

Originating Cause That Turns Life into 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).

Today we'd like to speak on the topic of the original cause for life becoming a heavy burden or *dukkha* – the original cause for life becoming a heavy burden or *dukkha*.

The answer to this that we can give right off the bat is that the cause is not knowing the five *khandhas* according to reality. Life becomes a heavy burden because we do not understand the five *khandhas* according to reality. This is the topic we will discuss today.

If we were Christians, we would answer this question by saying that the original cause is the eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the Christian tradition this is the original sin. This original sin of eating that fruit from that tree – which God forbid Adam and Eve to eat – that original sin is the cause of all *dukkha*.

But if we are Buddhists, we don't answer in that way. We say that the original cause of all *dukkha* is in not understanding the five *khandhas* according to reality.

Because of misunderstanding, the idea of 'I' or 'we' arises. Actually there is only the mind. There is only this thing which is able to know – which is aware, which is sensitive. This is the mind.

And one of the functions of the mind is thinking. The mind thinks. Sometimes the mind thinks correctly – in the right way – and we can call this ‘right thinking.’ Sometimes the mind thinks in the wrong way. It thinks in a way that does not accord with reality. We call this ‘wrong thinking.’

All there is, is the mind – the mind that feels, is aware, is sensitive and that thinks. Sometimes there is wrong thinking and sometime there is right thinking. But originally, naturally, ordinarily there is only this mind.

There’s only mind. But because of wrong thinking there arises the illusion of ‘I’ – of ‘me,’ of ‘self,’ of ‘ego,’ of ‘soul,’ whatever you want to call it. All of these are illusions – *atman* [Sanskrit], ‘self,’ ‘soul’ – no matter what your conception of them. And these are always arising because of the wrong thinking.

Ordinarily there is only mind. Naturally there is only mind. But through wrong thinking there arises the illusion of some separate individual ‘I’ or ‘self.’

The mind is one part or component of life. It is paired with the other component which is body. So there is the mind which is this one aspect of life which is able to feel, be aware, be sensitive, thinks and so forth.

The mind often is attaching to itself as a ‘self.’ The mind through not understanding – through wrong thinking – identifies with the mind itself, or one aspect or function of the mind, as the ‘self’ or ‘soul’ such as when the mind is performing the function of feeling – that those feelings that arise toward sense-experience which we call the *vedanā*. When this function of mind is taking place the mind will attach to it as ‘I’ or ‘mine.’

Or the function of mind that we call *saññā* – the perceiving of the marks or distinctions of the sense-object. When this perception is taking place the mind will attach to it.

Or there is the activity of the mind that we call ‘thinking.’ And the mind will attach to itself in the function of thinking.

Or then there is the sense-awareness of some sense activity via the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind. When this function of the mind is taking place, the mind may go and attach to that as ‘I,’ as ‘mine.’

So in this way the mind is attaching to itself through misunderstanding and wrong thinking. It goes and identifies – or clings to – one of its functions as the ‘self’ or ‘soul.’

Sometimes when the mental activity is fairly quiet – when there is nothing really interesting taking place with these various mental functions – then the functioning of the body will stand out much more clearly. And in moments like this, then the mind will attach to the body as ‘I.’

Normally when one of the mental functions is strongest, the mind will attach to one of those and will only attach to the body as ‘mine,’ ‘my’ body. But when the activity of the body is most obvious, then the mind may attach to this as ‘I.’ ‘I am’ the body.

So this is how – through not understanding the reality of the five khandhas, not seeing the true nature of these things – the burden of life arises. These five khandhas are just activities. They’re just natural functions and are totally . . . and in those functions there is nothing that is a ‘self.’

But through not perceiving this truth – this reality – the burden of life arises through attaching to these natural activities as something personal, as something individual – as ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ This is the arising of the burden of life.

So to repeat as concisely as possible – the burden of life arises from not seeing the five khandhas as they really are. The burden of life comes from not realizing the genuine truth of the five khandhas.

This not understanding or the lacking of this knowledge about the way the khandhas really are is called *avijjā*. This is a very very important word because it stands for something that is very nasty and fierce. So remember this word.

The word is *avijjā* (A-V-I-J-J-A). Usually we translate this ‘ignorance’ but sometimes people don’t quite understand what we mean. *Vijjā* means ‘knowing’ or ‘knowledge.’ *Avijjā* is ‘not-knowing.’ This is the lack of knowledge. *Avijjā* is where there is not the right knowledge.

This is the starting point of the process that conditions dukkha. All dukkha has its starting point in *avijjā*. And therefore *avijjā* is something very very important to know.

Avijjā is essentially not understanding all things as they really are. *Avijjā* is not having the correct knowledge about all things. When we say ‘all things,’ we mean all the phenomena that arise in and before consciousness – all the things that happen within the mind. This is everything.

All the things that you can know, experience, feel, see, hear, touch, think – all of these things are no different than the five khandhas. So we can say ‘all things’ or we can say the ‘five khandhas.’ Avijjā is not-knowing all things as they are in their genuine truth – not perceiving the truth of all things or not perceiving the truth of the five khandhas. This is avijjā.

In Dhamma language – the language which has different levels of more profound meaning which we use to explain the truth – avijjā is darkness. Avijjā is darkness.

