

Defilements & Dukkha

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

The *kilesa* (the defilements) and *dukkha* disturb us and bother us so that we cannot be cool or joyful. The problem is that *dukkha* arises from the fact that we don't know ourselves.

The thing we call *dukkha* has many symptoms, conditions, characteristics but we can summarize it as saying *dukkha* is what makes the mind agitated. It's what we must endure and bear and suffer through. And it takes away the mind's freedom in being cool and calm. It destroys the mind's freedom – ability to be free in coolness and calmness.

The knowledge that is Dhamma could be called 'psychology' if we want because psychology has many different branches to it. However if we're going to call Dhamma 'psychology' we have to understand that it is the study of the mind which has to do with joy and calmness – not the kind of psychology that has to do with material benefit, material advantages.

When we know Dhamma and then practice Dhamma and then receive the benefits of that practice of Dhamma, these we can know for ourselves. We don't have to have any teacher tell us or point out what has happened. We know it ourselves through the lessening of *dukkha*. We can see that for ourselves as *dukkha* lessens through the practice and receiving of the benefits of Dhamma.

Those people who point out the attainments of meditators or give us certificates for various levels of attainment – these are absolutely meaningless.

The only thing that has any meaning is when we know for ourselves that dukkha has lessened.

This practice we can call *citta-bhāvanā* or ‘mental development.’ This is for the mind to develop and progress. For this development, there are two aspects – *samatha* (tranquility) and *vipassanā* (insight). We need both of these. We need both *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

The first one – tranquility, *samatha* – is when the mind is calm and ready to know, ready to see. It’s prepared to see. And then *vipassanā*, insight, is when that highly trained, calm mind sees. These go together – *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

Samatha or *samādhi* alone – that is tranquility or concentration alone – isn’t enough. For this reason we need to practice *ānāpānasati* completely – not just the beginning stages. But we need to follow it through to the end in order to accomplish both *samatha* and *vipassanā* – in order to know and to see.

When we’re born we have just about no knowledge at all. And so young children or infants think wrongly, speak wrongly, and act wrongly. They go around speaking wrongly, thinking wrongly, and acting wrongly because instinctual knowledge isn’t enough. And so as they grow they just continue thinking wrongly, speaking wrongly, and acting wrongly.

Then as the young infant grows and goes through life thinking wrongly, speaking wrongly, and acting wrongly, dukkha arises out of all these wrong things. And this dukkha grows and builds.

As this dukkha is experienced and grows and builds, we begin to see it and reach a point where we realize we just can’t take it anymore – that we can’t endure all this dukkha. It’s too much. Then at this point we become interested in finding a way out of dukkha and we look for the Dhamma – the way out – in order to be free of all this dukkha. This is the fact of the way things work.

So at this point we begin to hate dukkha. We’re afraid of it. We’re disgusted with it. And we develop a strong desire to get rid of – to extinguish or put out – dukkha. And so then we begin to be interested in the kind of knowledge that is necessary for extinguishing dukkha. And that knowledge is the Four Noble Truths (the *ariya-sacca*). And for this reason we will now examine the *ariya-sacca* very closely.

The *ariya-sacca* are four things – the Four Noble Truths. The first one is the noble truth of dukkha. The second is the noble truth of the cause of dukkha. The third is the *ariya-sacca* of the extinction of dukkha. And the fourth is the *ariya-sacca* of the path that leads to the extinction of dukkha.

We'll begin with *dukkha* – the first ariya-sacca – and we'll look at its meaning or definition sufficiently for you to understand what it is about.

In the general meaning of this word – that is, as it's usually used – *dukkha* means 'difficult to endure, hard to bear, hard to stand up to.' This is speaking of the feeling (the *vedanā*) that we feel towards things that are undesirable, unpleasant, unwanted.

This meaning isn't very difficult to understand but what we need to do is look at some of the ways where people get things backwards – where they don't see *dukkha* in things that are *dukkha* – or they go so far as to think certain things are fun and enjoyable because they don't see the *dukkha* in these things. So we need to look at this area of *dukkha*.

The first meaning of *dukkha* is 'difficult to endure' – difficult to bear. The second meaning is that when we look and see it and know it, then it's ugly – it's hateful. In the second meaning *dukkha* means 'if we know it well, then we'll hate it.'

This second meaning includes inanimate things also like the sand, the rocks, the benches. When we look at these things we see that they're constantly changing – that they're absolutely impermanent – and for this reason they're hateful. So even inanimate things have this symptom of *dukkha* – of being unbearable.

The first meaning is very easy to see. We can know it through our feelings. It's a feeling. So it's quite apparent. But the second meaning is very difficult to realize and therefore we must use wisdom or insight to know it – to know this second meaning of *dukkha*.

The third meaning of *dukkha* . . . If we examine the word by its roots or examine it etymologically, *du* means 'hateful' and *kha* means 'empty.' So this means that when we look at it and see it – when we look at *dukkha* and see it – we realize that things are empty of any essence or substance that is a 'self,' a 'soul,' an 'I,' 'me,' anything that we can attach to as a 'self.' And then when we see that emptiness, that emptiness is hateful – it's ugly. And so the third meaning of *dukkha* is hatefully empty or disgustingly empty – disgustingly void.

