

Not Self: The Buddha's Teachings (4 of 5)

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2006-02-06

Keywords:

anattā, not-self, self-identity, dukkha, Four Noble Truths, clinging, liberation, Sāriputta, personality view, suffering

So good evening, everyone. And so today I am going to continue with the theme that I have done the last three weeks, and on the theme of self, not self, selfing, unselfing. And hopefully I still have your interest. This topic, that's a very personal topic, of course, and so we should all be very interested, I would imagine, in principle. So the question is that the topic as to itself? And it's one that is addressed by many different philosophers, many different religious teachers, teachings by many psychologists.

It seems like such a very central category for human beings: the dear self, and myself as a self, all that. And then the Buddha has a teaching that's almost basic, appears almost like a basic foundation of his teaching, that which is the teaching of *anattā*. And *anattā* is sometimes translated into English as a teaching of no self. And then people are perplexed: No self, I mean, I am here, you are there, there's a self. All my philosophy books have talked about self, all my psychologists have talked about self. And Buddhism says there's no self, and someone, of course, has to be wrong.

So it turns out that the Buddha never said or taught that there is no self. It's an easy thing to pick up when you can talk quickly, or hear very quick teachings of Buddhism: There is no self, and you find actually a lot of great Buddhist teachers who actually say there is no self, and then you'll ask, How can that be? And then they'll come up with various logic or philosophies or ways of looking at reality that somehow will tell you, There is a self and there is no self. There is a, well, conventionally there is a self, but ultimately there is no self, and that's kind of philosophies, and thus two different levels or realms of reality, or realms of discourse, ways of talking. And one is conventional. We use concepts and conventions, and the other is more ultimate, how things actually are.

But if you take the Buddhist teachers who say there is no self, and take that at face value, and then go back and try to find the Buddha saying that there is no self, you won't find that at all. And so that's kind of perplexing here. The founder of the religion never said that. People attribute it to him all the time. And so what's that about? There was only one time in the record, or the record, and the records are quite extensive. There's something like, you know, I don't know any volume, as if all the records together, or what survives supposedly the Buddha's teachings, would probably be in about five or six, maybe seven books this size, a lot, and only one, only once in all.

That entire record that someone actually asked the Buddha, Is there no self? Is there no self? And in a sense, unfortunately for us, he remained silent. So you know, finally someone's been trying to pin him down. What is this about no self teaching? I've read all these books, you know. I went down to Kepler's. I bought these books on Buddhism. And I say, There's no self. And I finally got to ask you: Is there no self? And the Buddha just didn't answer. So what goes on? What's happening there?

Before I go much further, I wanted to read you a quote that I found one day when I was walking in downtown San Jose. I don't know San Jose very well, not anymore, but not at all. But somewhere in the very central part of San Jose, there's a kind of pedestrian walk area, and on there, engraved on a bench or on cement—I forget, it was so many years ago—but there's engraved on a bench or engraved somewhere on a piece of stone, was this quote by Ernesto. Maybe somebody knows the quote. You see it down there, and his name is Ernesto Galarza. It's familiar to anyone. I figured he was famous or important in San Jose.

I don't know who he is, anybody. He says, "Possibly the self not being fundamental." That caught my attention, you know, down there in San Jose. No, I don't think this guy had studied Buddhism. "Possibly the self not being fundamental breathes out on the incidental." I don't know what that means, but I can imagine what it means. But the fact that somebody else, I would say, the self is not fundamental, and each of us takes ourselves as being so fundamental, so fundamentally important, and the self is not fundamental breathes out on the incidental.

So I like the idea that they have the breath in there, because that seems pretty Buddhist, focusing on the breath. And the first self is not fundamental in breath. That's good. So, so set, and then breathes out on the incidental, and breathes out on the incidental. For me, I take it to be just the details of life, each moment, each detail, each event itself. The self breathes out. Everything ends on the outbreath. Everything begins on the next in-breath.

The world gets born moment by moment, and that's a kind of very deep, I think, experience. Some people can have that moment by moment. The whole world we live in somehow or other ends, and the next moment it begins all over again. And mostly we have a sense of tremendous continuity all the time. We carry our self, we carry our history, we carry everything with us down through time, and nothing really changes. And so that, you know, this self of ours we take, we take it so solid often.

