

New Life, Part 2 of 3

HOW TO HAVE NEW LIFE

by Buddhadāsa 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 Buddhadāsa 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. All Ajahn's teachings are now available on:

www.suanmokkh.org,

<https://soundcloud.com/buddhadasa> and

<https://www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829>.

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Today we'll speak about the next thing which is how to abandon attachment to the good and the evil in order to have or realize a new life as was described yesterday. We have to study, observe and examine the penalty or pain of attachment. This needs to be seen both in ourselves as individuals and within society. It's necessary to examine how attachment arises, to know the cause of the arising of the attachment. We have two ways of studying this. The first way is externally, and the second way is internally, within. As far as the external observation and examination goes, we can go through the various books and all sorts of information which can point to this. Our main sources are books and information which point out the history of the human species. Back in the early stages of humanity when there was the being that we call ape man. This ape man did not know good and evil. As the ape man evolved and developed into more and more human stages and levels of revolution, at some point, the ape man became human enough to know good and evil, and once knowing these, it attached to goodness and evil. When we see it from the external view of the history of human revolution, we can see the cause of attachment to good and evil arising in this way.

The story of Adam and Eve which we discussed yesterday where Adam and Eve disobeyed God, were disrespectful and disloyal to God to the point that they disobeyed his order and ate from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil. We can interpret this to describe that point in man revolution where the important change occurred. The transformation from the ape man that didn't know anything about good and evil. When we say that Adam and Eve disobeyed God that

they were disrespectful of God. With these means is that at this point in human revolution, man stopped following the flow or the man began to break away from the original nature, from the original stage of the mind and started to go to the opposite direction. In going against the original nature of things, we can say that this is being disobedient to God. The method of interpretation that we just use was one kind. There was another kind or method of interpretation which we can use to interpret the same story.

The first interpretation was in people language, the common everyday conventional language of relative truth that most people use. However, for Buddhists there is another kind of language that is quite different than people language and we call this “Dhamma language.” The language of ultimate truth of reality. We need to understand the difference between these two languages in order to penetrate to a deeper understanding of things. So when we interpret this story in terms of Dhamma language, we get a much more profound meaning.

The infant, the unborn child in its mother’s womb, has no knowledge of good and evil. When the child is newly born, it has no knowledge of good and evil. But as it grows, as it comes into contact with the various objects of the senses as its parents take care of it and raise it, feed it, clothe it, as people begin talking to it, and all these activities in the socialization that begins to take place, the infant is taught the meaning of the words “good and evil.” When it is first born, it has no knowledge of good and evil. But as it grows, it is raised in such a way that it develops the knowledge of the meaning of good and evil. As this knowledge is begun, then there is attachment to good and evil. This attachment grows and further develops and becomes more and great and becomes more habitual as a child grows into adulthood and on into old age. This attachment to good and evil will continue until death unless somewhere along the line, the necessary knowledge for abandoning this attachment arises. Attachment either continues until death or until there is the right understanding that helps or that leads to the abandonment of attachment to good and evil. This is how we interpret this in the language of Dhamma. In either method of interpretation, the result is the same - attachment and the problems that arise from attachment. If we wish to interpret this biblical passage from the point of view of human history, that’s fine. And see that at this one point in human revolution at that stage, man began to know good and evil. This word began to have the meaning of good and evil, and there was attachment to these meanings – the meaning of good and the meaning of evil. This original sin was then handed down from generation to generation until this very day. This original sin of attachment to good and evil has been our inheritance to all the generations until today.

We can interpret this passage in these terms, or we can look at it as a Buddhist word. As a Buddhist, we want to see it on a deeper level and understand this more profoundly. And so we see that these passages referring to the transformation in the infant from the stage of innocence of not giving any meaning to good and evil, to the transformation into the stage that is no longer. When the infant is born naturally, this process happens naturally. The transformation naturally takes place which results in the growing of the meaning of the words good and evil, and then attaching to this meaning. And then through that attachment, there is *dukkha* and all various

problems. We can use either interpretation. They don't disagree with each other. There is no contradiction or conflict, but we prefer the second interpretation because it is deeper and more profound. We don't have to think in terms of some original sin that is inherited to the generations. But we can see the original sin as it happens in the evolution of each human being. So the second interpretation we see how the infant begins to take certain experiences as pleasant and satisfying. And this becoming the meaning of good for that infant. And other experiences are taken as unpleasant and dissatisfying, and this becomes the meaning of evil. So through this, the meaning of good and evil begins to have value and we attach to. So we have two methods of interpreting this.

