hollywood, yeah, that's what she would say. But this is the Pali canon. And Mallikā is no fool. She says "No, there's nobody I love more than myself, and how about you? Is there anybody you love more than yourself?" And the king has to admit that well, there's nobody who he loves more than himself. So that's the end of that scene. The king goes down from the palace, goes to see the Buddha and reports to him what Mallikā said. And the Buddha says, "You know, she's right, you could go all over the world. And you would never find anybody that you love more than yourself. By the same token, though, everybody else loves themselves just as fiercely as you love yourself. And so the message that the Buddha, or the lesson that the Buddha derives from that; it's not that this is a dog eat dog world, he says, As a result of that you should never harm anyone or cause anyone to do harm. In other words, you have to respect that person's desire for happiness. You can read this in two ways, one is the more pragmatic issue: If you harm them, in your search for happiness, they're not gonna be happy with your happiness, they're gonna try to put an end to it. But then, two: you begin to sympathize with others, you realize we're all in this, in the same boat, We all want happiness, it's only fair then that you should make sure that your happiness doesn't harm anybody else. So here you can see, compassion, even though we tend to think of it as probably the most selfless of all the virtues, does come down to an intelligent sense of self. A wise sense of self.

22:17

As for suppression the Buddhist term here is restraint. You realize that, both in terms of things that you do, and in terms of the things that you take in through your senses, you have to be very careful about what you do. Learning how to say no, when you know that it's going to cause harm. And as I said, restraint here applies not only to the things you do and say and think, but also how you engage with your senses. Just as the Buddha said, we're not passive in our engagement of the senses, we're more active. Oftentimes, we're looking for trouble. This is why we have the internet. The internet doesn't turn itself on, poke itself into eyes. Were the ones



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who turn it on. Because we're looking for something. And the question is, what are we looking for? And who's doing the looking? Is it your greed during the looking? Lust doing the looking? Anger doing the looking? As Ajaan Lee liked to point out, he said, it's not the case that we're just sitting around doing nothing, and all of a sudden something comes in and creates greed, aversion, and delusion in our minds. There are times when we look for something to be angry about. So we turn on, like say, a radio, but we're looking for something and then we're looking for somebody to activate the anger. We're feeling lust, we're looking for something to excite the lust. So you have to show some restraint there because otherwise you clutter up your mind, especially if you're trying to meditate. If you're cluttering up your mind all day with these activities, they're going to continue as you sit down and close your eyes. So as an important part of the meditation you realize, okay, I have to be very careful about how I engage with my senses. I have to be very careful about how I use my words, my thoughts, my deeds. And I have to know how to say no, in an effective way. Part of saying no in an effective way is the process of sublimation. In other words, find an alternative pleasure. And here the Buddha talks about the pleasures of being generous, the pleasures of being virtuous, and above all the pleasures of concentration. If you learn how to develop these forms of pleasure, and then you have an alternative, so it makes it easier to say no to your greed, aversion and delusion. This is why the Buddha gives an analogy he says it's like restraint of the senses is like having a six animals and they're tied to leashes. You have a dog, you have a hyena. You have a crocodile, a bird, snake, monkey. You've tied them to leashes and then you tie the leashes together and what's going to happen? Well the animals are going to push and pull each other until finally one of them, whoever is the strongest, will drag all the others on. In this case it's probably the crocodile who'll drag all the other animals down into the river and they're all going to drown. He says what you need is a post. In this case the post is mindfulness of the body. We tie all the leashes to the post and the animals can pull and pull and pull. They're not going to go anywhere very far. And the reason that post is so solid is because mindfulness of the body leads to concentration, which leads to a strong sense of well-being inside. You can use that well-being to feed the mind, feed your hungers. So you're not hungry for things outside. This would be sublimation, which again, is a healthy ego function. You realize that you have desires for happiness. And you can't just deny them the Buddha tried that for six years and he realized it was gonna lead to his death. When he found the middle way he realized, okay, there are certain pleasures that you can develop, which will compensate for the pleasure that you're giving up as you try to develop the path.

26:04

And finally with a sense of humor, the Buddha doesn't talk about humor that much, but there's plenty of it in the Canon. You see it sometimes in stories in the suttas. The virtue of humor, as I said, is the ability to step back from your defilements and be able to laugh at them. And that's one of the most effective ways of dealing with greed, aversion, and delusion. Pull yourself out of the stories they tell you, pull yourself out of the worlds that they create. And you create some distance. There's that famous story about the nun who was going through a forest and Goldsmith son comes up and he tries to seduce her. Now she's a non-returner, so she's not the least bit interested. And all she could do is basically laugh at the guy. And she's sitting here, "What do you see in this body of mine, it's just full of all kinds of disgusting things." And he says, "Your eyes, your eyes are just so beautiful. I can't get over your eyes." She says "Well, you know, the eyes, is just like little bubbles, full of mucus and all that kind of stuff, but if you really