So the Buddha didn't teach that there is no self, so there's no record of that at all. But he did teach *anattā*, and *anattā* should not be translated as no self, but rather should be translated as not self. And that's a subtle distinction, but it's a hugely important distinction. To say there is no self is to make a metaphysical claim, an ontological claim, a claim about reality as it is. Whenever the Buddha taught about not self, not self, it was always qualifying something, was always describing something, characterizing something.

So when you say not self, it's implying that something is not self. So not self, not self teaching is a teaching about things, that things, certain things are not, certain things are not self. Now, you can breathe out this. So I said, is *anattā* to these things in there are in there are no. So the teaching on not self is, you know, like water is wet. So wetness is a characteristic of water, in a sense. You don't have wetness without a liquid, without making six go along with me without water.

So if there's water, then there's wetness. If there's wetness, there's water. Or there's liquid and water. Wetness is a characteristic of water. And I suppose there's a lot of things that you would say only exist as a characteristic of something. They don't have an independent existence. So color, for example, in nature, color. I don't think color exists in nature in some way, right? You can argue that the color doesn't exist at all.

It's a kind of amazingly, you know, colorful world we live in. But it's just a kind of amazingly mysterious process that I don't think people really understand why these electrons, waves, light waves, as they come and hit our retina and go into our brain, they get translated into these, into these particular colors we know by the waves. And how the colors correspond to different wave frequencies and all that, but why they should be interpreted or seen or in the mind as being blue or red. You know, that's the kind of little mystery. But, you know, in nature, color doesn't exist apart from something which has that color. So color is generally a characteristic of something.

So the not self teaching, not self is a characteristic of things. The only question is, What things is it a characteristic of? So certain things are not self. So the Buddha would say, This body

is not self, your feelings are not self, your perceptions are not self, your intentions, your impulses, your thoughts are not self, your consciousness is not self. He would never say, There is no self. But he points to certain things which these things don't qualify as a self at all. Don't take them as a self.

There are examples in the discourses of very accomplished meditators, some of the Buddha's most accomplished students, very accomplished in meditation, deep spiritual life. One of them, I am thinking of now, who was very deeply attained in meditation, but he was still not liberated. And he went and talked to Sāriputta, another disciple of the Buddha, and said, Look, I've practiced very deeply, very seriously. I come to very deep states of meditation where I am really still and still. Even with that stillness, I haven't still been liberated. And he was instructed and say, When you're talking, when you're having these experiences, when you talk about it, there's a lot of self in there. I'm, you know, I've got this deep attainment. I've got this. I haven't reached this final level of liberation. It's all kind of done through the reference of I.

So he was kind of, that was pointed out to him, and then he went back to meditation, and stopped referencing things to the self, some self that was experiencing it all. And that was what he needed. That was a little key. He needed to kind of finally experience his realization: This is liberation. Somehow stop the constant referencing of experience through the filter of self. This is happening to me. It's my last little piece of self. Consciousness is a little bit.

This is what I talked about last week, was I tried to talk last week that all these things that don't qualify as self, it turns out that you can't find anything. If you pay very careful attention, you can't find anything as being the definitive thing that you can say, This is who I am. But to say that this is not who I am, this particular thing. And the fact you can't find anything which is not anything, you know, this is not who I am doesn't translate it. Saying there is no self just means you can't find any anywhere. And any kind of empirical experience, you cannot find a self.

And then you can push, Well, empirical experience that's, you know, or lightweight or something. You know, now, really, we have to intuit some kind of metaphysical self that's beyond empirical experience. And that's what some people do. There's some kind of self that's beyond you. You can't see it. You can't feel it, you can't somehow have contact with it. But you kind of, your logic or intuition tells you it's there, and I think that also the Buddha said, then it's not. I didn't say this exactly.

This is my kind of follow up on that. If that, then it's not relevant. If it's outside of your expe-

rience, then it's not really relevant, because what's relevant for the Buddha is very much the world that you can experience. Because the Buddha was trying to address issues in our life that have to do with what we can actually experience. That was the domain, the realm, the Buddha was trying to address. And what he was trying to address in particular was suffering, how we suffer, and how to be free of suffering.

So there's, I think, kind of a wonderful discourse of the Buddha. He talks about how to pay attention to things wisely and how to pay attention unwisely. Or another way of saying it is on what questions you should ask in your practice life if you want to become liberated. You engage in a spiritual practice of looking deeply. But looking deeply needs and tends to be informed by certain questions of what you are looking for. And you have to ask the right questions.

