

Self-View in the Three Realms

Before explaining self-view in the three realms, let us first review the content of self-view and the functionality of five aggregates.

Self-view is the taking any one of the five aggregates as the everlasting self. Although the five aggregates are illusory, they have various functionalities; due to these different functionalities, sentient beings take the five aggregates as the real self. The functionalities of the five aggregates are as follows:

1. The form aggregate refers mainly to the five sense faculties, which come in contact with the five sense-objects, so its function is to contact.
2. The sensation aggregate refers to the unpleasant, pleasant, or neither unpleasant nor pleasant feelings, so its function is to feel and sense.
3. The perception aggregate refers to the state of awareness or knowing of the sense-objects, be it awareness with or without language and words, so its function is to be aware.
4. The formation aggregate refers to decisions, be it decision on a certain thing or the mental activity of deciding on what to do next, so its function is to decide.
5. The consciousness aggregate refers to discernment, so its function is to differentiate and comprehend the meaning of the six sense-objects.

Let us discuss self-view in the three realms next. The first is the self-view in the desire realm, which includes various different erroneous views, and there are six of them primarily. The first is “taking the sharp and clear awareness as the everlasting true mind.” However, a mind that understands and comprehends clearly the various states it hears, sees, smells, tastes, or touches is the mind that understands or differentiates the six sense-objects, which belongs to the perception and consciousness aggregates. Such a view that takes the perception and consciousness aggregates as the everlasting mind is definitely a type of self-view.

Why is the sharp and clear awareness not the true mind but the consciousness aggregate (illusory mind)? Mistaking the sharp and clear illusory awareness, which belongs to the consciousness aggregate, for the true mind has the following flaws:

1. If the true mind could differentiate sharply and clearly the six sense-objects, there would be no need for the consciousness aggregate to exist to perform the function of differentiating. This means there would be no need for the consciousness aggregate to

exist in the first place. If there was no need for the consciousness aggregate to exist, then there would also not be any need for the three aggregates of sensation, perception, and formation to exist either. If that was the case, then only one of the five aggregates, the form aggregate, would remain. As a result, the six consciousnesses (which make up the consciousness aggregate) in the eighteen elements (six sense faculties, six sense-objects, and six consciousnesses) would not exist, and there would only be twelve elements remained. Then the Buddha's teaching that all human beings have five aggregates and eighteen elements would be incorrect. Therefore, the true mind does not differentiate the six sense-objects.

2. All sutras state that the true mind is a non-discriminative mind. Since it is a non-discriminative mind, how can it clearly comprehend the six sense-objects? It is stated in the sutras: "The Dharma is apart from seeing, hearing, feeling, or knowing." Since the true mind is apart from seeing, hearing, feeling, or knowing, how can it clearly understand and comprehend the six sense-objects? Therefore, the statement that "the awareness that can clearly discern and understand is the true mind" contradicts the Buddha's teaching. These two faults serve to demonstrate that the awareness with sharp and clear understanding is not the true mind. Taking the consciousness aggregate or perception aggregate as the everlasting true mind certainly falls into the category of self-view. This is the first kind of self-view in the desire realm.

The second type of self-view in the desire realm is taking the state of "contact without discrimination" of the conscious mind as the true mind. That is, one always attempts to remain in the state of contact only with no subsequent differentiation in daily life, and then mistakes such a state for nirvana. However, are sentient beings really capable of remaining in the state of contact only with no subsequent discrimination in daily life? Take having a meal as an example; if you remained in the state of contact with no further discrimination, how would you know to pick up food? How would you know what food to pick up? How would you know to place the food in your mouth? How would you know that it was your mouth? Therefore, if you were able to truly remain in the state of contact without further discrimination, there would be no way for you to eat a meal. The so called state of "contact without any further discrimination" is not truly without discrimination but is a state with rather coarse discrimination without language and words.

Is there a state of "contact without discrimination" among the various kinds of meditative concentration in the cultivation of Buddhadharma? Yes, there is. The dim awareness in the state of access-concentration is exactly such a state. In the state of dim