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like my eyes, here, have one, and she plucks out her eye and hands it to him. Well, that's the end of that scene. He says "I'm sorry, playing with you is like playing with fire." And so she has a good laugh. And she goes to see the Buddha and as she sees the Buddha her eye is restored. Just as an aside, that particular sutta- I've seen it translated in ways in which the guy comes off as being pretty crude, and no woman in her right mind would ever go with this guy. In the actual sutta in itself, he's probably the one of most articulate people in the Pali canon. And his inducements for her to go with him are some of the prettiest passages in the Pali canon of all. And it shows, okay, even with those inducements, a person who is really beyond lust, doesn't feel any inclination. It's also interesting to know how he tries to seduce her, he doesn't talk about sex directly. He talks about it very indirectly, but he talks about, basically, you come and live with me and you will be like a golden doll, and you will live in this beautiful world. And it's all about trying to create a state of becoming in her mind where she would be willing to go with him. And she's not susceptible for that. But it's interesting that this is how a lot of seduction takes place. It's appealing to that person you're trying to seduce appealing to that person's sense of becoming, what that person would like to become, the world in which that person would like to live. This is just an aside to point out how sensuality works, and how you can develop a sense of humor around it. As I said, the passages are some of the prettiest passages in the canon. But they're treated humorously, as I was saying, okay, even though these are really pretty passages, and they're really seductive; it's still pretty miserable, what this guy is trying to do for this woman. That's one example of humor. Other examples of humor in the Pali Canon tend to be found in the Vinaya, which is the section of rules for the monks and nuns. And I think it's instructive that this is where you find so much of the humor in the sense that they have origin stories for each of the rules. And many of the origin stories are very funny. And the purpose of this is to get you on the side of the person making the rule. If you're being subjected to a code of rules, written by someone who has no sense of humor at all, you're going to chafe, you're going to rebel. But if you see the rules as an outcome of someone's wise humor about the human condition, it's a lot easier to side with the rules against that particular defilement.

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I'll give you an example. There was a monk who had a lot of psychic powers, but he was not very articulate. And the time would come every now and then when he would have to instruct the nuns. And he would repeat the same old stanza over and over and over again. And that would be the instruction. Well, it comes to be his time, word gets to the nuns that it's this monk's turn to instruct the nuns, and the nuns say 'Oh my gosh, him again, this is not going to be very effective. He's just going to repeat that same stanza over and over and over again.' But they go, and so he goes through the formalities and then he says, "Okay, here's today's instruction, and he starts repeating the stanza. And the nuns turn to one another, and they say, "See, didn't we tell you this was not gonna be effective at all?" Well, he overhears them. And so he levitates up off the ground, splits his body into many forms. Some of them are emitting light, some of them emitting smoke, some of them emitting Fire, Water. And each of them is repeating many different stanzas of the Buddha, that one, plus many others. And the nuns say "Wow, this is the most effective dharma talk we've ever seen." Well, he gets carried away and continuously displaying his powers until after dark. And so the time comes for the nuns to leave, they go back to the city where the nunnery is, and it turns out, the city gates are closed. So they have to spend the night outside. And then the next morning, when the city gates are open, they come into the city. And the people say, "Oh, here comes in nuns after spending the night with the



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monks." And so this is the reason why we have a rule against the monks teaching nuns during the nighttime. But it's also a lesson in, if you have psychic powers, watch out, don't get carried away. So those are some of the uses of humor.

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Finally, there's a sense of shame. As I said, this is that shame which is the opposite of shamelessness. You want to look good in the eyes of the noble ones. As in that passage, I talked about just now where they talk about the world as a governing principle. You think about how the Noble ones would regard you if you start doing something really unskillful. On the one hand, they'd be disappointed. On the other hand, they would be compassionate for your well being, they would be disappointed in you more than anything else. And you use that sense of shame to spur yourself not to do unskillful things. So these are some healthy ego functions that the Buddha recommends. He doesn't call them ego functions, but they are lessons that correspond to what modern psychology would regard as ego function. This is another way in which you use your sense of self. Anticipation basically trains your commentator, you think about the long term if you're going to comment on your actions. Altruism, again, trains your commentator, you've got to think about the well being of other people. Suppression trains your commentator. Sublimation trains all three aspects of the self. In other words, you say, okay, if I go for that other unskillful activity, it's going to cause harm, what can I do that would be more skillful, then the producer is able to produce something that is more skillful, then the consumer learns how to enjoy that. And again, humor, trains all three of your senses of self, the producer, the consumer and the commentator. The commentator has you step back. The consumer is willing to step back from his or her, or it's, desires. We realize, okay, there's just something wrong there. And then the producer is able to provide something better.

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So those are some of the functions of skillful use of self on the path. As for not-self. As you're engaged in the practices of the path, there are certain things you're gonna have to give up as part of this activity of restraint. There's certain attachments, you're gonna have to let go of. And this is where you bring out the concept of not-self. In other words, you learn to see these things as not being yours. For example, in the practice of generosity, if you're really attached to the things you have, it's going to be very difficult to be generous. But if you learn to reflect on them, you realize that these things that I have here, what is their real value? I get more value out of them. If I learned how to give them away and develop the perfection of generosity. These things are not mine permanently, I'm gonna have to lose them at some point anyhow, so why don't I lose them in such a way that I actually benefit from them and I'm not just deprived. So you're going to have to see things as not yours really. There's simply there, you have the ability to use them, but they're not really yours. That makes it a lot easier to give them away. Because as I said earlier, when you're developing a healthy sense of self, there's going to be a sense of not-self that goes along with it. Wherever there is a sense of self, there will be not-self. And basically a sense of self defines a boundary, whatever's outside of the boundary is not-self, you learn how to move that boundary around so it actually makes it easier for you to follow the path. There's passage also in terms of virtue, where the Buddha talks about three things that would deter you from following the precepts: concern about your wealth, concern about your health, concern about your relatives. In other words, there are ways that you can engage in trade where you If



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you lie, you get a better price. But you have to be willing to forego that better price, in order to stick by your precepts.