There is the third method which use things on an even more profound level than either the first two methods. When we examine this issue with this third method, we can see that there is only nature which follows according to the law of nature. It's only nature and its lawful changes. The changes and transformations that occur according to the law of nature. Through his ignorance and stupidity, man takes his own feeling – this judgement of pleasant and unpleasant, satisfied and unsatisfied, as the standard. Through this ignorance and this judging, good and evil begin to have meaning to the ignorant mind. As soon as man stops taking these feelings and judging these things according to them, then all that is left is the original nature. The original nature hasn't gone anywhere. It's always been there. But through this pity convention of man whereby we judge according to our own feelings, according to this this limitation. The original nature is obscured but as soon as we stop that, the original nature is realized again. And there is no attachment to good and evil. This is a more profound way of viewing this issue. This is a very simple matter. It's just a matter of nature proceeding along according to the law of nature. Nature and its original stage. There is man following the agreement of this original nature but then at one point, man goes crazy, becomes insane, and comes up with this idea of good and evil and attaches to them. But as soon as man gives up its insanity and returns to the original nature, then it's all back to the way it always was.

The very simple matter – it's just this insanity of mans and the return to sanity. It's all just a matter of nature and natural processes. Take for example – the rain. There's water in streams, river, and ocean. This evaporation of water lifts up to the air and gather together in clouds and has the precipitation in the cloud which builds and reaches the point where it falls as rain. It falls on us and makes us wet. It also allows the rice farmers to plant their rice and other farmers to grow their crops. The rain itself is just a part of a natural cycle, flowing according to the law of nature. But we, humans, derive different advantages and disadvantages or benefits and problems from this rain. And then we go and attach meaning to these benefits. It's something benefits us that we say that it is good. We give it a value of goodness. If something causes us problems, then we say that it is evil. So some of us view the rain as evil, as bad because it is uncomfortable for us or inconvenient. Other people such as the rice farmers view it as good because from their viewpoint, it's what they need. It gives them benefit. It makes them happy. So they give them the meaning of good. These words just have value in terms of their relationship to us and our way of

viewing things. But really, these are just our conventions and illusions. And there is no real ultimate truth in these words, good and evil. Yet, we attach to them over and over again.

If we wish to go deeper into the human mind, then we can look at it in this way. There's an infant that knows nothing of good and evil but as its life carries on naturally, it meets up with various sense objects through the sense of the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. With these sense experiences, these infants that lack knowledge will always be reacting to these experiences. There will be certain experiences which find joyful, pleasant, happy. With this satisfaction, with the pleasure and enjoyment of these experiences, the infants begin to discriminate and distinguish these as good, begin to identify them as good. With this identification as certain thing as good, it begins to attach to them as my good. And other experiences which are not enjoyable, which are unpleasant, painful, displeasing, disturbing, the infant takes them to be evil or bad. It begins to discriminate in this way. To distinguish certain things as bad and then with this kind of identification of things as bad, then it attaches to them as this is bad for me, or I am bad or this is bad. So through human ignorance, the lack of knowledge and understanding that leads to discrimination of certain things of good and others of bad. And in this way, attachment arises and grows and builds and we are admired this kind of life. That was looking at it in terms of individual.

Many individuals make up a society. And in society, there is also taking the judging or discrimination of certain things as pleasing, enjoyable and attaching to them as good. And other things as unpleasant, disturbing and attaching to them as bad. So even on the level of society, of the group, there is attachment to good and evil. Through this societal and cultural attachment to good and evil, this is codified or systemized in organized religion. And so we begin to have words like merit and demerit or virtue and sin which are societal discrimination based on what pleases and displeases the society. What is taken to be good and evil for the society? These conventions which are originally used just to maintain the survival of society are attached to and become dogmatic and So attachment also functions on the cultural, societal level until the point where we stop doing this, where we let go and abandon these attachments whether on individual level or on societal level. We call this letting go of attachment the "New Life."