So if you ask a question, if you become a naturalist or zoologist, and your whole life's dedicated to the study of zoology, to animals, and what you really want to discover is a white unicorn, you could spend, you know, a whole career never find one because you're asking the wrong question. Unicorns don't exist, so looking for the white unicorn is not going to get you the right thing, the right answer. You have to have the right question. You know more or less in order to know what to look for. So to ask in what is the self in some essential, true, ultimate way. The suggestion of Buddhism is that it's a bit like a unicorn to look for. The self is a little, you won't find it. That's the wrong question to ask.

There's a lot of questions that go together with a question of self, and are connected to self. Questions that I would consider to be unwise, not useful questions to have. So here is a list of these kinds of unwise, unuseful questions:

Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future? Or else the person is inwardly perplexed about the present in the following way: Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?

That's kind of a big list. What's left? What can you ask about? What can you ask about yourself? When a person attends unwisely in this way, one of six views can arise: The view, Self exists for me arises as true and established; or the view, No self exists for me arises in him as true and established; or the view, I perceive self with self arises as true and established; or

the view, I perceive not self with self arises as true and established. Or the view, I perceive self with not self arises in him as true and established. Or else he has some such view as this: It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions. But this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change and will endure as long as eternity.

These speculative views are called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the common person is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, and is not freed from suffering. So nowhere do you find the Buddha teaching that there is a self, and nowhere do you find him teaching there is not a self. And in fact, in this discourse, he very clearly suggests, Don't bother with—he says that the view, the philosophy, the idea that there is a self, or the view, the idea that there is no self, both should be avoided.

Both of them are philosophical nightmares, you know. If you start questioning and looking and analyzing deeply, what's behind any kind of claim, This is the self, or There is no self, you know, it's a thicket of views. You'll get into this maze of philosophy, and now there's no way out. So then the question is, What's the alternative? And this is really the climax of the talk, or even the climax of these last three, four weeks. What is the alternative? What's left? What's left? What can you do?

So the Buddha still is trying to offer or suggest a way to attend wisely, to ask good questions, to help you find the path to liberation. And he suggests, This is how you find the path. This is the question to ask when one attends wisely as follows:

This is suffering.

This is the origin of suffering.

This is the cessation of suffering.

This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

When a person attends wisely in this way, three entanglements are abandoned: personality view, doubt, and clinging to rules and observances. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by seeing. So here is what he offers as an alternative to the whole quest of self, and understanding the self, and finding a true self, or finding a conventional self, or an ultimate self, or finding no self, or all this kind of idea of oneself.

What he's suggesting as an alternative is to look at something much more immediate, some-

thing much more intimate, almost. And that is in your own experience here and now. Notice where there is suffering or stress or tension. The word is *dukkha*, and then look for the origin of that, to understand the cause of that *dukkha*, that suffering, and then realize the cessation of that suffering, like the cause and that suffering, and then follow a path that can make you do that.

This is the *Four Noble Truths*, and this is really the pillar or the foundation of the Buddhist teachings. Part of his brilliance as a teacher was to offer a spiritual path that was not based on philosophy or metaphysics or ontology that was removed from what we experience here and now. So there's no god that you have to believe in. For some people, that god is self, right? And so there's no, even there's no—all questions about self and finding a true self, in a sense, is avoided in this path.

The Buddha offered a suggestion: Instead, drop down into your immediate experience and notice where your attention is. Notice where you're suffering. Notice where the sense of stress is in your life. Take that seriously, and then investigate there and find where that can help you find freedom from it. The quest in Buddhism is to become free of suffering, and the starting point for doing that is suffering itself. The awakening of Buddhism is the waking free of suffering.

And so the most direct route to do that is to start with suffering and look at that. If you start with philosophy, then you can go a really long time, even go years and years. You can get a PhD in Buddhism, I like to say, and not get any closer to answering that question. But you don't study at all except studying yourself in the immediacy of your experience. Also, the issue of self is very important for us. Many of us, I do, cling to self or have views about self, ideas of who we are.