35:53

Years back, I had a student whose mother was going to give a large sum of money to a Buddhist center. And he called me up and said, basically, you know, what can I tell her so she would give the money to the monastery? And for monks, we're not allowed to tell people where to give their gifts. The rule is that if someone comes and says, "Where should I give this gift?" We're supposed to say, "Give it where you feel inspired or where you feel that it would be well used, well taken care of." And so, instead of giving suggestions on how he can get the money for the monastery, I told him, "Ok, tell your mother, give her gift where she feels inspired." So she gave it someplace else. And so I realized, okay, I now, have a precept that's worth more than that amount of money. So there are times when observing the precepts will involve losing the opportunity for wealth. Especially when you have to be truthful. In terms of your health, say that the economy collapses, or crazy government gets involved in three or four wars otherwise, and the only way you're gonna get any food is if you steal it. And you have to say no, even in a case like that, I'm not going to steal. So even though your health may suffer from that, you're much better off by holding to your precepts. In terms of your relatives, the same sort of thing, my family are going to starve unless I can steal, you just teach them, no, I'm not going to steal. We don't live by stealing. Okay, you're drawing your sense of not-self, around your wealth, and your health and relatives, which the Buddha says, that kind of loss, if you lose your wealth, health, or relatives- that's minor, compared to losing your virtue or losing your right view. Now that's gonna require a certain rearranging of your idea of what is yours and what is not yours, what's worth laying claim to, and what's not worth laying claim to. But it's an important part of practicing.

37:58

And then, in general, you'll find other things will come up, especially when you're developing concentration: all the distractions that come up into the mind, things that would pull you away from your topic. You have to regard those as not-self as well. This is where the Buddha begins to recommend a five step program. Some of you probably know this already. For learning how to develop dispassion for things, in other words, to see that they're not worth claiming as self. As I said, I've been trying to make the point all throughout the day, that your sense of self is basically a value judgment. How do you train yourself to see that your defilements are not worth holding on to? And the defilements here would include, like we mentioned this morning, the traumatized child from way back. And other psychological issues you have. The Buddhist way of dealing with this is, one: try to give the mind a safe place to be in, this is what you try to develop with the concentration. And then try to notice when a particular defilement comes up, how it is originated, what comes along with it, what causes it. You're not just looking at it arise, but you're also looking at its arising in connection with something else. And then you notice that it passes away, and then it comes back. It's not like these defilements last, last, last, all the time. They come and they go, they come and they go. And once they come and they go away, then you dig them up again. Sometimes you dig them up. Say there's a problem with anger, okay, the hormones are still going through your system. And you read that as a sign. Well, I must still be angry. And so the part of the mind that enjoys the anger will pick it up again. So this is why when you when you start picking these things up and running with them, you have to ask yourself, "What's the allure? What part of me likes that?" This is where it's useful to see the mind as a



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committee. Some of the members of the committee like that particular defilement and other members don't. You've got to figure out: the ones who do like it, what do they like about it? What's the allure? This is something that's going to take a lot of digging around. Because often, there's a part of the mind that doesn't like to admit to itself, why it likes to go with these things. But if you can see the mind as a committee, it makes it a lot easier to dis-identify with certain members of the committee and to identify with the more skillful ones. Once you see the allure, then you compare it with the drawbacks. And when you can see, okay, running with this particular defilement is going to lead to these problems and you see, it's not worth it. When you see it's really not worth it, then you develop dispassion for it. And that's the escape. Again, a value judgment: this is really not worth going with. Now, this works most effectively, as I said, when you really see what the allure is, and the mind is kind of lying to myself about what the allure is and you have to dig around. So you do this in conjunction with your concentration practice so that you have a sense of a solid center, a safe place inside. You've also strengthened more of the skillful members of the committee. So that you can enter into a dialogue with your defilements; try to understand them. So that's using the not-self, as you're dealing with concentration practice. Then there's finally discernment, when you reach the point where, Okay, it's time now to let go of everything. When you've applied this five step program to all the things that would pull you away from concentration. Until you realize, Okay, there's one attachment that's left and that's your attachment to the path. And this is where the Buddha says you start analyzing your concentration in terms of those aggregates. And you learn to apply the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, not-self to them.

42:01

Why do you do that? Because you want to see that, okay, even though the pleasure to which you're most attached in life is the concentration, it is fabricated, it has its drawbacks. And so you start applying that five step program to the concentration itself. It has its allure, there's a lot of pleasure that comes with it, there's also a sense of stability. And it's been useful as a means for getting past a lot of your defilements, but because it's fabricated, it's something you have to keep going all the time. You have to keep working at it. Wouldn't it be good if there was something unfabricated? And the mind gets to a point where it realizes if it stays in the state of concentration, it's going to be stressed, if it moves someplace else, it's going to be stressed, what does it do? At this point, all your senses of self get stymied, the self as a consumer comes to the value judgment: okay enough of this. The self as the producer's stymied: Where to go? What to do? The self as the communicator has no idea what to do either. And this is when the mind stops fabricating. The first time this happens it's just a brief period of time when there is no fabrication going on in the mind at all. There are no intentions because you're stymied, there's no place to attend. And that's when the deathless opens. So in other words, you realize that if you think back in terms of the original question for discernment: what when I do it will lead to my long term welfare and happiness? You realize that long term is no longer good enough. There's nothing that I can do that won't cause stress. And that leads to a moment of non-fabrication the Buddha tries to develop this in that famous questionnaire where he asked the monks, when he goes down the list of the aggregates: is this aggregate constant or inconstant? If it's inconstant, is it easeful or stressful? Well, it's stressful? Because you're trying to find happiness there, it's like sitting on a chair with uneven legs. You're constantly having to tense up. If it's inconstant and stressful, is it worth calling your self? No, it ends in a value judgment, the judgement of dispassion. And then you apply that, you realize it's not just here in the present moment, but all



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the aggregates, past present or future, near and far. This applies to all of them as well. And the dispassion gets really really radical at that point.