If we learn and study these three meanings, i.e.: 1) unendurable; 2) when we've seen it, it's ugly; and 3) completely void and empty. The more we study these three meanings, the easier it is for us to see and realize what *dukkha* is. So I recommend that you learn and study these meanings enable [in order] [?? 11.37] to help you to understand *dukkha*.

The first meaning or ‘difficult to endure’ we should all know already. We should be quite familiar with that feeling.

So then we need to examine the second meaning. This one is much more difficult for us to understand – this meaning of ‘once it’s seen, it’s ugly’ – because most of us haven’t seen it. And all the things that satisfy us – that we like, that we love – we haven’t really seen them as they are. So we don’t see this hatefulness in them because we haven’t really looked. So we need to really look.

And if we keep looking more deeply, then we often see the third meaning that things are completely empty of any substance or essence. And because of that emptiness, they are dukkha. So we need to see all three of these meanings by looking more deeply into things.

So we’ll take these in order, in order to examine them.

We’ll begin with the most coarse kind of dukkha. We can begin with sorrow, sadness, grief, lamentation, despair, physical pain, mental anguish. These are the coarser levels of dukkha – the ones which we have very little difficulty seeing.

Next is dukkha when we are separated from something we love, or when we meet up with something which we don’t like, or when we don’t get things the way we want them or when we don’t get the things that we want. These are three further characteristics of dukkha. These are symptoms and characteristics of dukkha which common people are able to see and experience. Ordinary people feel these and so they are able to know them. Because they are so easily seen or realized, we call these the coarser levels of dukkha.

The more somewhat subtle levels of dukkha are as follows – birth, aging, illness, and death. If we look at these, what we see some dukkha in them. These are some of the more subtle forms of dukkha.

Many of our problems and much of our experience of dukkha – if we examine it – we will see how they are connected to birth, aging, illness, and death. So all sorts of/kinds of dukkha are associated with birth, aging, illness, and death. It’s not these four things themselves which are dukkha. But it’s the problems that arise – the things that arise – out of birth, aging, illness, and death which are dukkha. If you look closely – if you examine these carefully – you’ll see the way things are.

The word ‘birth’ can be seen in two ways. The first way is birth from our mother’s womb. This kind of birth doesn’t have that many problems associated with it.

The second kind of birth is a mental kind of birth – birth that happens in the mind. This is the birth of ‘my body’ or ‘I, me, myself.’ This is the mental birth of the self. This kind of birth has associated with it all sorts of problems – an incredible number of problems.

And also this kind of birth doesn’t happen only once like the physical births from our mothers’ wombs. But this mental birth of the ‘I,’ of the ‘self,’ happens countless times in a lifetime – hundreds, thousands, tens thousands of times in one lifetime. And with all those births there’s a lot of dukkha.

The second kind of birth we need to understand very well. This kind of birth arises from *upādāna*, u-pa-da-na (‘attachment’) – clinging to things as ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ This *upādāna* (attachment) arises from ignorance (*avijjā*). And then from this birth arise all the kinds of dukkha. So this is why we need to see this birth that arises from attachment and is caused by ignorance.

Next is aging. And we have to look at aging on two levels just as we did with birth. The first kind of aging – aging in the everyday conventional sense of the word – is the aging of the body. It’s the growing old of the conditioning – the physical conditioning process – that we call the body. This aging is very easy to see and we’re all quite familiar with it.

Now we also need to see the second kind of aging. This kind of aging is present not only in old bodies but this kind of aging is present in youth also. The second level of aging is buried or hidden within youth. So we need to see it within youth.

To understand aging we need to see both aspects of it – the aging of the body and the kind of aging which is hidden within, which is buried within youth. Within your own youth, each of you here . . . Look within your own youth and see that there is aging – that there is old age – already buried deep within that youth. See it. Find that there is hidden age and old age which is hidden within your youth.

Old age is just part of the evolutionary process that starts at the beginning and evolves toward extinction. And so from birth there is old age. Old age and aging are present from birth. So take a good close look and see this old age hidden within your youth.

Next we come to illness and injury. Once again there are two levels. There is the illness of the body – injury and physical pain – which once again we’re all quite familiar with. There is also illness of the mind or illness and injuries of the spirit. Whenever we think incorrectly, then this spiritual illness – this spiritual injury – arises. We have to see both kinds of illness – both physical of the body and mental illness of the spirit.

When the body is sick or injured we take it to the hospital to see a doctor and that doctor can cure it. But when the mind or spirit is injured and ill we must take it to the Buddha. The Buddha is a doctor of the spirit – of spiritual disease and spiritual illness.

So we have to know which doctor we need for our problems. If it’s just a physical problem we can find help in the hospital down the street. But if it’s spiritual illness and disease we need to seek aid from the Buddha or those followers who have preserved and carried on the Buddha’s teaching. They have the knowledge we need to cure spiritual illness.

