

Existence means control

In order for something to exist (*bhava*), in order for it to be, in a full and appropriated sense, that thing has to be given first, in the form of an experience as a whole. When I say 'given', this should be understood in the sense that we can only "find" things as already being there, in the world. (Cf. Sartre's statement in *Being & Nothingness* that every thing comes *with* past). The fact is that things can only be found when they are attended to and this means that - fundamentally speaking - they are *beyond* one's control¹: one is not their *creator*. Thus, one's experience as a whole *cannot* be controlled; the most a person can do is to modify an already given state of affairs, on a more particular level.

Take the five-aggregates as an example: their nature is to appear, disappear, and change while standing, at *their own accord*. It is only with *upādāna* that this characteristic is obscured², and in such cases the apparent Self becomes the fundamental agent of the process instead, or at least this is how it appears to a *puthujjana*. One who is not free from *upādāna*, and the Self-view, confuses the fact that the five-aggregates (or in this case the five-holding-aggregates) *can* be modified or affected once they arise, with the notion that they are controlled. This notion of control also supports (or feeds) the view that 'Self' is their creator, which in return feeds that notion, and so on indefinitely. This is why with 'Self' there comes the perception of *mastery* over one's experience -

Attā, 'self', is fundamentally a notion of mastery over things. (Ñāṇavīra Thera, Notes on Dhamma, DHAMMA)

The Self then, as a "master", appears as something different, something *apart* from the five-holding-aggregates. Furthermore, the Self keeps finding proof for its existence by constantly interfering and modifying (when possible) the arisen states of the five-holding-aggregates. The Self finds pleasure in doing so.

On the other hand, if the Self would see that, despite all of the proof, its mastery actually *requires* (or *directly depends* upon) the five-aggregates, the notion of control would cease³. It becomes clear that 'Self' cannot possibly exercise any fundamental control over their appearing, disappearing, and change while standing. This is why by contemplating this long enough, one can become an *arahat*:

Then, monks, at another time the Buddha Vipassī dwelt contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates... And as he remained contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-holding-aggregates, before long his mind was freed from the fetters without remainder. (Mahāpadāna Sutta, D. 14/ii, 35)

Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli

1 Even if one can control them, first they have *to be*. In other words - the *nature* of control is seen as something beyond our control.

2 As a matter of fact, it's not only the characteristic that is obscured, the five-aggregates are not seen either, most of the time.

3 For a *puthujjana* it is not enough to see this once. It is only with the repetition of this insight (achieved through effort), that the habitual view of control will disappear, and be replaced (gradually too) with the view of an *inherent* lack of control - the view of *impermanence*. When it is seen that impermanence underlies every project of the Self, the Self ceases to be Self, since without its mastery, selfhood cannot stand. (Cf. Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma, PARAMATTHA SACCA*, para. 6)