44:43

This is where as I said this morning, you end up with the teaching on Sabbe Dhamma Annata: all dhammas are not-self. This applies not only to inconstant things, but even to your first experience of what is constant, which would be the deathless itself. Because if you latch onto that, and it is possible to have an attachment of that: it gets in the way of full awakening. So at this point, the Buddha says nothing is worth holding on to. And as I said, once you let go of all those other attachments, you realize you have one attachment left that you have to relinquish and that's attachment to that discernment itself: that too as to be let go of. And then you're totally free.

45:23

So this is where the teaching on not-self is supposed to lead you. The Buddha is not trying to define what you are, in fact, he's telling you, your attachment to what you are, or what you think you are is part of the problem. But he's also saying you can take that sense of what you are, and train it. So that it can actually become part of the path. And then once it takes you as far as it can go, okay, then you get yourself free. The Buddha's not trying to put you in a box, he's trying to show you: you put yourself in a box, because that passage where he says, however you define yourself, you limit yourself. Here he's saying, there's a way you can find a happiness where you don't have to define yourself. As long as you are looking for happiness, you're having to define a self that's capable of finding and enjoying it. But once you've found the ultimate happiness, okay you can let all those desires go, you let go of all strategies, the teachings on self and not self, you put them aside. From that point on you pick them up, put them down. As I've said many times, arhants know when they're eating, whose mouth to put the food in. But they don't develop a lot of unskillful thoughts and attachments around that fact. They use whatever abilities they still have, after awakening to help the world. And then when the time comes to go, they go without any sense of regret, without any sense of lack. Because that true happiness that they found is not affected by whatever happens to the sixth sense spheres, whatever happens to the body. It's something totally on fabricated. So that's what the not-self teaching is all about. That's what it's for. And I hope that these comments have been helpful. Look forward to hearing any questions you may have.

Questioner 47:22

Hello, Ajaan Geoff and everyone. Ajaan Geoff, in terms of self and not-self, I have, I think I have a pretty clear feel understanding of self in the sense that if I'm ever producing or doing an action that is skillful, and it's going to take me up to another level: that's skillful that's a good sense of self. But in terms of not-self, I've been kind of confused in its application. And this is what I've come up with. So if you can correct me if I'm right or wrong, that would be useful. I kind of see it in two ways, not-self: one, in the beginning of the practice, it's almost like if I'm meditating, and there's a distraction that comes in, there is a possibility to run with the distraction or to say, or if it's connected with the body, for instance, you can say that's not-self and try to move away from it, come back to the breath. So that would be at level one, turning a sense of self into a not self. And I think I understand from what you just said that as the practice matures, that this sense of not-self is not just moving away from it, but there's a deeper understanding of everything in



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terms of the three perceptions, maybe the Four Noble Truths, that makes it clear to see that it's not-self. And now and then that becomes quite clear in certain instances, but not all the time. And I was just wondering if that would be the right approach. Because not-self really kind of confuses me quite often.

Ajaan Thanissaro 49:26

Okay, well, you're right in the beginning that you're going to be just basically deciding, I'm going to move the boundary of my self. What I've been claiming to be myself, I'll remove the boundary back or forward as necessary. So that the area of not-self includes things that I used to lay claim to, but you can move that boundary as an act of will. But if there's part of you, members of the committee that still want to go back and lay claim to that, there will be this constant back and forth. And that's when you have to start using the analysis and the five steps and seeing things in terms of the three characteristics or four noble truths, so that you really understand why it was that you wanted to lay claim to it to begin with. Yeah. And that's that's a different kind of not-self.

Questioner 50:13

Yes. And I think also, one line that you mentioned just today is that at that stage, the more mature way of practicing is indicative of not defining yourself at all.

Ajaan Thanissaro 50:30

Ultimately. Yes

Questioner 50:31

Thank you Ajaan Geoff.

Questioner 50:38

Hello. So you mentioned directed thought and evaluation. I guess I was just wondering exactly how I use that within meditation, and what form kind of does it take? Am I sort of speaking to myself? Am I investigating something? Like, I guess exactly how what's the most skillful way of, of using that within meditation?

Ajaan Thanissaro 51:12

Well, it's basically talking to yourself. And you're asking some questions and trying to find some answers. And in the meditation, of course, the questions are, is the mind able to settle down with the breath? Is there a problem with the breath is the problem with the mind? And then you try experimenting with different things, coming up with different ideas of Well, let's try this, let's try that. See what works to get the mind and the breath to get together. So it's kind of like an internal conversation. When people come to me sometimes and say, "How do I start doing directed thought and evaluation?" I say you're doing it all the time already. It's simply a matter now of using it so it's useful in getting the mind to settle down.