As we meditate, as the mind gets more mindful and more perceptive or present, as we learn to leave ourselves alone in meditation, just be present, then we start seeing more and more in highlight the ways in which we don't let ourselves just be. We see more clearly the ways in which we cling to self-identity. We cling to conceit. We cling to views and ideas of who we are. We cling to ideas of what I need, what the self needs. And we also see the way in which, out of this clinging to self-identity and ideas of who we are, it gives birth sometimes to a whole slew of our emotional life.

There's a whole category of emotions that arise because we have first some idea of who we are, some clinging to a sense of self. So, for example, boredom sometimes can arise when what's happening in the world in some way doesn't relate to my cherished idea of who I am.

Fear can arise sometimes when my sense of self is threatened, my self-identity, my self-image. Anger can arise when my self-image is frustrated. Certain types of joys can arise when the self or self-image is delightfully reinforced by reality.

So for example, if I win the California lottery, my cherished sense of self would be totally validated, and it proves that I am a wonderfully perfect person. You know, I can drive an expensive car, I can buy a big house, and I would just be just the greatest self, right? That would just be the best, and so I could feel a lot of joy. So I'm going to point to certain kinds of emotions that arise because of this. We already have this clinging to self, and people will suffer a lot. A lot of suffering that people experience in the world has to do with how we are holding this idea, cherished idea of self.

As we start looking, especially in meditation, we start seeing the places where the holding is. And it's not possible to go deep in meditation without beginning to shed some of the layers of clinging and holding around we have it on self. And the more, I would suggest, that one of the most direct ways of shedding in a realistic way, through understanding what we're doing in the process, is by looking and studying the suffering and the clinging that gave birth to that suffering. If you have some idea of what your true self is, or some idea of what no self is, and try to hold to the idea, then you're just substituting one kind of holding for another kind of holding.

So a lot of Buddhist meditation practice or Buddhist spiritual life has to do with shedding and shedding the things that we hold on to. And then some people, then, the question is, Who are you when you've shed everything? And that becomes a very important question for some people, because it can be very frightening to shed our self-image, self-identity. Always cherished clings we have to self, because that's the way people find their orientation in the world with other people. That's how they find that they're safe, for they kind of know who they are in the world, this reference point me and whatever you are, some kind of idea.

And some of the ways in which we cling to self we do because we think it can provide us with security or well-being or a sense of purpose or something. And so, as this shedding process continues, it can be very frightening for some people. I have known people who've gone into a panic because the idea of not having the protection of some idea of who I am is very, very difficult. So it should be entered, this whole process should be entered with great respect and great care. You shouldn't rush through the process, because it's quite, to me, quite a challenge to really let go in a deep way.

I remember there was a time in my practice where I could just see that what the practice was

asking of me was to let go of some cherished idea that I was holding on to who I was. I could see it was asking me that, and it was like looking over a precipice. You know, I could see it. I knew I had to, but I wasn't ready to step over there. Please, it's bottomless. Nothing would hold me up. One image I have of a practice like this is that you come to a point to the edge of a cliff, and you're asked to step off the edge, and it's net—look down.

So long as it's bottomless, it's almost bottomless that it's safe, or because it can't hit anything. But, you know, it's a long way down. And so you come to the edge of the cliff and you're asked to take a step, take a step out into the abyss or into the void. And it doesn't seem safe, no way. But you're told you have to. So after all, you finally trust your teacher. OK, I guess this is it. I guess I'll die. But I am told this. My teacher asked me to do this.

So you take that step, and then as you take a step into the unknown, you let go of your last holding to the ground. Then magically the cliff grows out and receives your next foot. But then you're to take the next step out. So you do, and then magically the cliff grows out, is there to receive you, so to let go of self. So none of this is meant to be a belief. As far as my understanding of the teachings of the Buddha, the whole idea of self and not self is not meant to be beliefs at all, but rather a suggestion.

It is a suggestion: just keep looking, keep getting still, keep being present. Keep looking deeply, and you'll see very clearly what needs to be let go of, and is let go of. And at some point, you'll see very clearly that in your experience here and now that nothing makes—it doesn't make sense to take anything as the self. So it's not a belief or a view. It's something you'll see. You'll see that who I can't find. I don't know where. I can look everywhere, scan the horizon, scan within sight of me, and nothing makes sense to take as myself.

So it's an empirical experience, not a view, an idea. So you can, you're more than welcome. Just wait patiently until that day comes, and then when that day comes and you see, That doesn't make any sense, take anything as a self, then the suggestion is, Stop trying to do it. Take and be at ease, be at peace. So I hope that once and for all you have freed yourself of a notion. Maybe you never had it until tonight, but free yourself of the notion that Buddhism teaches that there is no self.