Now death. The first kind of death is death of the body and we all know about death. The image of death strikes fear in all of us. We’re all afraid of death. This we know quite well. There’s more to death than physical death. There’s also spiritual death.

For those of you who are Christians you’ll be familiar with the story on the first page of the Book of Genesis. On the first page of the Bible talks about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and that God told Adam not to eat the fruit from that tree because if Adam was to go and eat that fruit, then he would die.

This kind of death that God was talking about, it’s spiritual death. So when Adam went and ate that fruit – when he ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – then he knew good and evil. And from knowing good and evil, then he went and attached to it. He clung to these things – to good and evil. And so his mind began to work dualistically. And through this dualistic thinking there arose all sorts of pairs of opposites. And then through attachment to these pairs of opposites – to these dualities – there comes spiritual death. There comes the dukkha and the mental suffering that arises from these attachments. So this is spiritual death.

The Buddha intends that we are free of both kinds of death. That neither kind of death has any meaning for us. The Buddha can lead us away from spiritual death. The Buddha can cure this kind of death that arises from attachment to dualities.

And then when spiritual death is cured, then it is possible to see physical death as just an ordinary, natural evolutionary process. That is just what it is and there is nothing to be afraid of. So we need to understand both kinds of death. And the Buddha can help us to be free of both of these kinds of death, or free of death in all its meanings.

Let me stress once again that birth, old age, illness, and death are not *dukkha* in themselves. The problem of *dukkha* arises in the reactions and conditions associated with birth, old age, illness, and death. So the *dukkha* is not in these things themselves but it's in the ignorant thoughts and reactions and feelings about birth, old age, illness, and death. That's where the *dukkha* is.

When we summarize the meaning of *dukkha* in both the shortest and most profound way, this is how we do it. The Buddha said that *dukkha* is in attachment to the five *khandha*. The *khandha* are the aggregates or groups of clinging and attachment. So *dukkha* is in attachment to these five aggregates or five groups – the five *khandha*.

Sometimes we attach to the body as 'I' or as 'my body.' And then when the body changes there is depression and *dukkha* because of that physical change, or because of attachment and then there is physical change.

But sometimes we attach [?? 25.24] to the feelings as 'I' or as 'my feelings.' And then when the feelings change there is heavy heartedness, sadness, and depression. And this is *dukkha*.

Or we can attach to the perceptions, distinctions, and identifications that the mind makes. And when we attach to these as 'I' or 'myself' and then they change, then that is *dukkha*.

Or the thinking – the mental conditioning – we can attach to this and it too changes. And then there is *dukkha*.

Or consciousness, the bare knowing – when the mind knows that the interaction between sense-object and sense-organ, that consciousness. We can attach to that as 'I' or as 'my consciousness.' And then its change is *dukkha* for us.

So attachment to any of these five things – any of these five things that we call the *khandha* or the *pañca-khandha* – this is *dukkha*, this attachment to any of the five *khandha*.

We need to understand these five *khandha* because together they make up what we call 'life.' These five *khandhas* together are life.

So in life there is always the body. And because there is the body, there are sense-organs. And through these sense-organs there is contact with sense-objects. And this contact gives rise to feeling. There is the present feeling of liking the sense contact or the unpleasant feeling of disliking it or the uncertain feeling of not knowing whether to dislike it or like it. So there are feelings arising all the time.

Then after the feelings, there arise the perceptions and identifications or distinguishing of those sense contacts. And these are arising all the time. Then there is thinking about the sense contacts. And this is happening all the time also. And then there is the consciousness – the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness. And these are happening all the time as well.

So these five khandhas together are arising all the time. And together they make up life. And when we go attaching to these things, there is dukkha. So we need to understand them carefully. We need to study them and look into them.

We can say that in order to really know Dhamma, we must really know the five khandhas. If we don't know the five khandhas, then we don't really know ourselves. So in order to know Dhamma, we need to know ourselves. And so we need to know the five khandhas.

Sometimes when the body is functioning in one of its ways, we attach to the body as 'I.' There is a supreme kind of truth which we often overlook. And that is that we attach to the different khandhas as 'I.'

So sometimes it's to the body *khandha* (the body aggregate) as 'I.'

Or sometimes when one of the feelings is what's in the mind – when it's the feelings are functioning – then we attach to the feeling as 'I.' This is 'me.'

Or it can be the perceptions – the distinguishing between this and that, the noting of the distinguishing marks of something. We can attach to that as 'I.'

Or our thinking – the mental linking of ideas – can be the prominent thing in the mind. And we attach to that as 'I.' 'This is what *I am*. *I am my thoughts, my thinking*.'

Or it can be that consciousness through the doors of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. And this consciousness can be . . . we can attach to that when it is what is functioning – what is happening in the mind.

So all of these five different *khandhas*, aggregates, are the things we attach to. And so what we attach to as ‘I’ spins around – revolves within – these five aggregates.

All that’s been said shows that there’s no self and there is no soul. This explanation shows that all there is is attachment to these different aggregates – to body, feeling, perception, thought, or consciousness – as a ‘self’ or ‘soul.’ But in reality there is no ‘self’ or ‘soul.’