51:55

I wanted to see your thoughts on an experience that I had, about a week ago. That I've been, that has been revisiting me, not purposefully, but has been revisiting me. I'm reaching my hand out to a doorknob, and there was this consciousness that said to me, I suppose, "Watch this." And I turned the doorknob and went through the door, and it felt like it dragged out for minutes



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or minutes. The lesson went on for minutes in my mind, it was just a few seconds. And as I went through the door, I became aware that there was some consciousness, that the contact that I made with the doorknob was the same contact, as I make with anything, and relate to all aggregates, which is I would not hold on to that doorknob while I'm trying to close the door behind me, that I wouldn't think to do that. It would be it would be inappropriate, it would be unnecessary. It's not even something I need to be concerning myself with. I just wouldn't do it, because my arm would get hurt, and the door wouldn't get closed. And I wouldn't be able to move. And there was something that almost literally said, "Watch this, know this", that all contacts are the doorknob, that all aggregates are the doorknob, unheld, whether I know it or not, they already are. And it felt like an important extended moment of knowing, non-contact, non-clinging non-contact but non-clinging. And there have been times since then that that has sort of floated back to me in awareness. And then gone. And then there have been times when I have felt myself in a contact and revisited that awareness purposefully, consciously in order to not cling and not to cling to any aggregates. And I just wondered if you have any thoughts on whether the revisiting it is clinging or whether that's helpful for my instruction to myself going forward, my encouragement going forward?

54:53

The question you always ask with an insight like that is, "When is this useful? And when is this not useful?" And, again, there will be times when it'll be a good thing to remember. If I need to touch the doorknob in order to open the door. But if I hold on to the doorknob as I close the door, I'm going to break my arm. Try to see which attachments this is appropriate to think about. There'll be other times when the Insight is not appropriate. And that's going to be a measure of your wisdom and discernment to figure out when do I apply this insight when do I not?

Questioner 55:29

Okay, thank you.

Questioner 55:34

Hi, Ajaan. What type of lifestyle, sense restraint, and seclusion does a layperson need to regularly enter jhāna?

Ajaan Thanissaro 55:44

Okay, minimal internet. minimal media outside, aside from that, just being very careful. Sense restraint doesn't mean you don't look at things or listen to things, it just means you're very careful as you go through the day. Is greed doing the looking? Is anger during the looking? Is lust doing the looking? If so, I've got to learn how to look in different ways. In other words, you're keeping your mind on a short leash as you go through the day. You're not tying it down, but you keep it on a short leash. So it doesn't go wandering off very far.

Questioner 56:25

Tan Ajaan, so I've noticed that some texts seem to imply that this knower, you know, the, the awareness and observer, the knower, is kind of the true self. But that's wrong. No? it's still a fabrication. Because sometimes, I mean, like this awareness persists after death somehow, but it doesn't seem right, I mean,



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Ajaan Thanissaro 56:57

You're gonna have to, as long as you're taking rebirth again, it's a sign that you're still holding on. I mean, you're still creating this being out of the five aggregates, the knower here, of course, would be consciousness. And as long as you keep on attaching to the five aggregates, you keep the process going, eventually you're gonna have to let go of that in order to gain awakening.

57:22

Then, as I said, once you gain awakening the question of what's the self and what's not the self... Ajaan Suwat once had a great comment, he said, "Once you attain the Great, the ultimate happiness, you're not going to be concerned about who's experiencing this. So there's nobody's experiencing or anybody's experiencing, it's just is on it's own, it's sufficient in and of itself." That's when you can put those questions aside.

Questioner 57:42

Thank you. Hi, Ajaan. You gave an example, a visual actually, of a circle with what's inside being what we're fabricating, we're choosing to be our self and what's unhelpful to be outside. And that was really helpful. And so, this is just always in regards to the five aggregates?

Ajaan Thanissaro 58:24

Any sense of self and the Buddha would probably say that it's when you have a sense of self, one of the five aggregates at least is going to be involved.

Questioner 58:33

Okay, and is it, would it be a practice to focus on the five aggregates as opposed to kind of just a willy nilly potpourri approach?

Ajaan Thanissaro 58:46

Yeah, the Buddha gives you that focus, because after all, it's clinging to those five aggregates that constitutes a suffering. Excellent, thank you. And if you find that five aggregates is too many focus on one.

Questioner 59:00

Sounds good. Thank you.

Questioner 59:04

Hi Ajaan, thank you for this talk. I have a question about when you're doing something that you care about the results for, you want to do it well or correctly, like a house repair or you have to deal with a government agency to correct a mistake that they made and and it's also very, can be stressful because there's always glitches that happen, and sometimes there's glitches that are not, it's generated by someone or something else. So in this case, in these cases, how do you like not feel attached to what you're doing but still want to do it well?

Ajaan Thanissaro 59:50

Okay. Just tell yourself, I could die before this whole process is done. So I'm gonna make sure my mind is in good shape. As long as I have the opportunity to continue with this, I'll try to do it well. But note that there may be, there may come a time when I just have to let it go. So kind of



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drop it. So, but always maintain the idea, I do want to do this well and this is something I want to succeed at, but I have to have some times when I can let that down so I can give the mind a rest.

