Anattalakkhana Sutta
(Samyutta Nikaya XXII, 59)

The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic

Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

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I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

"The body, monks, is not self. If the body were the self, this body would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to the body, 'Let my body be thus. Let my body not be thus.' But precisely because the body is not self, the body lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to the body, 'Let my body be thus. Let my body not be thus.'

"Feeling is not self. If feeling were the self, this feeling would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to feeling, 'Let my feeling be thus. Let my feeling not be thus.' But precisely because feeling is not self, feeling lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to feeling, 'Let my feeling be thus. Let my feeling not be thus.'

"Perception is not self. If perception were the self, this perception would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to perception, 'Let my perception be thus. Let my perception not be thus.' But precisely because perception is not self, perception lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to perception, 'Let my perception be thus. Let my perception not be thus.'

"Mental processes are not self. If mental processes were the self, these mental processes would not lend themselves to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to mental processes, 'Let my mental processes be thus. Let my mental processes not be thus.' But precisely because mental processes are not self, mental processes lend themselves to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to mental processes, 'Let my mental processes be thus. Let my mental processes not be thus.'

"Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.' But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.'

"How do you construe thus, monks -- Is the body constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"How do you construe thus, monks -- Is feeling constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"How do you construe thus, monks -- Is perception constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"How do you construe thus, monks -- Are mental processes constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"How do you construe thus, monks -- Is consciousness constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"Thus, monks, any body whatsoever -- past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every body -- is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Any feeling whatsoever -- past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every feeling -- is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as:

'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Any perception whatsoever -- past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every perception -- is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Any mental processes whatsoever -- past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: all mental processes -- are to be seen as they actually are with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Any consciousness whatsoever -- past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness -- is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Seeing thus, the instructed Noble disciple grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with mental processes, & disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released.

"With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that, 'Birth is depleted, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Glad at heart, the group of five monks delighted at his words.

And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of the group of five monks, through lack of clinging, were released from the mental effluents.