All there is is the mind which has arisen naturally and is evolving and carrying on according to natural laws. This mind in its natural way goes and attaches to things as ‘I’ or ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ It attaches to the body, the feelings, perceptions, thoughts, or consciousness as a ‘self’ or as a ‘soul.’

But you can see in the fact that this mind, in its way, is attaching to all kinds of different things and never the same thing – that there is no real self or soul. And so this knowledge of non-self or non-soul, that there is no real self or soul, just sits . . . this attaching by the mind, this kind of thought of attachment . . .

This knowledge or wisdom of non-self protects us from dukkha. Dukkha arises because of these attachments to the five *khandhas*. In knowing that there is no self, we can be protected from that attachment which leads to dukkha.

So in summary we need to see these five aggregates of clinging, we need to see the attachments to the things that are called the five *khandhas* in order to protect ourselves from dukkha. To put it concisely we can say that Buddhism is the religion of non-self or non-soul.

If we state it even more strongly than this, we can say that Buddhism is the religion of no man. There are no men, no people. There are no human beings. All there are are the five *khandhas*. All there is is body and mind. Or we can break that out further and say all there is is the five *khandhas* and that there are really no people, no human beings.

If you can understand this point, then you will understand Buddhism and you will be able to protect yourself from dukkha.

To avoid any misunderstandings – to protect you from falling into misunderstanding – let me point out for you to be very clear that Buddhism does not teach that there is nothing. Buddhism is not nihilistic or annihilationist.

Buddhism does not teach that there isn’t anything. What Buddhism says is there are things but in those things there is no self and no soul. You see the difference between non-self/non-soul – which is Buddhism – and nihilism which says there is nothing whatsoever and that is not Buddhism.

So in order to avoid and prevent misunderstandings, please see the difference and realize that Buddhism teaches non-self/non-soul but does not teach nihilism or nothingness. Be very clear that whenever there is attachment to the khandhas together or any one of them – whenever there is this attachment to something, one of the khandhas as ‘I,’ as ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ as ‘myself’ – then there is immediately dukkha. That is as soon as there is attachment to one of the khandhas, dukkha immediately arises.

So please see this very carefully – very clearly – and understand that dukkha arises because of attachment to the khandhas.

So what we were talking about was the first *ariya-sacca* (the first noble truth) of dukkha. Now we come to the second noble truth, the cause of dukkha.

If you’ve understood what’s been said so far, then you should be able to see what the cause of dukkha is. If you were following and understanding the discussion of the first *ariya-sacca*, then you should have a pretty good idea what the second *ariya-sacca* is – the cause of dukkha.

But to make it absolutely clear we will emphasize that the cause of dukkha, the nearest most immediate cause of dukkha, is attachment (*upādāna*, u-pa-da-na) – attachment to something, to anything, as ‘I,’ as ‘me,’ as ‘mine,’ as ‘myself.’ This attachment is the most direct and immediate cause of dukkha.

The usual way it’s stated – the way the Buddha put it – is that dukkha comes from desire or craving which is ignorant, stupid, foolish, wanting. When we want ignorantly – when our want is based in stupidity – that is called ‘craving’ or *taṇhā* in Pāli (tan-ha). This is what the Buddha said is the cause of dukkha.

You can probably see for yourselves that there is no contradiction between what the Buddha said and what we said just a moment ago. You can probably see that attachment arises from desire or from ignorant wanting.

So when craving arises in the mind, then there arises the thought – the idea or the feeling – that there is an ‘I’ who wants. So the *taṇhā* causes *upādāna* – the ignorant craving causes the feeling of attachment – to arise in the mind. And once that arises there is dukkha. So there’s no contradiction here.

When we say attachment is the cause of dukkha, then we mean attachment is the nearest – most direct and immediate – cause of dukkha. If we back up just a little bit, then we can say desire is the cause of dukkha. Desire causes attachment which causes dukkha.

It’s as correct to say that desire causes dukkha as to say that attachment causes dukkha. It’s mainly a matter of if we take the nearest, most immediate

cause or we take a cause which is a little farther back – a little farther away. This is the difference between saying craving is the cause of dukkha or attachment is the cause of dukkha.

If we back up all the way to the beginning of this whole process, then we can say that dukkha is caused by *avijjā* (ignorance) – by not-knowing. Now there's no problem in saying this. There's no argument. There's no contradiction.

To say that dukkha is caused by *avijjā*, not-knowing, is just to say that this process of dukkha begins with *avijjā*. And as you heard the other day, *avijjā*, not-knowing (ignorance) leads to stupid or ignorant contact. And then we get lost in the feelings which is ignorance once again. So there are foolish or ignorant feelings. And from getting lost in these feelings, there arises ignorant want, *taṇhā* (craving) which causes attachment (*upādāna*).

So to say that not-knowing causes dukkha is the same as saying that desire or craving causes dukkha, or that attachment causes dukkha. Because it's all the same process. It's just different links in the process which leads to dukkha.