But really as it is described already, this New Life is really just the return to the original nature of things. So in fact, it's an old life. Older than old. So old that we can call it eternal. But for most of us, we've never seen this. And so to us, it's quite strange – this old original nature. So to us, it's new. And because of situation of this strangeness for us because we are so unfamiliar with it, we are now calling it "New Life." But when we really understand it in terms of nature and a law of nature and natural processes, then we see that it's not a new life at all but it's the old life, the original life. But for now, we call it the "New Life" whether it's functioning on the level of individual or of the society.

The meaning of good and evil expands and spreads. There are at first this attachment or identification of things as good, as the good. But then the tools and mechanisms by which we strive for the good, by which we obtain the good, these tools become good. We attach to them as

well. And then through the attachment to evil, the tools and mechanisms which bring about evil, which lead to evil, these, too, attach to as evil. So besides the original discrimination and attachment to the good and the evil, then there are the tools of good and the tools of evil. And in this way, the meaning of good and evil expands and it continues to expand that results in the future. Things that happen in the future are also distinguished as good or evil depending on our discrimination and judgement of how these things affect us. And the causes in the past are also discriminated as good and evil. So we go through past causes and future results and the present mechanism and we distinguish them as good and evil, attach to them. Then this way, the problem of good and evil expands, takes up more space and causes greater problems.

We want to see it in terms even more closer to us, even more easy to understand terms. And we think of the word “Boon (भुण्)” or merit or virtue. And whatever gets us what we want, whatever obtains those pleasing, satisfying things that we attach to, this we consider to be merit or virtue. This is the good. Now the other hand, there is Bab (बाध) or demerit, sin which is whatever leads to those things that displease and dissatisfy us. So good and evil expand into merit and demerit, into virtue and sin, into happiness and *dukkha*. We take it even more narrow terms, we have happiness and *dukkha*. When this happiness is something, we attach to as good, it’s something pleases us that we like, and so that’s good – happiness is good. This is another attachment we have. Then *dukkha*, something we don’t like, something we don’t want, it’s not at all pleasant and satisfying. So we say that *dukkha* is bad. So whichever way we look at it, we see this discrimination, or we categorize things as either good or bad constantly, over and over again throughout our lives.

So good and evil keep expanding and meaning including all sorts of situations and possibilities. Let’s take one that is something you all are familiar with which is very important in the world we come from. It’s the situation of profit and loss. When we get into some business venture, we invest. If we make a profit, we attach to this profit. We identify it as good, this profit. But the other side in the business transaction was seen as a loss. So for them the loss is bad. They identify it as bad. So profit and loss also take on the expanding meaning of good and evil.

Or we can see in other relationships between people where one person has the advantage. For that person, that’s good. When the nation has an advantage, that’s good. This is taken as good. Cherish is good. But it’s gotta be the other side that is on the disadvantage or for that person or that group, that is evil which they don’t like at all. Or we can see it as winning and losing in the competition that is so much a part of our lives. One side win. The other side loses. For the winner, it’s good. For the loser, it’s bad. So good and evil spreads into all these different areas, of profit and loss, advantage and disadvantage, winning and losing. Spreading out into all these different areas, in all these dualities, these pair of opposites – good and evil expands in this way. Now this different pair of opposites that we’ve discussed, you had knowledge of this already but obviously you haven’t understood them completely. These pairs of opposites are things that we genuinely need to understand and to see as fully as possible. They’re always causing all sorts of

problems through this attachment to good and to evil. We need to look at this different opposite and see what it at work is.