awareness during the state of access-concentration, the conscious mind suddenly halts at a single moment during an arising and ceasing instant when the conscious mind comes in contact with the mental object, and the conscious perceptive mind becomes incapable of discriminating such a state. This is why it is called the dim awareness in the state of access-concentration. However, how does our mind actually complete the process of discriminating the six sense-objects? Our mind is called “the instantaneous initial mind” at the first instant when it comes into contact with a certain state. Because it does not have a prior state in a previous instant to compare with, it does not know what state to discriminate. As a result, the second thought moment arises, which is called “the inquiring mind”. After the arising of the second thought moment (second instant), the conscious mind will be able to accomplish discrimination, which is called “the identifying mind”, in the third instant because there are two prior instances to be compared. In other words, the conscious mind requires three instants to be able to decide on the states it discriminates. In the dim awareness during the state of access-concentration, the perceptive mind stops discrimination after contact, so it cannot accomplish discrimination. Although there is such a state of “contact without discrimination” in the state of access concentration, it is still not the state of nirvana but a state pertaining to the conscious mind. The state that the conscious mind does not discriminate after contacting mental objects (contact with no discrimination) is a state pertaining to the state of consciousness aggregate. One who takes the consciousness aggregate as the everlasting true mind also falls into the category of self-view. This is the second kind of self-view in the desire realm: “contact without discrimination.”

The third type of self-view in the desire realm is the “thoughtless pristine awareness” in which discrimination is performed without the arising of language and words. It can further be divided into three kinds: (1) the “thoughtless pristine awareness” during prolonged sitting meditation, (2) the “thoughtless pristine awareness” during motion, and (3) the “thoughtless pristine awareness” between the cessation of a former thought and the arising of the subsequent thought.

The first kind of “thoughtless pristine awareness” happens when one is in sitting meditation for a prolonged period and then suddenly a thought arises, allowing one to clearly recollect what happened in the past. Being clearly aware of this event that occurred in the past is the operation of the five determinative mental concomitants of the consciousness aggregate, which is the state pertaining to the consciousness aggregate. Although language and words have not yet arisen, one is already clearly aware of what is going on. Such a state is still being discriminated by the five determinative mental

concomitants. Whoever takes such a state of consciousness aggregate as the everlasting mind falls into the category of self-view.

The second is the “thoughtless pristine awareness” while in motion—which is the state in which one differentiates without the arising of language and words while in motion. It is not much different from the state of clear awareness during prolonged meditation mentioned above. The only difference is that the thoughtless pristine awareness without language, words, or illusory thoughts while in motion has the power of meditative concentration as support. Such a state also falls into the category of self-view like the first; this is the second kind of thoughtless pristine awareness.

The third kind of “thoughtless pristine awareness” refers to the state when a former thought has just ceased but the subsequent one has not yet arisen. What kind of state is it? It is the thoughtless pristine awareness when an illusory thought has just ceased in the former instant but have not arisen in the subsequent instant. When we move from one state to another, the mind that contacts the new state is called the “instantaneous initial mind” as explained previously. Because the “inquiring mind” of the second instant has not yet arisen, the mind is not capable of knowing this new state; this is called the “instantaneous initial mind” when the former thought has ceased but the subsequent thought has not yet arisen, which is a state of the conscious mind. Taking the state of the conscious mind as the everlasting mind is certainly one type of self-view.

The fourth kind of self-view in the desire realm is the notion of “living in the present moment.” When one clearly knows that one is living in the present moment, it is the function of the perception aggregate. The mind that can differentiate and discern that one is living in the moment is the consciousness aggregate. The view that takes the consciousness aggregate or perception aggregate as the everlasting mind is a self-view.

The fifth kind of self-view in the desire realm is the view that the subtle mental consciousness or the subtlest mental consciousness is everlasting and can traverse to the next life. Such a view is also a self-view. In Volume 9 of the Long Agama Sutra, the Buddha said: “All kinds of conscious mind arise depending on the confluence of the causes and conditions of the Manas [mental faculty] and the mental object.” In other words, no matter how subtle the conscious mind is, it must rely on the confluence of the Manas and the mental object to arise. Things that arise will definitely have to cease eventually. It means that no matter what kind of mental consciousness it is, it must be an arising and ceasing dharma and it cannot be the everlasting true mind. Whoever takes the subtle

mental consciousness or the subtlest mental consciousness as the everlasting mind also falls into the fallacy of taking the consciousness aggregate as the everlasting self and must be an ordinary person who has not eliminated self-view.

The sixth kind of self-view in the desire realm is the “union of bliss and emptiness” experienced during the sexual yoga of the Highest Yoga Tantra in Tibetan Buddhism. In their practice of sexual union, the practitioners observe that both the perceptive mind and the lustful pleasure mind are of the nature of emptiness, and mistakenly think that these two dharmas of the perceptive mind and lustful pleasure can be everlasting and will not cease, and call them the union of bliss and emptiness. However, taking the perceptive mind and the lustful pleasure perceived by the sensation aggregate as the everlasting mind also falls into the fallacy of taking one or more of the five aggregates as the everlasting self and the erroneous self-view.