So it's a matter of if you take the most immediate cause, or back up a little further, or take it from the beginning. That's what determines whether we say that ignorance or craving or attachment is the cause of dukkha.

If you understand this fully – if you understand what's being said completely – and you realize this not intellectually but you see it within yourselves, then your understanding is complete and you'll know all you need to know.

You ought to make yourselves understand this. You ought to see how this works, how this process which leads to dukkha arises.

If you take a bird's eye view from way up here and look down and see dukkha, then you can see there is attachment leading to dukkha. And then ignorant wanting or craving leads to attachment which leads to dukkha. And then if you back up all the way to the beginning, you see that there is not knowing, ignorance, which leads to ignorant contact. And from the ignorant contact arises stupid feeling and getting lost in this unwise feeling leads to craving. And the craving leads to attachment. Attachment is conditioned by craving.

So when there is this craving, then there is this feeling that there is an 'I' that craves. And this condition – what we call *bhava* or it's the becoming of the 'I' . . . And then there is birth – the birth of the 'I.' So from attachment, there is

becoming. And then there is birth of the ‘I.’ And as soon as there is this ignorant birth of the self, that leads to dukkha.

So we can see it’s just a line from avijjā -> ignorant contact -> ignorant feeling -> ignorant desire -> attachment -> becoming -> birth -> dukkha. So if we have a real bird’s eye view and understand this whole process, we’ll see just how it works and we’ll be very clear about it.

But this is a very important thing to study and come to understand. You should try to understand this process of dukkha. You should do whatever it takes to the end – to the fullest of your abilities – to understand this process.

The Buddha said that this is the beginning of the sublime way of life – this is the basics, the fundamentals, the ABCs of the highest level that we can live our lives.

So to really be living on as sublime – as elevated – as high as possible, we have to begin studying, learning, understanding these basic points of the way – the process by which dukkha arises. So you have to try as much as you can – using all of your abilities, all of your energy – to understand this and see how dukkha arises.

This is very important. This is the beginning point of developing what we call the *prommajān* [Thai; Pāli, *Brahmacariya*] or the sublime way of life. The most exalted, the highest way of living.

There’s another point we should add which is: if you see this – this wheel of life, this process of dukkha – then you see the Buddha. The Buddha said that if you see this, you see the real Buddha.

To see the body or clothing of the Buddha is not to really see the Buddha. It’s to see this Dhamma – this truth that we’ve just been talking about – that’s what it means to see the Buddha.

There were people in India at the time of the historical Buddha who saw him walking around but they didn’t really see the Buddha. And though they were living at the same time, they didn’t see the Buddha.

And though the historical Buddha died long ago, we can see the real Buddha by seeing the truth of this process of dukkha. If we really understand it – if we really understand the cause of dukkha, of this process – then we see the Buddha. This is what it means to see the Buddha. It has nothing to do with physical appearances.

So we've spoken about the first two ariya-sacca. Now the third one which is called *nirodha* (ni-ro-dha). *Nirodha* is 'extinction' – the going out – of dukkha, the end of dukkha.

Now if you have understood what we were saying just now, then if you see that craving – that ignorant want – is the cause of dukkha, then you'll see that by extinguishing craving, dukkha is extinguished. By putting out craving, then we put out dukkha.

Or if you see that *upādāna* (u-pa-da-na), attachment, causes dukkha, then by extinguishing attachment dukkha is extinguished. Or if you go all the way to the beginning and see that not-knowing (*avijjā*) is the cause of dukkha, then you'll see that by putting out – by extinguishing – that not-knowing, that dukkha is extinguished in that way.

So these various causes of dukkha that we talked about – put any one of them out and you put out dukkha. Extinguish these causes and you'll extinguish dukkha. This is the third *ariya-sacca*.

So we don't have to go into this third truth in great detail because if you see the cause of dukkha, then you'll see that the way to put out dukkha is to put out the cause. So this just points out the great importance of understanding the cause of dukkha. So by understanding it, then you'll know the way to get rid of dukkha – the way to put it out.

So we aren't going to say any more about this third ariya-sacca. That's just to emphasize that you need to understand the second truth – that is, the cause of dukkha. And then the third truth, the extinction of dukkha will follow from that one. And it will be easy to understand the third truth once the second one is understood.

Now we come to the fourth *ariya-sacca* which is *magga*. *Magga* means 'path' or 'way.' And this is what we must practice. By practice we mean to walk along that way. By walking this way of the Fourth Noble Truth, then we extinguish dukkha – we put out dukkha.

To follow that path is to live rightly – to maintain one's life in correctness, to follow the path correctly. When our life is correct and proper and right – and when life is fully established and maintained in correctness – then there is this path which we call the *ariya-magga* (the Noble Path) which has eight factors. It's one single path with eight factors. So to maintain oneself in rightness is to follow this path – this Noble Path which has eight factors.

We can also call it the *majjhimāpaṭipadā* (the middle way) – the way that is balanced between various extremes. So to be right and correct in life is to be on this path which has eight factors. This is the fourth noble truth.