So what do you think? What are your thoughts or comments on this or questions?

Kate: Boredom

West: Boredom, boredom. What I was trying to do is say that there's a certain way sometimes our emotions are triggered, or the condition for the arising of certain emotions is our sense of self or self-concept. So sometimes, if our experience in life has no relevance to our self-

concept, that can trigger boredom. If we get praised, I'm not bored, get criticized, I'm also not bored, but if it's no relevance to myself at all, then especially if I'm narcissistic, then, you know, everything has to relate to the self, right? So that it's real. I easily get bored, because not everything does. It doesn't mean that all boredom comes out of a sense of self-clinging. But I think boredom often has a strong component part to that.

Yes, I guess my thought about the self is the self is a concept, and there's—I mean, it sort of limits my experience. And so if I stay with my experience and not with my ideas of what it might be, then it either—then I'm to have a more full experience, and I guess I won't be limited by just some idea I'm this or I'm that, which is craziness. That's it. So I then, on one, on a definition I have for the self. It's like, Yours, this self is wind drag, wind drag, wind drag. So I can put your hand out the car window and the wind drag. The self is wind drag. That's self. It's limiting, right? Can't be so over here.

I'm having a hard time. I'm buying it. Frankly, I'm glad you asked what we thought. I guess I'm swayed by empirical evidence, I guess. And if I look at this experience and see not self as sort of a characteristic of all experience, then eventually it seems like I've gained enough empirical evidence to say there is, there is no self. Oh, you mean, we mean, if I—and I see what you're saying about I'm clinging to it, but clinging to it seems like a separate thing. I could cling to the idea that clinging is the root of suffering, and that, too, would cause me suffering. But it seems like before the clinging, to just have the felt experience that there is no self.

So after ten years of looking at all your experience, you know, and yet you don't find any self. After ten years and your experience, then it's probably safe to say there is no self, right? That's what you're saying, right? Yes, basically. Yes, I mean, you could also, you could. But why would you bother? Why? Why is it interesting? I think it's interesting because to see that, to see that in experience, is actually very freeing. So you would bother in the same way, for the same reason that you would bother to see that attachment causes suffering, because in seeing that there's some—that's quite following.

So is to see that there is no—see that there is nothing in your personal experience that qualifies as self. That's certainly freeing. But you find it also freeing to generalize from that and say, Well, I can safely generalize. It's a safe generalization, because statistically, here, you know, for ten years now, I see nothing else but this. So therefore you find that your generalization, therefore there is no self. You find that's helpful for you. Yes, I mean, if I look for things in my experience to see whether or not something is like fundamentally true, right, and there,

Buddhism does seem to teach that there are a few things that are fundamentally true, and I think of them as those three things.

You know, it's possible, but I'd offer a different view of this. And I do not can say my view is fundamentally true, but I'll offer you a different view of this. And that is that Buddhism is not meant to be physics. Though some people want to see this kind of physics, it's not as much. Buddhism is not trying to describe what reality is like. Buddhism has a very—the Buddha had a very narrow interest when he taught, and that was how to free people from suffering, and so he had the strategies to help people do that.

And one of the strategies was this deep mindfulness practice, that in the mindfulness practice, in the moment experience of mindfulness, we don't see the three characteristics, one of them which is not self. Now, you could, you could then come out of that deep meditative experience and make a conclusion that says, This is the nature of reality. This is what there is. There is no self. There isn't, you know? And that view could somehow be consoling for some people, to be frightening for others. That view can help lighten things up and loosen up certain attachments to some degree, to be useful.

But it's still a view. It's still relying on the view. And even that might be a comforting view. The strategy of the Buddha, as I understand at least the strategy of the *vipassanā* practice, is, in *vipassanā* practice, you won't be able to see very deeply the not self of the moment experience. But the function of that seeing is not to come to a conclusion about reality. The function of that seeing is, in that seeing deeply, to realize that it doesn't make sense to cling to anything as self, and then as encouragement in that experience while you're on a state to begin letting go of the deepest clinging that we have, and to do it so thoroughly that there's a radical, you know, just do it completely thoroughly, and a thorough shift, a thorough letting go that happens at the moment of liberation.