Questioner 1:00:28

Thank you Ajaan. I just wanted to go back to my question from the first session about the fourth tetrad of ānāpānasati. So my understanding is that you are abandoning the hindrances and developing the factors for awakening. So how does inconstancy apply to say, drowsiness and restlessness in terms of, well, how would you apply the three perceptions to you know, say those hindrances? And is it the case that once the hindrances are sort of subsided and the enlightenment factors are fully developed, then you would apply the same three perceptions to the factors for awakening?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:01:18

Right. I mean, you have to say, Okay, what is it that's making me drowsy? And sometimes, of course, drowsiness comes from the fact that the body is really tired and it's time to get some rest. Other times though, you find you get up from the meditation, all of a sudden you have lots of energy. So okay, what's going on here? Sit back down again. What's, the issue? Why is my mind telling me that when I'm sitting, meditating, I'm drowsy, but I get up, I'm not drowsy. That's the kind of thing you want to look into. What am I attached to? What does the main one right now that it's feeling frustrated about and then learn to see that as inconstant and unreliable. Because that's what inconstancy is all about. It's not so much things are impermanent, it's that they're unreliable. When you can see that a defilement is based on what's unreliable, that helps you get past that defilement.

Questioner 1:02:14

Okay, thank you.

Questioner 1:02:15

Good afternoon. My question is, when you were speaking about the Buddha talking about having a mature approach to mistakes, is there a specific area or a specific list that he would refer to to expand on within that mature approach? How to like recover from said mistake?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:02:50

Okay, well, there's that sutta, where he says, if you reflect on the fact that you did something that you regret, you realize you can't go back, no matter how guilty you feel, your guilty feelings will not be able to undo what you did. And the best course of action is to, one, resolve that you're not going to repeat that mistake again. And then two, lots of goodwill, in fact all the Brahmaviharas for yourself or the people you wronged, or everybody in general, Goodwill for yourself so that you're not just beating yourself up all the time, Goodwill for the people you harmed. May we not have any more karma like that together. And then for all beings in general, so you remind yourself, "I've gotta keep the well being of everybody in mind if I want to make sure I don't repeat this mistake." Thank you. Lots of the Brahmaviharas.

Questioner 1:03:40



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I have a more "out there" question. There's a famous author (who I won't give free promotion to) who, in his books- he's a fantasy writer, and he has like magic systems and stuff. And in his metaphysics of his universe, there's a key, where if I cast a spell in a certain magic system, like nobody else can interfere with it, because it belongs to them. So in our universe, in which there was a Buddha, and in which there are awakened beings. Like, it seems like, I don't know if I can even say this, but the awakening seems to be key to them. But the Buddha, that's is not a place where he wants us to go, right? He doesn't want us to try to figure out if there's an entity behind the awakening? Like when the Buddha got awakened, I didn't get awakened with him, right. So there's, I'm not gonna say there's a self, but is there something?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:04:44

As long as you're functioning as a being, you're going to have a sense of self right? Yes, the only people who are not beings are arahants, if you're defined by your defilements you're defined by your attachments. And what you're trying to do is learn how to get undefined.

Questioner 1:05:05

So is it kind of like turning off a computer program?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:05:10

Turning off the computer.

Questioner 1:05:12

Okay, got ya. Thank you, Tan Ajaan.

Questioner 1:05:15

Thank you, Tan Ajaan, and everyone at the Parisa and Sati center for having this session. My question is probably kind of elementary, but I'm thinking about how to be more aware of the process of I-making and my-making? And is it that, you know, if I think, oh, I want some tea, or I need to take a shower, that I'm making too? Or if I want my friend to be happy, is that I-making? I'm not really sure what it, in my daily life, what it sounds like, in my mind,

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:05:53

Okay. I mean, that's kind of innocent I-making and my-making. And there will be a little bit of a world around that sense of I. But those things, the things you're talking about are really innocent. We're talking about, like the Buddha's more concerned about is the I-making my-making that really start causing trouble, causing suffering. But basically, it goes around, you have a desire, and there's a sense of you who wants to attain that thing. And there's a you who's trying to enjoy that thing, once you attain it. And as the Buddha starts out by saying, you can't just say, "Well, I won't have any desires at all." You say, "Okay, let me learn how to desire what is skillful." And create some more I's around skillful desires, desires to be generous, to be virtuous, to follow the path. And then you'll begin to realize, you've got this whole stable of I's that you've been making in the past, and you'll come running up against some and sometimes they'll come up and say, "Well, I would rather do this." "No, I would rather do that." And you say, "Is this really where I want to go?" This is how you become more conscious of the I-making and my-making when the two I's start fighting.



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Questioner 1:07:05

Thank you, that's what I was trying to figure out- how to be more conscious of it when it's happening. Thank you so much.

Questioner 1:07:14

Yes, thank you. I am up against a really difficult problem where I'm a professional musician, and I have always, I've dedicated my whole life to music. And my goal has always been to not have a self at all, to be selfless, to be a kind of transparent vessel. So that whatever was originally intended by the composer can be transmitted without any mediation from me. And it's a very unpopular approach, especially nowadays, but but I've adhered to it and I believe in it strongly. And I'm just, I don't know if it's old age or what it is, or but the I've been trying to keep my mind on a short leash. And but right now I'm up against I'm doing some music that is very important to me, I'm performing it, and I'm going to be performing in a few days. And I cannot stay in the music, my mind is racing to just inane, it's almost like somebody replaced my brain with like a, you know, a monkey with a monkey mind or a puppy or, and I don't know what happened. I don't know how that came about. I mean, this is, I've had a long career and I don't know. But the self non self, I keep trying to just return to the music, but somehow it's like there's something in rebellion. And I don't know, if this is too esoteric a question.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:08:47

No, it's not what you might want to ask this mind or say "What are you rebelling against? Is there something in the music you're rebelling against? Is it this particular piece? Or is it all the music that you're performing right now?"