The most powerful of these pairs of opposites has such a profound and strong influence on our lives. It's the opposite of male and female. These are also aspects of the attachment to good and evil. The sexes are just a natural occurring separation of function. It's just a natural mechanism used in propagating the species and sexual instinct is another natural mechanism which nature has developed in order to continue the various species. So then there is a female sex which for it to fulfil this sexual instinct, the female has to find the male in order to respond to this sexual needed has, so attaching to the male is good. For the male, in order to fulfill the sexual instinct, it needs the female and attaches to the female as good. So male and female are attached to as good by the respective sexes. And this grows in importance. Through this attachment, our vision is so obscured of the way things are. Through this attachment, all kinds of problems develop through clinging to this is male and that is female. And through all the seeking and desiring that goes on and trying to gratify this sexual attachment we have; we can see that in the pair – male and female – sexual pair of opposite. We can see how this attachment to good and evil develops into a very powerful influence, very powerful force in our lives which is constantly disrupting thing. This's always dragging problems into the situation. So we need to study this pair of opposite and understand them, especially this one very powerful pair of male and female.

Let's look at the world. Take a look and examine the world. See all that hassle of the difficulties, of the crisis, that arises because of the sexual pair of opposite, because of male and female, because of this attachment to good and evil. See all the difficulties and problems that we must go through, and we suffer because of this attachment. The way we do so many things because of the influence of this pair of opposite of maleness and femaleness. The way we dress – all the problems we go through and finding clothes or jewelry or arranging our hair or trimming our beards, painting our faces. All the various things we do to beautify ourselves just because of this sexual pair of opposite.

The way we eat. It is changing from time to time. The ideal way of a person should we look. So we always got this problem of eating in a way to achieve that ideal which is expected to catch the opposite sex. And the job we do and the way we make our living, the way we behave, the way we talk and walk, the things we do – are always under the influence of this pair of opposites. We're always doing things to attract the opposite sex, to fulfill the sexual need or power or desire. Even in homosexuals, we can see that there is still this need for the opposite sex. The male can't be gratified by the male. The male needs a female for gratification. The female needs the male. So even in homosexuals, you see that the different partners play different roles because there has to be this opposition in this attached, diluted, attempted fulfillment.

So all these various problems that are caused by the sexual pairs of opposites bring about problems in all sorts of various areas of life – in academic areas, in social, in health matters, in political, religious. On all levels, these problems of male and female have always exerted a powerful influence. So we can say that this is the last pair of opposites because it's so strong and

it's something that affects all of us, every one of us. It's a burden for even the most common ordinary person. So this is a pair of opposite that we really must understand, and get to the bottom of because it exerts such an influence on our lives and create so many problems and hassles and make genuine peace, something really difficult to realize and experience. So get to understand this. You've heard of it before, but you really fully understand this pair of opposites of male and female.

So we can observe all the many problems that human being suffer through because of attachment to good and evil. We can see all that hassle that must be endured. We can look at this, look at yourself, how destructive they are. By doing this, we begin to see how appropriate this story in the Bible is. When God said if you eat this fruit, you will know good and evil and you will die. All these burdens, problems, hassles, evils that mankind must endure is the meaning of death from knowing good and knowing evil. So this teaching is very appropriate especially for Christian that through eating this fruit, man comes to know good and evil, and through that knowledge, comes death. These are all the problems that we must undergo because of attachment to good and evil. That was looking at things from a viewpoint of religion.

Now we can examine from a view of psychology that is the science of the mind. We can see how that attachment to good and evil results in *dukkha* within the mind. All the problems and burdens, all the hassles that arise from attachment to good and evil – these are the meaning of *dukkha*. So when we see it from the psychological point of view, when we look at it from our own mind, examine this within our own mind, not outside of us, in society or in history, then we see that attachment to good and to evil is the cause of *dukkha*. You can verify this by watching it within your own mind. If we observe attachment, we'll see that it happens dependent on stupidity or ignorance. But it's only because of not understanding, because of foolishness, because we are stupid. That all this happens. When we see that this is just a process of conditioning, then there would be no problems. But because we are foolish and ignorant, we don't see what's happening. And so instead of being aware and open to and wise about the conditions that are taking place, we go in and use our own personal feeling what makes us happy, what makes us sad, what pleases us, what displeases us. We take this as a measure and then go on to attach to things. This is our own stupidity. Attachment only arises when it is helped and supported by ignorance. And so, we see that ignorance and stupidity is the cause of attachment. This means that the way out of attachment is to see things the way they really are, to understand things, or to put it simply and roughly, the way out of all these is to lose our stupidity, to stop being stupid.