That doesn't need to have a view or a story behind it, you know. It's like if you have an illness, you take the medicine, and when you're cured, you don't have to create a religion around the medicine, you know. You say I took the medicine, you know. And there's also the placebo effect and things. And so I'm making sense for you. So that the point of the not self is that it's a strategy that helps the mind let go.

And once it succeeded in helping the mind letting go, you don't need to be concerned about the not self or not self. That's just a kind of incident. It's kind of interesting. It's not saying it's not interesting. It's kind of interesting. But your happiness is not dependent on that question. No, then you can get it. CD We now I look at all the different issues too. This is a very important

point. So do you understand what I'm saying? Is it satisfying, or are you not untroubled, or like ninety-five percent? It's hard, a feature. Yes, it's actually very good to hear that. I like it when people don't agree with me, perhaps.

So you might end up repeating your answer in the same way, but he probably—I'd like to hear that the ultimate letting go is to let go. Life itself and yet therefore our existence, evolution is based on survival instinct, procreation, and such a certain of clinging is sort of predetermined in our genetic make up? Or is it just basically, like you say, it's just a narrow interest to let one assist himself to freedom, the mind from suffering? I suppose you seeing the evolution as a fact of science, sir. If I follow your question. The question is, are there biological conditions in being a human being that operate automatically, naturally?

So if you are thirsty, you know, dying of thirst, then there's a strong desire for water to drink. And the biological, of course, is very highly related to the spiritual and mental, physical—answer the question. So there might be a strong, you know, physical, biological urge to drink, but you're thirsty. You're unison, and therefore the self to do the—therefore the need to nurture that self to survive, the need to nurture the self to survive. I suppose the total let go, which is basically going into a cliff and let go of life itself. Yes, some people do that. Great.

There are lots of stories in traditions of people who get really old and sick, great meditators who decide that it's time, and so they go into meditation. And meditation is let go completely of life itself. So some people do that. They see the issue here is maybe simpler, and the issue is not what biology propels us to do. But the issue is, how do we suffer? And so it's possible to be thirsty and not suffer. And I think probably all people, maybe some of you, have been in extremely trying situations, and then been able to not suffer because of it, you know, with it, been at peace in the midst of it.

I've certainly been in difficult situations where I've suffered a lot, and I've been in the same kind of difficult situations, reminds me of really peaceful. And you would think that when there's strong physical pain, for example, that physical pain comes with such suffering, and it doesn't necessarily come with suffering. I've had intense joy and delight in my mind, rapture in my mind, while at times having intense pain in my body. I've had times in which my mind is completely serene and peaceful when there's been intense pain in my body, so I've never—so there's certain things that happen in the body, strong conditions and movements, but does that necessarily translate into suffering in the mind?

Now, I'm not qualified to give you a definitive answer to this question, but I just know that the path, that being on the path of looking at suffering, the causes of suffering, and letting

go, and finding that the path is deeply satisfying, and it's adding, I believe, not immediately satisfying. I think it's a great gift to the world also to do that work. But that the self needs to be nurtured. And you have a responsibility, for example, to provide for your children, and therefore you have to go through a certain process of earning a living and such, right?

So I don't take this body as myself. However, this body is very important to take care of. You know, I take care of my car, I tell you, you know, try to get it serviced, you know, get oil change and stuff like that, and put gas in and various things, and try to take care of it. What runs well? And you get new tires now, so I think I can get new tires. And now this is all very important, right. It's the same thing with this body. Now I need to take care of it so it lasts for a long time.

If this body can be a good vehicle for being on the path, for being of service to the world, this body needs to be well maintained and taken care of. And I don't need to see it as this is my body in some kind of essential way. Or we cling to my body. It's a body. It's the one that I seem to come with, and better or worse. But, you know, so I take care of it, and I have this mind. I take care of the mind. I don't see my mind as myself. I also say when I suffer I don't necessarily see my suffering as myself either.

There's suffering. I'll work with and deal with it. If I am at peace, at ease, I don't see that as my peace, my ease. In fact, even less so than when I suffer, because when I'm deeply at peace, I can't find myself in that. It's like being transparent. It's like being empty. It's like being numb. It's kind of like, you know, yes, in a glass window that's so clean that you can't see the glass. You know, just, you know, where is the self in this peaceful experience?

