

ANĀTHAPIṆḌADA

Sudatta, usually called Anāthapiṇḍada (Pāli, Anāthapiṇḍika; Giver of Alms to the Destitute), the wealthy merchant of Śrāvastī and donor of the famous Jetavana Monastery in India, was perhaps the Buddhist order's most important patron. An ardent and learned lay disciple (*upāsaka*), he was particularly devoted to the Buddha and to his disciple ŚĀRIPUTRA. Anāthapiṇḍada died listening to the dharma.

See also: Disciples of the Buddha

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ANĀTMAN/ĀTMAN (NO-SELF/SELF)

The Vedic Sanskrit term *ātman* (Pāli, *attā*), literally meaning breath or spirit, is often translated into English as self, soul, or ego. Etymologically, *anātman* (Pāli, *anattā*) consists of the negative prefix *an* plus *ātman* (i.e., without *ātman*) and is translated as no-self, no-soul, or no-ego. These two terms have been employed in the religious and philosophical writing of India to refer to an essential substratum within human beings. The idea of *ātman* was fully developed by the Upaniṣadic and Vedāntic thinkers who suggested that there does exist in one's personality, a permanent, unchanging, immutable, omnipotent, and intelligent *ātman*, which is free from sorrow and leaves the body at death. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for instance, states that the *ātman* is "without decay, death, grief." Similarly, the *Bhagavadgītā* calls the *ātman* "eternal . . . unborn . . . undying . . . immutable, primordial . . . all-pervading." Some Upaniṣads hold that the *ātman* can be separated from the body like the sword from

its scabbard and can travel at will away from the body, especially in sleep. But Buddhism maintains that since everything is conditioned, and thus subject to ANITYA (IMPERMANENCE), the question of *ātman* as a self-subsisting entity does not arise. The religion points out that anything that is impermanent is inevitably DUḤKHA (SUFFERING) and out of our control (*anātman*), and thus cannot constitute an ultimate self.

According to Buddhism, beings and inanimate objects of the world are constructed (*saṃskṛta*), as distinguished from NIRVĀṆA, which is unconstituted (*asaṃskṛta*). The constituted elements are made up of the five SKANDHA (AGGREGATE) or building blocks of existence: the physical body (*rūpa*), physical sensation (*vedanā*), sensory perception (*saṃjñā, saññā*), habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra, saṃkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna, viññāna*). The last four of these skandhas are also collectively known as *nāma* (name), which denotes the nonmaterial or mental constituents of a being. *Rūpa* represents materiality alone, and inanimate objects therefore are included in the term *rūpa*. A living being composed of five skandhas is in a continuous state of flux, each preceding group of skandhas giving rise to a subsequent group of skandhas. This process is going on momentarily and unceasingly in the present existence as it will go on also in the future until the eradication of avidyā (ignorance) and the attainment of nirvāṇa. Thus, Buddhist analysis of the nature of the person centers on the realization that what appears to be an individual is, in fact, an ever-changing combination of the five skandhas. These aggregates combine in various configurations to form what is experienced as a person, just as a chariot is built of various parts. But just as the chariot as an entity disappears when its constituent elements are pulled apart, so does the person disappear with the dissolution of the skandhas. Thus, what we experience to be a person is not a thing but a process; there is no human being, there is only becoming. When asked who it is, in the absence of a self, that has feeling or other sensations, the Buddha's answer was that this question is wrongly framed: The question is not "who feels," but "with what as condition does feeling occur?" The answer is contact, demonstrating again the conditioned nature of all experience and the absence of any permanent substratum of being.

Just as the human being is analyzed into its component parts, so too is the external world with which one interacts. This interaction is one of consciousness (*viññāna*) established through cognitive faculties (*indriya*) and their objects. These faculties and their

objects, called spheres (*āyatana*), include both sense and sense-object, the meeting of which two is necessary for consciousness. These three factors that together comprise cognition—the sense-faculty, the sense-object, and the resultant consciousness—are classified under the name *dhātu* (element). The human personality, including the external world with which it interacts, is thus divided into skandha, *āyatana*, and *dhātu*. The generic name for all three of them is dharma, which in this context is translated as “elements of existence.” The universe is made up of a bundle of elements or forces (saṃskāras) and is in a continuous flux or flow (*santāna*). Every dharma, though appearing only for a single instant (*kṣaṇa*), is a “dependently originating element,” that is, it depends for its origin on what had gone before it. Thus, existence becomes “dependent existence,” where there is no destruction of one thing and no creation of another. Falling within this scheme, the individual is entirely phenomenal, governed by the laws of causality and lacking any extraphenomenal self within him or her.

In the absence of an ātman, one may ask how Buddhism accounts for the existence of human beings, their identity, continuity, and ultimately their religious goals. At the level of “conventional truth” (*saṃvṛtisatya*), Buddhism accepts that in the daily transactional world, humans can be named and recognized as more or less stable persons. However, at the level of the “ultimate truth” (*paramārthasatya*), this unity and stability of personhood is only a sense-based construction of our productive imagination. What the Buddha encouraged is not the annihilation of the feeling of self, but the elimination of the belief in a permanent and eternal “ghost in the machine.” Thus, the human being in Buddhism is a concrete, living, striving creature, and his or her personality is something that changes, evolves, and grows. It is the concrete human, not the transcendental self, that ultimately achieves perfection by constant effort and creative will.

The Buddhist doctrine of REBIRTH is different from the theory of reincarnation, which implies the transmigration of an ātman and its invariable material rebirth. As the process of one life span is possible without a permanent entity passing from one thought-moment to another, so too is a series of life-processes possible without anything transmigrating from one existence to another. An individual during the course of his or her existence is always accumulating fresh KARMA (ACTION) affecting every moment of the individual’s life. At DEATH, the change is only comparatively deeper. The corporeal bond, which held the individual together,

falls away and his or her new body, determined by karma, becomes one fitted to that new sphere in which the individual is reborn. The last thought-moment of this life perishes, conditioning another thought-moment in a subsequent life. The new being is neither absolutely the same, since it has changed, nor totally different, being the same stream (*santāna*) of karmic energy. There is merely a continuity of a particular life-flux; just that and nothing more. Buddhists employ various similes to explain this idea that nothing transmigrates from one life to another. For example, rebirth is said to be like the transmission of a flame from one thing to another: The first flame is not identical to the last flame, but they are clearly related. The flame of life is continuous, although there is an apparent break at so-called death. As pointed out in the MILINDAPAÑHA (*Milinda’s Questions*), “It is not the same mind and body that is born into the next existence, but with this mind and body . . . one does a deed . . . and by reason of this deed another mind and body is born into the next existence.” The first moment of the new life is called consciousness (*vijñāna*); its antecedents are the saṃskāras, the prenatal forces. There is a “descent” of the consciousness into the womb of the mother preparatory to rebirth, but this descent is only an expression to denote the simultaneity of death and rebirth. In this way, the elements that constitute the empirical individual are constantly changing but they will never totally disappear till the causes and conditions that hold them together and impel them to rebirth, the craving (*tṛṣṇā*; Pāli, *taṇhā*), strong attachment (*upādāna*) and the desire for reexistence (*bhava*), are finally extinguished.

See also: Consciousness, Theories of; Dharma and Dharmas; Intermediate States

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