The important point here is the word ‘middle.’ To be in the middle, be in the center. To not be too strict or too loose, too tight or too loose, or to not be wet or dry, but to be in the middle. To not go to the extreme left or the extreme right, but to be in the middle. This is the important part of being right – to be in the middle, not off in the extremes.

This word ‘middle’ has all kinds of different meanings and we don’t really need to go into all of them. But we can summarize all these different meanings by saying the ‘middle’ of ‘being in the middle’ means not this and not that – neither this nor that but in the middle.

Another way of saying this is that there is only *idappaccayatā* – the law that all things arise and happen through causes and conditions. They’re not this and they’re not that. They’re just the arising through causes and conditions, neither this nor that – only things happening through causes and conditions, only this processing causing conditions – but neither this nor that, but in the middle.

To live life or walk life or follow life in a state of correctness and rightness means to be in the middle. It means to be on this Noble Path which has eight factors or eight aspects. So it is by fulfilling these eight aspects or factors that one is in the middle or that one is on the Noble Path. This is what it is to follow and live the Noble Eight-fold way – to maintain in a state or condition of rightness.

Please don’t listen incorrectly or misunderstand and think that there are eight paths. There are not eight paths. There is only one path. There is one path which has eight components or eight factors. But there is only one path.

It’s like a rope that has eight strands and the eight strands are woven together into one single rope. And so it is that there is one path, one noble path, which has eight components or factors which are together, inseparably, in the one noble path.

Or we can compare it like this. The Noble Path is like a road leading from this city to some distant city. It’s only one road. There’s just one road that goes from here to there. But to travel that road we need a map and then we need some bridges – like to go over rivers. And we need some means of protection – say police – to deal with thieves and bandits and robbers. And we need to keep the tigers and elephants and wild beasts away. And then we need food because it’s a long trip.

And so it's like this. There is one path – one road. But to travel it there must be eight useful things – eight useful components – to this one road, to get from this city to that distant city. The Noble Path is like this – just one noble path with eight very useful components.

There's another very special meaning which you maybe have heard before. There's a single path for a single person. This single path can only be walked by this single person. Nobody can walk that path for that person. There's just the one path for this one person.

Not only this – not only is there the single path for the single person who must walk that path, that single path – but there is a single destination for that person on that path. And that single destination is Nibbāna – it's the coolness of the extinction of defilements and dukkha.

So there are these three single things: single path, single person or single traveler, and the single destination (Nibbāna).

So now let's look at these eight components of the single path. These are eight rightnesses – eight correctnesses – which come together in the path.

The first of these – the first rightness – we can call right opinion/right view/right knowledge/right understanding/right viewpoint, whatever. Any of these words – but the right knowledge, the right understanding, the right view – this is called *sammādiṭṭhi*, *sammādiṭṭhi*. It's the first component of the path.

This *sammādiṭṭhi* (right knowledge/right belief/right understanding) has to come first. There are all kinds of knowledge in the world. But right knowledge is just the knowledge that it takes to follow the Noble Way. So this right knowledge that we begin with is the knowledge that we can extinguish dukkha. This is right knowledge/right understanding/right belief.

So *sammādiṭṭhi*, right understanding, is the understanding of dukkha – understanding the cause of dukkha, understanding the extinction of dukkha happens by extinguishing the cause of dukkha and understanding the path – the way – that leads to the cause of dukkha.

This is the beginning of the path – is this right understanding. If you don't have this understanding, there's no way you'll even find or think of following the path. So it begins with this right knowledge or right understanding.

The next component is right want/right intention (*sammāsaṅkappa*). When there is right understanding then we should know what we want. We want to stop dukkha. We want to extinguish dukkha. This is right want,

sammāsaṅkappa. It follows from right understanding. Without right understanding there cannot be right want or right intention.

So when we understand about dukkha and the end of dukkha and the path leading to the end of dukkha, then we have the right want to end dukkha and to do what we need to do to end dukkha. This is right wanting.

Now don't go and confuse this with greed, lust, and craving which we can also call want. But those are stupid or ignorant wants which lead to dukkha and are based in ignorance and foolishness and delusion rather than in knowledge and correct understanding.

So there is right intention or right want that is supported by right view and right understanding. Another way of putting it is *saṅkappa* – which by the way is a good word to remember – and understand that *saṅkappa* is different than *lobha* which is greed and *taṇhā* (craving). *Sammāsaṅkappa* is the kind of want that you should want. Whereas *lobha* (greed) and craving is the kind of want that you don't want – that you shouldn't want.

So there's wanting that we want which leads to the end of dukkha, and there is the unwanted want which leads to dukkha. So see the difference between right want (*saṅkappa*) and ignorant want or craving. When there is right want then we go about doing what we need to do to get the thing we want – to achieve what is wanted.

So the third component is right speech. It is part of what we must do in line with the right want. Right speech is speech that does no harm to anyone. It is truthful and honest. It is useful. It's not useless or frivolous. And it is pleasant to hear. Right speech is truthful, useful, and pleasant. This is the third component – right speech.