And then someone comes along and says, Gil, how do you—how do you feel? Oh, oh, I got to find that self a little bit. You, Daraka, I feel fine. Thank you. But some, you know, it's a good question. It's a fair question. But you know, occasionally, when people ask me a question like, it seems like what—it doesn't quite compute for a moment.

Yes, I was interested about your feedback on the idea that there are difficulties that seem to not have a concept of self to begin with. Like there are some—what? There's different cultures that seem to not have a concept of self, and that self is really the relationship to everything around them. Like the Australian aborigines believe that they are the tree, that they are the water or the dirt, that they are just as equal a part of that. And is that what the Buddha is talking about? Getting away from the idea that myself is apart from everything around me, and that if there is an example that we have of the society on, you know, on earth that seems to do that, it would be something like the Australian aborigines.

Is it just, kind of, take the whole question of self out of the picture? Yes, take self out of the picture. I sense there are many different concepts of self that different cultures have. I don't know of any culture that has no concept of self. Maybe they exist, but it may be—I think most cultures have a concept of self. It's very interesting to go and live in different cultures and see how variable the self-concept is.

And if you only live in your own culture, it's almost inconceivable to imagine how radically different concepts of self are. And until you have been outside your culture, you take it as given. Natural is how the nature of the order of the universe was built around this particular concept of self, but describing anthropology, you realize it's culturally conditioned, and so much of our suffering arises out of the culturally conditioned idea of who we're supposed to be. But you realize this is cultural conditions, and anthropology is one of the vehicles to be all but free, because you realize, Awful! Wait a minute! It doesn't have to be this way.

So I don't know if there's any cultures without the concept of self, but this idea of seeing yourself, the self in nature, you know, I don't really exist separate from reality, but I am the tree, I am the animals, I am you. That's another view that some people form. And still, from the Buddhist point of view, still a concept of self. So he says, So I will read it as it says, but you can substitute the word earth with the word nature, for example.

So a common person, when misunderstands, perceives earth as earth. Having perceived earth as earth, that person conceives himself as earth, or conceives himself in earth, or conceives himself apart from earth, or he conceives earth to be mine. He delights in earth. Why is that? Because he has not fully understood it, I say.

So I think that here you see, to see yourself as part of nature—you know, who I really am as part of nature, I am not separate from nature—that's also a view of self, and also not needed. Also, a kind of wind drag also gets in the way anyway. So it's a great experience. It's a great kind of mystical experience to really have a sense of your self disappearing, and really feeling yourself becoming one with a tree or an animal or somebody else. It's really a great thing. But the fact that it's really great and feels really ultimate doesn't naturally mean it's liberating. There's a lot of selves that want a leaf.

It gets getting late. Yes, the microphone makes me not self-conscious. I'm using the Buddhist philosophy to understand what's happening with the rest of the world. As I study myself, I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about, you know, what's happening now, the Islamic fundamentalists that are reacting to the cartoons in Denmark. And in some way, I can

understand that these fundamentalists are getting upset because their identity is so much attached to their beliefs. I can see it that way. And at the same time, I can see that maybe it's not so much that. But it's the Western culture that's imposing the idea that this identity that we have created for ourselves in the West is moving and eating up that culture. Does that make sense?

Sure, it makes some sense. That is—and I don't really feel qualified to answer that question. I mean, there was an article I saw in the Chronicle this last—yesterday, I think—about how what the Europeans did to the Native Americans in America is what is now just being expanded out, you know, beyond this continent, kind of the same kind of destruction, an unknown cultural clash. I don't know, but I do know that in all the different cultures that Buddhism has travelled to—you know, starts in India, Nepal, Tibet, China, ancient Afghanistan, and the parts of ancient Greece or extended Greek empire, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, China, Mongolia, parts of Russia, Japan, and in the modern world, you know, everywhere else, almost.

The teachings of the teachings of not self, of somehow looking through and seeing the ways in which we are identified and attached to self, seems to be deeply relevant, and that the understanding that self-identity, in holding to self, is a cause of a lot of suffering, both for oneself and also out into others. So I would say that it's a universal thing, not culturally specific. It's that one culture doesn't have it. I think they probably—all cultures—has an underlying people who are deeply attached to a sense of self in some form or other, self-identity. And that, when that is clung to too tightly, it's very easy to spill out forms of violence and disrespect for others. Is that good enough? Well, thank you. I hope that this was interesting or helpful.