When things happen, instead of seeing just in terms of what makes us happy and sad or what pleases us or displeases us, satisfy and dissatisfy, just see it as natural processes flowing according to the law of nature. Condition, conditions, conditioning each other according to the law of *idappaccayatā* (the law of causality), meaning with this as a condition, this arises, or with this condition no longer exists, this no longer exists. This is the law of interrelationship between conditions, between cause and effect. When we begin to see things in this way, then we can lose

this stupidity by which we always attach to things. Instead of seeing as pleasing and displeasing, we see it just as it is. And just this, we see just what's happening, the reality of the situation – the truth, instead of seeing superficial distinction, discrimination which we are always pleasing upon experience. To the see of profounding in this way, see that it's all the nature and natural process is to lose our ignorance, to be free of our ignorance, to stop being stupid. And in this way to remove ourselves, to escape from or be free of this attachment and the *dukkha* which attachment causes. We can see that the value and meaning of good and evil are results of ignorance. One is the direct result of ignorance, and the other is the indirect result of ignorance. Through ignorance attaching, these things take value directly for one and indirectly for the other. So in seeing this more deeply – seeing the problem of this misunderstanding, this ignorance and the attachment that gives rise to, seeing that good and evil are just the direct and indirect results of that ignorant attachment, then we begin to see the value of what we call “non-attachment.”

We have to really see how attachment works, how good and evil take their meaning from attachment, to be able to really understand the importance of non-attachment. We don't use the word detachment because to detach is just to attach to the evil. Detachment is just clinging and grasping at the evil. So instead of detachment, we talk about non-attachment – being without attachment, being free of attachment to either good or evil. So we don't feel detachment is a proper way but non-attachment. This is the middle way. We don't have to be scared that non-attachment, that without attachment to good and evil, we will die. God said “through knowing good and evil, we die.” So non-attachment isn't death. Non-attachment is to live in such a way that it's beyond death. We can say that it's life everlasting or eternal life. So there's no need to be afraid of non-attachment. In a life of non-attachment, everything is possible. It is possible to look for money. It is possible to have money and to use it. But we search without attachment. We have that money without attachment, and we use it without attachment.

Whatever needed can be done but the key is it's done without attachment. We speak with things without attachment. This is what the life of non-attachment is like. So non-attachment is the way out. This is realized through what we call *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* means to see clearly, to see things clearly as they truly are. So through *vipassanā*, things are understood as they really are and then our attachment to them begins to fade away. As attachment fades away, then there is the knowledge of things as they are. And as we live using mindfulness and wisdom, using this knowledge of the things that we need to know, this is *satipaṇṇā* or applying this knowledge with mindfulness is *sati-sampajañña* (mindfulness with wisdom and action). By being mindful and applying the knowledge of things as they are, then there's no attaching to things. So there's freedom from them. Thus, *vipassanā* is very important in finding one way out of attachment and living the life of non-attachment. So through seeing things clearly as they are, we begin to non-attach.

“Seeing things clearly as they are” means seeing ourselves as this thing we call “we.” Don't see it in terms of triple “we” or triple “I,” but see it just a double “we” – the body and mind. But

don't add the third "we" of self. Or we say "we" or "I," – there is only body and mind. But there is no self. Through *vipassanā* and realizing this, then it is possible to live without attachment.

Please don't believe the people who say that without attachment we won't do anything. That it takes selfishness and greed and desire to live, to act, and work in the world. There are certain people in Thailand who criticize us for talking about non-attachment because they claim that for the development of Thailand, for the economic health of Thailand, people need to be selfish. They need to have desires. They need to compete. They need to attach. So they say that non-attachment is wrong that we need it. Don't believe these people because they are so attached to things that they don't know what they are talking about.