The first two components – right view or right understanding and then right want – we can group together as the wisdom aspect or the wisdom department of the path. Now we're talking about the morality or right or behavior aspect of the path. So there's right speech and then the fourth component or factor is right conduct.

Right conduct means non-killing, non-stealing, not indulging in improper sexual conduct. These are just some examples of what right conduct is. So right conduct is conduct that doesn't cause problems for oneself or others. So this is the fourth component of the path.

The fifth rightness or component is right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). *Ājīva* is to maintain one's life and this *sammā-ājīva* is to do so in a right way. This

means obtaining food, clothing, shelter, and medicines – the things necessary for life – in a right way, a way that does not cause problems or do harm to oneself or others. This is the fifth component – right livelihood.

Now the three factors we just spoke about make up the group that is right conduct, *sīla* (morality). Now we come to the group that we can call meditation which is the mental, the mind aspect of the group or aspect of the path.

So the sixth component – the first one of the mental group, the meditation group – is right effort (*sammāvāyāma*). Right effort is trying in the right way. It's putting forth effort in order to extinguish dukkha. This is right effort. So this means not causing wrong things to arise or abandoning wrong things that already exist or that have already arisen, and then causing right things – good useful things – to arise, or the good and skillful things that have already arisen – it's strengthening those, developing those, maintaining those. So these are the four right efforts – these four ways of trying to extinguish dukkha which make up the sixth component.

And now we come to the seventh rightness which is correct mindfulness (*sammāsatī*). *Sammāsatī* is self-awareness, recollection, the ability of the mind to reflect upon itself. This is *sammāsatī*. *Sammāsatī* is generally talked about as the four foundations of mindfulness which are the body, the feelings, the mind, and truth. These are four things which the mind should be aware of, it should recollect, it should reflect upon. So when there's *sammāsatī*, mindfulness keeps rightness, it governs rightness, it keeps the rightness here and it keeps the mind mindful of or gathered on or centered on rightness. So this is *sammāsatī*.

When we talk about these four foundations of mindfulness – the body, the feelings, the mind, and truth – the most profound and complete way of practicing this *sammāsatī* is *ānāpānasatī* (mindfulness of breathing) which you are learning here because through mindfulness of breathing, right mindfulness is developed in a complete and full way. And not only that, it is mindfulness that has the sole aim of extinguishing dukkha.

So therefore it is correct, it is proper, and it is complete because the process of *ānāpānasatī* fulfills these four foundations of mindfulness in the body, mindfulness in the feelings, mindfulness in the mind, and mindfulness in truth. Or recollection of these, reflection upon them, awareness of them – these are the four right mindfulnesses. And *ānāpānasatī* is the most complete, the most efficient and correct way to fulfill this seventh rightness or seventh component of the path.

So there must be right mindfulness, both in the general and in the deepest and most profound levels of life. This is *sammāsaṭi* – right mindfulness.

Now we come to the eighth component which is *sammāsamādhi* or ‘right *samādhi*.’ *Samādhi* means to set or found the mind – establish the mind – securely and correctly. This is *sammāsamādhi* – to securely correctly establish, to set up the mind, to found it, to ground it securely and firmly.

Sammāsamādhi has three components or characteristics. The first one is purity. The mind that is *sammāsamādhi* is pure. The mind is pure. The second is steadiness, stability. So the mind is steady and stable. And the third is agility, alertness, activeness. So then the mind is agile, alert, very skillful, active.

So *sammāsamādhi* is to securely establish and correctly establish the mind and then it is pure, steady, stable, and active. And *sammāsamādhi* has as its object or aim *Nibbāna* that is the extinction of the fires of *dukkha*.

So *sammāsamādhi* is the step-by-step development of *samādhi* towards the mind that is well established – that is securely grounded – and then which aims, which focuses itself, directs itself towards *Nibbāna*. This is *sammāsamādhi*.

They all come together in *sammāsamādhi* – in right *samādhi*. *Sammāsamādhi* is the one that cuts the defilements – that destroys the defilements, that puts out *dukkha*. This is the one that does all that work. And so to aid it – to aid *sammāsamādhi* – there are the other seven rightnesses which are supporters to *sammāsamādhi* which does the actual job of cutting through all the problems, through destroying spiritual illness.

So you can see the eight factors. And then when they come together, then there is *sammāsamādhi* which is aimed at *Nibbāna* which all it sees . . . it’s just pointed right at *Nibbāna*. And it just cuts through all the defilements with the aid of the other seven until all *dukkha* is destroyed and then there is *Nibbāna*.

There’s one more fact we have to talk about. When *sammāsamādhi* is fulfilled – when it’s completely developed and established – then it causes *sammāñāṇa* (right knowledge; right insight knowledge). The *sammāñāṇa* is knowledge or insight into the impermanence of all conditioned things – into the *dukkha* of all conditioned things and into the non-selfness, the selflessness of all things whatsoever.

When there is this insight knowledge into impermanence, *dukkha*, and *anattā* (non-self), then there arises the loosening of attachments to things. And as attachment loosens – as there is the releasing of things attached to – then

there is the end of attachment. And with the end of attachment there is the giving back to Nature of all the things we have attached to.

