

# Beginner's Course - 6

No Self



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## Lesson 6: No Self

Of the three dharma seals, no-self is least mentioned. Buddhists like to talk about compassion, loving-kindness, humility, peace and joy, but no one talks about the very essence which underlies all of those virtues in Buddhism. The realization of no self is the embodiment of liberation. It is the basis of existence that all of our reality is based on an assumption of a permanent, unchanging self, yet, when closely observed in our mind, we are shocked to find that no such thing exists.

The realization of no self is the basis for true liberation. Why? Because when we assume that a self exists, we grasp all the changing phenomena of mind such as thoughts, feelings, sensations, perception and even consciousness, and to make those things ourselves, we are forever feeling insecure. These five elements of the mind: thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions and consciousness (called five aggregates) are constantly in flux. It is always changing!

What we identify as self are a bunch of mental labels, which are just thoughts that must continuously hold our attention from one thought or label to another without breaks. If we stop thinking, all this stream of thoughts will disappear; therefore, our false selves will die. No-self – a terrifying place for thoughts. In a world that virtually worships thoughts and intellectual pursuits, and human individuality, no self is not something people want to discover and acknowledge in their search for truth.

Identity – a collection of concepts grasped and held together by Manas (a sense of conceit) with the help of Alaya (storehouse consciousness or the unconscious). Its fundamental makeup is the continuous movement of thoughts/ desires.

The Theravada sees suffering as real; the Mahayana tradition sees it as an illusion since there is no fundamental concept of a self; who suffers then?

A child has a limited concept of identity. (ie. The Ego), the child's concept of identity is localized by the function of Manas (conceit) and Alaya (unconscious).

An adult has many concepts of identity acquired over years of experience and grasping those experiences.

Fundamental identity has the existence of a body to form its most basic form of grasping or desiring, a conduit to the mind that allows the stream of the succession of thoughts. Death – or the disillusion of the most basic form of identity- is a terrifying experience. No self is the only real essence of human life. Everything else is impermanence.

In Theravada tradition, the insight into no-self has arrived through Jhana and Vipassana practice.

In the Mahayana Zen tradition, the insight into no-self has arrived through Koan, Zazen, and meditative practice. An experience of piercing the veil of existence and realizing no-self is called Kensho or Satori. One who experiences Kensho/Satori has a glimpse for the first time into the true nature of existence without a self or a glimpse into emptiness.

Before the disillusion of the self, one experiences an identity crisis.

Before the disillusion of the self, one experiences a tremendous amount of fear.

Fear is the gate that must be passed before entering the first Jhana which one experiences Piti, or tremendous joy and lightness.

Suffering is a condition associated with the existence of the self, which has no real existence but is dependent on eight factors of consciousness.

The insight of no-self cannot be communicated, but only through personal practice in gaining insight into the nature of existence.

To arrive at no-self insight, we must question and observe the ever-changing nature of a “self.”

A body – what we fundamentally identify with being our “self” is ever-changing.

A name –is rarely unique to anyone. It, too, changes as we wish it. It is also a collection of several words together to form a name. It was given to us after we were born. If we were not given a name, then who then are we?

Being male or female – this, too, with recent medical advances, could also be changed and is tied in with the function of a body.

Feelings – well, this changes all the time.

Collection of traits – is interchangeable depending on whether a person wishes it to be changed and applies themselves to doing so.

Who is this “I” then when we refer to ourselves? Who is this “I” that the thought constantly revolves its activities around? Who is this “I” that we constantly reference in our language, actions, and thoughts?

The only way we can get to the Root of “I” is to observe in our consciousness, in our experience, that which does not change.

The Buddha is a scientist of consciousness. Determined to discover the nature of identity, he sat for 49 days in silent meditation to observe his consciousness and discover the true nature of the self.

Without judgment or a label on anything he observed to hinder his observation, he arrived at the true nature of the self: that it doesn’t exist or has any permanent existence.

No Self is the absolute reality of all forms in nature, including all that forms our existence and experience.

When we experience something, the experience itself is observed without labeling and referencing another “label” called “I,” which is nothing more than the movements of a constant thought stream, without this incessant labeling, we are free of reality distortions. We then can see things as they are and realize liberation from sufferings.