After explaining the six kinds of the wrong view of a self (another term for self-view) in the desire realm, the wrong view of a self pertaining to the form realm will be discussed next. Taking the five states of the first, second, third, and fourth dhyanas (meditative absorptions) and the absorption without perception as nirvana falls into the erroneous self-view of taking the five aggregates as an everlasting self. Why does taking these five states of dhyana as nirvana constitute self-view? Let us take the first dhyana as an example. In order to attain the first dhyana, there are two prerequisites: the attainment of the state of access concentration and the elimination of the five hindrances. After the fulfillment of these two conditions, the state of the first dhyana will manifest naturally. There are virtues derived from the five constituents of the first dhyana: applied attention, sustained attention, physical rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness of the mind. Applied attention and sustained attention pertain to the state of the consciousness aggregate while physical rapture and bliss pertain to the state of the sensation aggregate, and one-pointedness also pertains to the state of the consciousness aggregate. Taking such states (the perceptive mind in these states) as the everlasting mind falls into the fallacy of self-view.

There still exist four sense-objects (the form, sound, touch, and mental objects) in the state of the first dhyana. There are also four consciousnesses (the eye, ear, body, and mental consciousnesses) that differentiate these four sense-objects in this state. Since there is still discrimination of these four sense-objects in the state of the first dhyana, it is certainly not tranquil at all. Taking such a state as nirvana also falls into the fallacy of self-view.

The second dhyana is investigated next. There are two different states in the second dhyana, the state of equal arrival (*samapatti*) and the state of equal holding (*samādhī*). The state of equal holding is the same as the state of the first dhyana: there are four consciousnesses of the consciousness aggregate discriminating four sense-objects. Therefore, the state of the second dhyana that still possesses four consciousnesses is the same as the state of the first dhyana and still belongs to the fallacy of self-view. In the state of equal holding of the second dhyana, only the mental consciousness of the consciousness aggregate remains to discriminate the mental object—the mental consciousness remains to differentiate the mental object during the state of concentration. Nevertheless, such a state is still not the state of nirvana. Taking such a state (not apart from the consciousness aggregate) as the everlasting true mind is still self-view, as having been defined previously that taking the consciousness aggregate or mental consciousness as the everlasting true mind is self-view. The state of the third dhyana is the same as that of the second dhyana (which is not free from self-view). In the fourth dhyana, although breathing and heartbeat have stopped, mental activity still exists because the conscious mind still engages in the state of the fourth dhyana. When there still exists any mental activity, it is not nirvana (it is still the state of the conscious mind). Finally, in absorption without perception, one eliminates the entire consciousness aggregate, i.e., one eliminates the six consciousnesses (consciousness aggregate) all together and only the form aggregate in the five aggregates remains (but without breathing). Taking the form aggregate during the state of absorption without perception as the state of nirvana without reminder as well as taking the form aggregate as nirvana certainly all fall into the fallacy of self-view.

The five states discussed above all belong to the self-view in the form realm. The self-view in the formless realm (the samadhi on infinite space, samadhi on infinite consciousness, samadhi on nothingness, and samadhi on neither perception nor non-perception) is discussed next. The self-view in the formless realm is the fallacy that takes the states of the consciousness aggregate as the everlasting self. In the samadhi on infinite space, there is only the conceptualization of emptiness; the conscious mind takes the unlimited vast emptiness as the perceptual object. One who takes such a state as nirvana (which falls into the fallacy of taking the conscious mind as the everlasting self) certainly falls into the fallacy of self-view. In the samadhi of infinite consciousness, there is only the perception of infinite consciousness; one introspects one's own consciousness aggregate, takes the unlimited vastness of one's own conscious mind as the perceptual object and no

longer thinks about the empty infinite space. Such vast state of infinite consciousness is still the state of conscious mind in the consciousness aggregate and is still not nirvana. In the samadhi of nothingness, one does not think of either emptiness or consciousness but remains solely on the thought of nothingness (in the conscious perceptive mind); the conscious mind stays on the thought of nothingness (in one's mind) as the perceptual object. Taking such a state as nirvana no doubt falls into the fallacy of self-view. Finally, the conscious mind in the samadhi of neither perception nor non-perception does not introspect its own existence; however, it still takes the mental object in the state of concentration as its perceptual object. Such a state certainly falls into the fallacy of self-view as well.

The different versions of self-view in the three realms have been thoroughly explained. We hope that you can observe and comprehend directly the falsehood and illusory nature of self-view, eliminate self-view, and soon realize the first fruition of liberation.