Questioner 1:09:00

No, This is the greatest music I think that has ever been composed. And I've always revered it and I've performed it before and so I don't, I feel like I'm unworthy suddenly that it's not I don't know, like my mind. I feel like it's beginner's mind in the worst way. And the sense of like this self that or whatever it is that's interfering.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:09:26

Okay, you've got to sit down and talk with it. Really, have an inner conversation. Okay, what's the issue? What's the problem? What are we up against here? And see what kind of conversation you can have.

Questioner 1:09:42

With myself?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:09:43

With yourself, yeah. Okay. What is it that I'm not admitting to myself about it? Again, this is where it's useful to think about the mind as a committee.

Questioner 1:09:52

Oh, that's what I wanted to ask you, the committee, right. The committee has gotten totally out of control here.



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Ajaan Thanissaro 1:09:56

Okay. Okay, who in the committee is leading the rebellion? And why are they feeling that their needs are not being met?

Questioner 1:10:08

Wow. Can I come up and see you at Valley Center and discuss this? I have no idea where to start with this. Okay, I don't know how to have that conversation, but I don't want to take up any more time from others. So. All right.

Questioner 1:10:33

Tan Ajaan, I'll ask some of these questions that have been coming up. So I know there are two more questioners waiting in lines, please thank you for your patience. Can you please elaborate on the three functions of self: producer, consumer, commentator, in the Pali canon? Is there a sutta where all three functions are described together? What are the Pāli terms for these? Alternatively, are these from different parts of the canon?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:11:07

These are from different parts of the canon, these are simply the way I've observed how the Buddha talks about self in his various teachings. In some cases, the concern for the self is you want to you want to provide for the happiness of the self, well, that's thinking about the self as a consumer. Other times when you think about- I am capable of doing this, like the self is being its own mainstay. The self that says that the other beings, other people can do this. They're human beings, I'm a human being, why can't I? Why can't I do it? That is basically you're thinking about the terms of self as the producer. The self as commentator is basically what the Buddha was teaching Rahula- how to ask questions about your actions while you're doing them. So again, these terms are not- there's no specific term applied to them in the canon, it's simply my observation of how the Buddha's psychology, when he talks self, how the psychology works.

Questioner 1:12:05

Thank you, how can we know for sure that we are at the stage of non fashioning? How long does it take from the stage of non fashioning to awakening?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:12:17

When you stop fashioning okay, there will be an awakening immediately. Because what's happening is what holds the present moment together is your intention in the present moment. And then when your experience of the six senses goes, and it's replaced by this knowing element, that's not related to the six senses at all. That's when you know that you've had a moment of non-fashion.

Questioner 1:12:47

Dear Ajaan, in the meditation, I could see self forming and conceit arising along with it. But not able to say explicitly identify any one or more of the aggregates as "I am". Then to which aggregate should I focus? And tell this is not me? Thank you.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:13:13

Okay, I'll start with perception. Because the sense of I Am is a kind of perception.



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Questioner 1:13:25

What are the three perceptions?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:13:29

In Pāli, Anicca, Dukkha, Anattā. They're usually called the three characteristics. That's the term that was applied to them in the commentaries. In the canon, they're referred to as perceptions. Perception of inconstancy. Sometimes that's translated as impermanence. But the word anicca, it's the negative of nicca, which means constant. And it's not so much that things are impermanent it's that the problem is they're unreliable. Dukkha I translate as stress, it's also translated as suffering, and then of course, anattā is not-self.

Questioner 1:14:00

Um, my livelihood right now tends to come from orchestrating change in my organization across long timescales. And as I have studied, dependent co-arising, I've think I've come to discern that a lot of our issues tend to come from aggregation defilements, if you will. And I've found success as I have started to apply what I have learned in meditation to how I approach our organization as an example. But what that's done for me though, is I find that sometimes I find stress and when I tried to tease it apart during meditation and discern it, I find myself sometimes getting stuck on time, and then I pull out three characteristics and that goes nowhere. So I put a pin in that and move on to something more useful. And I was just wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:15:08

So the issue is about time?

Questioner 1:15:09

Yeah, I have yet to, if I am meditating, and I find stress, and I discern it back to the concept of time, I kind of come to an impasse and I work through a different means to try to do something with the problem, if that makes sense. I Yeah.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:15:27

Okay, well. Yeah, is the question impatience around time, or just having to go back and forth into the past and the future?

Questioner 1:15:41

It's more so like, I find stress and say it's around a plan or something that is not tangible, yet something it's a completely fabrication. And I'm trying to make fabrications reality. And so time is a requirement there. And so sometimes as I try to discern, where is the stress? What am I clinging to? Sometimes I almost perceive that I'm clinging to time, and I have yet to figure out how to apply three characteristics there.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:16:07

Okay, now, this is where you have to basically say, I wouldn't apply three characteristics right there quite yet. I'd say more, "I've got to get my mind under control and stop just certain types of thought which are not helpful right now." So you just focus on the stressful of the thoughts. And



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they're getting in the way of my concentration. So that particular narrative has to go, I have to, whatever attachment I have to it, I have to tell myself, look, I cannot hold on to you right now. Because you're interfering with something which I think is more important.

Questioner 1:16:43

Okay, so So ignoring that train of thought so far has been the right course of action.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:16:48

Right. Right.