There is a saying "where is the will, there is a way." Be very careful about this. If what people mean by will is attaching to things, if will is to attach, if it is selfishness, then this is completely wrong. Saying "where is the will, there is a way" and be talking about attachment is wrong – it's incorrect. But when you use the word "will," there is no attachment involved. When we say "where is the will, there is a way," we are talking about something that is free of attachment. Then you can say this if you want. But be very careful because for most people, the will is something of the self – it's attachment. So the way to live is with non-attachment. Don't be afraid and don't believe what some certain people say that attachment is not necessary to live, to breath, to act. The only way to really live is the non-attachment – to be free of this discrimination of good and evil, of clinging to these things and taking on these heavy burdens. These also lead to all sorts of *dukkha*. Attaching to good brings a good source of *dukkha*. Attaching to bad is a bad kind of *dukkha*. But it is all just *dukkha*. So the only way to really be free is to stop attaching, to live in non-attachment. This is the true middle way – the way of non-attachment.

There is a secret to this attachment business. When there is attachment to something as good, or when there is attachment to the good, then there arises "the self" that is good or that has good, that one's good, that will get good – the good. This is a secret mechanism within the mind or of the mind. And it works the same way with evil. When there is attachment to evil, then there arises "the self" that is evil or that has evil, that will get evil, that one's evil or that doesn't want evil. This is a very important secret of the mind mechanism. The true attachment – there arises "the self." The self when it is full-grown is the thing which experiences all the problems and hassles in *dukkha* that we've been talking about. And when there is mindfulness and wisdom in action applied wisdom at work, then there's no possibility for this attachment to arise and so the self is not created. And when the self does not exist, when there is freedom from the self, then there is nothing to experience *dukkha*. There is no *dukkha*. So it's crucial for there to be proper understanding, for there to be wisdom about things through having insights into things the way they really are, into realizing the truth of *anattā* – not self. The things are not self. There is no permanent essence in all these.

To realize *idappaccayatā* – the law of causality, that is nothing but this causal process, that this causative relationship between different conditions, that there is just conditioning. To just see things as they really are in this way by using mindfulness and applying this knowledge as

sampajañña (wisdom and action) – this is how to be free from *dukkha*, how to stop the arising of attachment and the birth of the self. This is how we talk about it in religious terms. Many people are into art – art is something inspires many of us. So if we'd like, we can call this the art of non-attachment, the art of living none attached. This is a kind of art much more skillful and important than any of the fine arts, or dramatic arts, or plastic arts or whatever. This art of non-attachment, of not allowing attachment to happen. In religious terms we talk about having mindfulness and wisdom and action governing all that we do, whatever governing oversee everything that happens, so that attachment doesn't arise. So you can talk about it in terms of art if that has meaning for you. Or you can see it from the religious perspective if that has meaning for you. What is important is you use whatever perspective you choose in order to be able to be free of this attaching to good and to evil so that all *dukkha* and all the burdens are not conditioned and created to way down and kill the mind.

So from all that has been said today, you can see that the self is the nucleus of attachment. So it's only because of this self that we can attach to things as mind, because of the attachment to things as mind, the attachment to the self, to the I. So if we can destroy this self, then we can be free of the attachment and all the problems, all the clinging, all the grasping, all the burdens, and all the pain. So we need to be free of this self. This is the way out. Just to realize the truth that in this body and mind, there is no self. There is just body and mind. Just this natural phenomenon. So to put it in simple easy to remember clear terms, we can advise you to “die before dying.” Die before dying. We are talking about two kinds of death – the death of the self and the death of the physical body. We don't know how long this body is going to remain alive. The mind only exists depended on the body. So long as the body and the mind are alive and so long as we don't do anything to cure our ignorance, then we are burnt with this spiritual problem of *dukkha*, of attachment, of the self. If we can kill the self, if the self dies before the physical body dies, that is the realization of peace of Nibbāna. So we end today with the advice – die before dying. Let the self dies before the physical body dies. Die before you die. So on this note we will finish today's talk and ask that today's meeting be closed. Thank you very much.

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