

Selflessness (Anatta):

The third 'thought that turns the mind' is about loosening the sense of self.

We have a belief that we are independent, separate entities. We have been constructing and strengthening this identity since early childhood. We develop a strong sense of self, and find ways to relate to others, objects and events such that **we protect ourselves and seek desired outcomes** such as material wealth, safety and other indicators of success.

Yet this is an illusion. What we think of as 'me' is just a collection of body parts, memories, concepts and experiences that change. What we perceive as 'self' is a bundle of **transient elements**: physical form, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.

The belief in a fixed self leads to **attachment** to the things we already have, desire for things we don't have, and avoidance of discomfort. This is the **root of suffering**, as we constantly strive to protect and enhance our life, using up energy, then feel fear and frustration when things inevitably change or break down (see notes on impermanence). In particular we identify with our bodies, thoughts, and emotions.

The teaching of selflessness recognises that everything, all the 'parts' that make up 'me', are in a state of constant flux. By understanding the **impermanence** of all things, and letting things arise without taking them personally, suffering reduces.

Through the practice of selflessness, we also find it easier to feel **compassion** for self and others, as it helps break down the barriers between us and other (duality). When we recognize that all things are interconnected, co-dependent and mutually supportive, we act with greater kindness and understanding, without the ego-driven **behaviour** that separates us from one another.

At a deeper level, when we recognise our **true self** – our essence or the pure consciousness that is innate – we can put some distance between 'me' and life's challenges.

Practices which can be used include:

- the recognition that our thoughts and actions are driven by this ongoing process of identity reinforcement and protection;
- learning to become less reactive to external events or internal thoughts and conditions - developing equanimity
- acting as if we are a 'nobody' (we still have our personality, yet we hold it more lightly), just staying present without self-reference

Selflessness as a practice, leads to an increasing sense of **freedom** from the cycle of attachment and suffering. We can be less reactive, and **kindness** arises more naturally.