Questioner 1:16:49

Thank you. All right, Tan Ajaan I think one more question has come separately to me. So I read out the questions, it's a pretty interesting one. So it says she had this question coming from your reading material, the not-self strategy under Section six. It says that dispassion is an unfabricated phenomenon. And this person had the understanding that they could cultivate or fabricate dispassion by contemplating the three characteristics, the foulness of the body, etc.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:17:30

Okay, you can, the contemplation is the means to the to the dispassion just like the path, the path doesn't cause dispassion. (Somebody's making noise.) What you do in terms of the contemplation is part of the path. And this is why the Buddha used the image of a path. It's like the path to the mountain doesn't cause the mountain to be, but following the path will take you there. So in this case, you follow the path that will take you to, to dispassion, you're not causing dispassion. Dispassion is something that sort of, as things drop away, that's the dispassion.

Questioner 1:18:15

So it is because it is the nibbida that results from the five types of question?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:18:22

Right, right, the five types of questioning that you're asking and then comparing the drawbacks with the allure of whatever it is you're attached to. Okay. Thank you.

Questioner 1:18:33

The other question this person has also asked is what's the relationship between viññāṇā as an aggregate and viññāṇāṃ anidassanaṃ, or consciousness without surface?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:18:47

They're two different things. Viññāṇā as an aggregate has to depend on the sense spheres, or the sense media, and viññāṇā that is without surface is totally independent of the sense media.

Questioner 1:19:03

Okay, another question just came up. Can you please repeat the five types of questions? Five types of questions. Yeah.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:19:13



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Okay. First, you want to see how does this thing originate? When it arises, what comes with it? What causes it? Secondly, you want to see that it passes away, as the cause passes away. Third, if it comes back, you say, Well, why am I going back for this again? What's the allure? What's attractive about this, what do I find compelling? And it can be there's something you like about it, or a sense of duty you may have around it, an obligation that you have to do this. And then the fourth one is seeing the drawbacks. And then the fifth is the result, which is there's going to be dispassion and that's the escape.

Moderator 1:19:56

So I just want to remind everyone, just five more minutes left. So hopefully, try to ask questions as briefly as you can to respect Tan Ajaan's time. Tan Ajaan, it's okay, if we go just one or two minutes? Okay.

Questioner 1:20:18

Okay, I'll try to be as brief as possible. Thank you, Ajaan, for your talk tonight. Well, tonight, for me, at least because I'm here in UK. So you're talked in your talk today about the self as being a strategy for happiness. And, for me, that connects another statement, from your book on discernment. We identify who we are by how we feed. And as long as we are unawakened beings, we will continue to create a sense of self and will continue to feed and wrapped up in that is a sense of vulnerability, and anxiety, because of the nature of the process, so I thought, so I was wondering if you could maybe talk a little bit about how to address and handle that sense of vulnerability, and anxiety that comes from feeding and come from selfing.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:21:13

Okay, well, this is where you have to start developing the selfing around concentration. So you realize that you can support yourself mentally and emotionally more and more through the practice of the skill that you develop around concentration, so that when things outside change, as they inevitably will, you're not so threatened by them.

Questioner 1:21:32

Okay. And do you feel that this is a place where the contemplation of refuge comes in as well?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:21:39

Right? You're realizing that you're taking your refuge, as the Buddha said, you take yourself as a refuge. And that means developing the establishing of mindfulness and establishing a mindfulness leads to concentration. So that's where you're going to be looking for a sense of stability in your life. A more secure food source.

Questioner 1:22:00

I'll do my best. Thank you.

Questioner 1:22:06

Yeah, so in the March 1, talk on rebirth and not-self, you were speaking about how the Buddha said that sometimes beings who do good, have bad rebirth, and sometimes beings who do harmful things have good rebirth? And the Buddha said that is because if you did well, if you did good, and then you had a bad rebirth, it was because you developed the wrong view. Now,



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initially, when I hear that, I think of somebody thinking like the Buddha is wrong or awakening is not possible or something like that, which is like a layup. Like, yes, that's a wrong view. But would worrying about your family members at death, would that be considered developing wrong view?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:22:49

It wouldn't be wrong view, but it would be the kind of karma that would pull you down. And this is where you need somebody by your side, to say, "Justin, no, don't worry about us." Remember that, there was the guy who seemed to be on his deathbed and his wife said, "Don't worry about me. If you're concerned that I'll go away from the dharma, don't worry, now that you're gone I like to have more time to be with the dharma." Okay, that's what you want. Okay.

Questioner 1:23:27

Noted.

Questioner 1:23:28

All right. Thank you, Tan Ajaan.

Moderator 1:23:34

There's one more question Balaji, that someone has, I think this will close it well.

Questioner 1:23:40

All right. Yes. Can you also repeat the one thing we should get from this talk? As you stated in the beginning?

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:23:48

Okay, the one thing is that the not-self teaching is not an attempt to define what you are or what you are not. The Buddha's not saying that there is no self. It's there to help you develop some Dispassion for the various ways that you've been defining yourself. The problem is not what you are, the problem is your idea of what you are. But the Buddha's genius is going to take part of the way you define what you are and make that part of the solution. In other words, learning how to train your sense of self so that it actually is focused on the path. And then from there, once you get to the end of the path, then you can let go of both self and not-self.

Questioner 1:24:36

Thank you, Tan Ajaan for this fantastic day long.

Ajaan Thanissaro 1:24:40

I hope it's been helpful.