

## Lecture 3: The True Nature of Existence (part 2)

(Notes on Bhikkhu Bodhi's introductory lectures, "The Buddha's Teaching as It Is", <http://www.buddhanet.net/audio-lectures.htm>).

3.1 dealt with the 'first characteristic' of existence, impermanence. This part continues with the second: dukkha

**Dukkha** (dealt with more fully in lecture 2)

Pain arising from the fact that change occurs even though we crave for things to last. According to Pali commentary, dukkha is 'Oppression by rise and fall'. The rise and fall of the aggregates seems oppressive because we want them to be stable.

**Anatta (Non-self / selflessness)**

According to the Buddha we need to see the 'selfless' nature of all phenomena in order to break free from conditioned existence.

This is a subtle teaching that is easily misunderstood. Self can be used in three senses:

1. A reflexive meaning (e.g. training oneself, making effort oneself) -> accepted
2. 'Self' as a shorthand for what is really a complex of body and mind, distinguishing different people -> accepted
3. Self as a substantial 'ego-entity', or lasting core -> rejected

Persons do exist, but there is no 'inner nucleus of selfhood'

Traditional example: In the dark we mistake a rope to be a snake and are afraid. When we shine a light on it, we see it was only a rope. There never was a snake, but only the appearance of one.

Rope = The person, consisting of a complex of mental and physical events

Snake = The non-existent self

The darkness = ignorance

**What would be the nature of a 'self' as a substantial entity, if one existed?**

1. Persisting through time
2. Simplicity, not a composite, indivisible, partless
3. Unconditioned, self-sufficient, not contingent on other things
4. Susceptible to control. If something is really 'me' then it should always conform to what we want it to be.

## Does such a self exist?

If it does it would have to be either:

1. the same as the five aggregates (either one or a combination of them)
2. different from the five aggregates

### 1. Self is not the same as the aggregates (existing somehow within them or as them):

- Every aspect of the mind and body is in flux, there are no lasting entities
- The person made up of the aggregates is a compound of multiple elements, not a singular monolithic whole
- The aggregates arise from conditions and are not self-sufficient
- We do not have mastery over the aggregates – the body gets old even if we don't want it to, we feel unhappy even if we don't want to, etc. They are not fully 'ours' because they depend on other conditions.

### 2. Self does not exist distinct from the aggregates (lying outside them, as their owner):

If it did, it would be findable, locatable. However, whatever we try to point to as the self turns out to be within the aggregates, even including the mind that is searching for the self.

## Not-self and rebirth

The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth does not posit an enduring entity passing from one life to the next. Rather, it is causal continuity across lifetimes. Even within lifetime, there is coherence within a stream of experience without any essence persisting over time.