This knowledge of impermanence, dukkha, and non-self, and then this knowledge of this easing of attachments, the loosening of attachment, and then the end of attachment – this is called right insight knowledge. When there is right insight knowledge then there is right deliverance. The mind has gone beyond attachment. The mind is liberated. There is right liberation.

So the Eight Factors of the path are the necessary causes. They're the things we must practice and do on the path – the one path with these Eight Factors – that we must practice, that we should do. And when it is done there arise these two fruits of the practice – right insight knowledge and right deliverance or right liberation/right salvation.

So we don't always have to talk about these last two because if we fulfill the first eight – we follow the middle way – then these last two fruits arise automatically. So this is why we usually just talk about the first eight because that's all that's necessary for our practice.

But to understand completely and to explain it completely, we have to talk about the Ten – the Eight Causes and the Two Fruits or Results. Eight plus two is ten and this is the Ten Rightnesses – the Ten Correctnesses. If we understand these Ten Correctnesses, then we understand the entire process – the entire path and fruit that leads to the liberation of the mind, that *is* the liberation of the mind.

So these ten things are everything we need to know about Buddhism. But in the fourth noble truth we speak specifically about the eight because these are the things we must do. This is what must be done. And it's not necessary to talk about these two because if the eight are accomplished and fulfilled, these two don't go anywhere. They're not lost. They automatically arise with the fulfillment of the eight factors of the middle way.

So this is all there is to know in Buddhism. Particularly we need to be interested in – we need to understand, develop, practice, put all our efforts, all our attentions, all our life into – these eight causes which lead to the two fruits. You should be very interested in this last noble truth.

To summarize the Noble Eightfold Path is to say that we travel life – we walk our lives – with mindfulness and wisdom in action. Through mindfulness we're applying the necessary wisdom to every event – every situation, every moment – of life. So there's no carelessness. It's a life free of carelessness.

When life is lived through craving and desire, then we're not on the Path. But when there is right want or sammāsāṅkappa, then we're on that path of *sati-sampajañña* (mindfulness and wisdom in action) that is not at all careless in any way. This is to live life correctly. This is to be on the middle way.

If you're centered and on the middle way, then you will not see things as 'positive' or as 'negative.' (By the way, they don't have these words in Thai.) But you're in the middle, you're centered and balanced. There's no positive; there's no negative. Or there's no optimism, no pessimism. We don't see things optimistically or pessimistically but you're in the middle, you're balanced, on the way.

So this is what the middle way means – to be in the middle, not be off in positive or negative, optimism or pessimism, these kind of things – but in the middle, centered. This is the middle way.

When you're centered in the middle way, then you'll be able to laugh at, to laugh away, all the pairs of opposites, all the dualities, such as good and bad or good and evil, such as winning and losing, gaining and missing, having the advantage or being on the disadvantage, credit and debit.

All of these opposites – all of these dualities – which so much of the world is caught up in, they can just be laughed away when one is on the Path, when one is there in the middle, because these things no longer have any meaning when one is in the middle – when one is balanced and centered in correctness.

Then there's one more very special thing – or not really special at all. There's one more thing you'll meet up with when you're on the middle way. This is *tathatā* (suchness; thusness). It's the just *isness* of things, the way they are, the exact thusness of things.

And when one is centered in the middle way and realizes *tathatā*, things are seen just as they are. There's nothing marvelous about anything. Nothing is special. Nothing can grab the mind and influence . . . Nothing can pull the mind out of its peace and cool and calmness. Nothing disturbs the mind. Rockets to the moon, all the fancy things that science and technology are developing, none of these are marvelous. Everything is just seen as they are. They're just what they are. They are, but there's nothing special about them. They're just what they are. That's all. Very simple.

And so when one has this fruit of being on the middle way, nothing can pull the mind out of itself. Nothing can disturb it. And this is the fruit. *Tathatā* is a fruit of the middle way. So when there is *tathatā*, nothing is marvelous. Nothing is special. We only see the end of dukkha.

So the last thing that happens in the end is that you will know the real Buddha. You'll know the real Dhamma and the true Saṅgha. By the real Buddha you know the one who extinguished dukkha – who traveled the middle way and extinguished dukkha. You know the real Dhamma – the true Dhamma that helps us to extinguish dukkha. And you know the genuine real Saṅgha – all those who have followed this way after the Buddha and extinguished dukkha.

So by being on the middle way – by following the middle way – one really sees *dukkha* and one really sees the end of *dukkha*. One sees the true Buddha, the true Dhamma, and the true Saṅgha. That's the end of the story. This is finis.

So finally I would like to express the hope that all of you understand what I've been saying and that you will – step by step, bit by bit – put this into practice in order to make use of your life in a way that cannot be compared with any other way of living – with any other thing that you could do. So I hope you understand what's been said and can put it into practice in order to live a life which is beyond compare with any other lifestyle.

And at this point I request that the talk end.

Thank you very much for coming.

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Transcribed by Arthur Brown in Jan. 2016

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