

The Blooming of a Lotus

#22 Looking Deeply Mental formations

are of my body, I breathe in.
ing to my body, I breathe out.
: of body, Smiling

are that this body is not me, I breathe in.
: that no self owns this body, I breathe out.
not me, No self owns body

are of a feeling present now, I breathe in.
ing to this feeling, I breathe out.
: of feeling, Smiling

are that this feeling is not me, I breathe in.
: that no self owns this feeling, I breathe out.
g not me, No self owns feeling

are of a perception present now, I breathe in.
ing to this perception, I breathe out.
: of perception, Smiling

are that this perception is not me, I breathe in.
: that no self owns this perception, I breathe out.
tion not me, No self owns perception

are of a mental formation present now, I breathe in.
ing to this mental formation, I breathe out.
: of mental formation, Smiling

are that this mental formation is not me, I breathe in.
: that no self owns this mental formation, I breathe out.
l formation not me, No self owns mental formation

are of consciousness being present, I breathe in.
ing to this consciousness, I breathe out.
: of consciousness, Smiling

are that this consciousness is not me, I breathe in.
: that no self owns this consciousness, I breathe out.
ousness not me, No self owns consciousness

knowing I am not limited by this body, I breathe in.
knowing this body is not limited by my lifespan, I breathe out.

Knowing that this body as five aggregates is birthless and deathless, I breathe in.
Knowing that I am also birthless and deathless, I breathe out.
Birthless, deathless
Less, deathless

Smiling to the birthlessness and deathlessness of this body, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birthlessness and deathlessness of this self, I breathe out
Smiling to birthless, deathless body
Smiling to birthless, deathless self

Exercise helps us to look deeply at the nature of selflessness. The body and the other bases of perception (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and mind) are not the self. Nor do they belong to a self that lies outside them. The five aggregates are the body, the feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. These five aggregates are not the self, and they are also not the property that exists apart from them. Self is often defined as a changeless entity existing independently from so-called nonself entities. Buddhism teaches that there is no such self, because in reality there is nothing changeless which can exist independently of all things. Then, is, the meaning of the words "I" and "self" in exercise twenty-two, and what do they refer to? Obviously "I" here refers to the person who is meditating, who is a compound of the five aggregates. The five aggregates are themselves a river of constantly changing phenomena which are not separate entities. If we understand that, then there is nothing wrong with the use of the words "I" and "self" if our minds are open to the fact that self is made of nonself elements, we can use the expression "self" without fear—like Ananda when he asked Ananda: "Do you wish to come to Vulture peak with me?"
Wrong views of self can be enumerated as follows:

1. The body is the self (Sattakayadrsti).
2. The body is not the self but it belongs to the self.
3. The body is in the self and the self is in the body.
4. The body is not the self but it is also not something independent of the self.
5. The world is the self, the self is the world.

It is important to remember that we meditate on no-self in order to uproot the idea of a permanent and changeless self-substance and to establish a theory of nihilism. Eternalism and nihilism are both wrong views, traps which the Buddha taught his disciples to avoid. The view of permanence (Pali sassata-ditthi) and the view that nothing is (Pali uccheda ditthi) are the basis of all wrong thinking. If we are able to go beyond these two extremes, we can freely and as we please use the word "I," just as the Buddha used "This body is mine" or "I am not this body." To identify self with the world is also a confused notion if it means we are caught in "eternalistic" thinking: "I am the universe. As long as the universe is there I continue to exist. When the universe is not there I cease to exist." This is not so, for truly reality is birthless and deathless, without self and without other. It does not come and does not go, and it is not destroyed. Only by realizing this reality that we can destroy the wrong view of self. Those who simply repeat over and over again "nihilistic doctrine" have probably lost their way and entered the view of nihilism.