If we took one hundred suns – (s-u-n-s), the kind that is up in the sky and that makes the day light. If we took one hundred suns they could still not drive away avijjā. Avijjā is so powerful, so strong, so dark that one hundred suns cannot clear it away. This is how important avijjā is – this not-knowing of things as they are, this not understanding the five khandhas.

Another way we can describe it is it’s even darker than blindness. Even when someone is blind they can still perceive a few things. Sometimes they can notice differences between darkness and lightness, or sometimes can perceive shapes even though they are technically blind. But with avijjā it’s far worse than that. This not-knowing is even blinder than blindness. It’s darker than blindness.

So hopefully you’ll appreciate the danger – the horribleness – of avijjā. If you do you’ll begin to have some interest in lessening this darkness – in finding some light to begin to clear up the darkness of avijjā. A hundred suns won’t do the trick but there is something called *vipassanā* (insight) which is a spiritual light which can begin to clear up the spiritual darkness of avijjā. So this is why we need to be interested in *vipassanā* (insight).

Literally *avijjā* means the absence of knowledge, the absence or the lack of knowledge. *Vijjā* is knowledge; *a* is ‘not’ or ‘without.’ But when we use the word ‘knowledge’ here it is still too vague or ambiguous because there are many kinds of knowledge. And so we need to distinguish between right knowledge and wrong knowledge.

There are many things that we can know and of these many of them are useless. They are kinds of knowledge that have no value in extinguishing dukkha. So we need to distinguish between right knowledge and wrong knowledge or frivolous unnecessary knowledge. And so if we understand this – that there are two kinds of knowledge, knowledge which is correct and knowledge which is incorrect

– then we will understand that *vijjā* means correct knowledge and *avijjā* is the lack of correct knowledge.

If you don't understand ignorance in this way then you will think you will have to go and learn everything in every book that has ever been written in the universe and that's an impossible task. So we're not talking about all the minutiae in facts and details that can be stored away in books, computers, libraries, and universities. We're just talking about right knowledge – right knowledge which is the knowledge that can clear up the problem of dukkha.

So this is *avijjā* (ignorance). Spiritual ignorance is the lack of right knowledge. And so we need to develop *vijjā* (correct knowledge) which is a light. This light of correct knowledge of *vijjā* will clear up the darkness of *avijjā*.

So in this way we must scrutinize the mind, be aware of any *avijjā*, and begin to straighten out the situation. Be able to clean up and clear up, and brighten up and polish the knowing so it is not *avijjā* but that it becomes *vijjā* (right knowing) – knowing things as they really are. Not knowing all the little iddy-biddy surface details of things – not getting caught up in the externals of things – but penetrating to the true nature of things, especially penetrating to the true nature of the five khandhas. This is the light of *vijjā* which will clear up the darkness of *avijjā*.

For those of us who are just beginning to study this subject – just beginning to look into this matter – there's a very easy way of noticing the difference between *vijjā* and *avijjā*. When there is *avijjā* present, then attachment will arise. When *avijjā* is overseeing the situation, then attachment will arise. On the other hand, if there is *vijjā* present – if *vijjā* is managing things – then attachment will not arise. The mind will not attach to anything as 'I' or 'mine.'

So for those of us who are just beginning to look into these things – into this matter – the way to discriminate between *vijjā* and *avijjā* is by the presence of attachment. If there is attachment, then there is *avijjā*. If there is no attachment, then there is *vijjā*. When *vijjā* in some form is present to a sufficient degree, then no attachment will arise. The mind through understanding the situation adequately knows that there is no value – there is no purpose – there is only pain in dukkha in attachment. So the mind does not attach.

So through *vijjā* functioning in the form of mindfulness or the form of *sampajañña* (wisdom-in-action) which is when a specific bit of knowledge is

applied right here at the sensory experience that is taking place. Or in the form of *paññā* – when *vijjā* is functioning in the form of *paññā* (wisdom) which has been learned, has been developed.

Vijjā in one of these forms will prevent the arising of attachment. So we can begin to tell whether there is *vijjā* or *avijjā* present by the presence or absence of attachment. This is a handy tool for those of us who are just beginning to study this problem.

Another useful way of getting a grip on the meaning of *vijjā* – in order to understand what we are talking about here – is to consider some of the synonyms for *vijjā*. There are many, many different synonyms – or words that have the same basic meaning – where you can use different words to express the same thing. And if we explore some of these words it will help us to understand *vijjā*.

Very good synonym for *vijjā* is the ‘eye’ – the eye. If you have the eye then there will not be attachment. By having the eye the attachment in *dukkha* does not arise. On the other hand if you don’t have the eye – and most of you don’t or probably none of you do – then there will still be attachment and *dukkha*.

Now don’t get angry when we say that you don’t have the eye – when we say ‘Well you probably don’t have the eye yet.’ Don’t go and say ‘No, look look, I’ve got two of them.’ We’re not talking about these physical eyes nestled in your skull. No matter how good these eyes are – no matter how perfect your physical vision – you can still look at things and attach to them. No matter how well you see things with these eyes, without the Dhamma eye attachment will arise. So this is a useful synonym to help us understand what *vijjā* means.

The physical eyes have nothing to do with the ‘eye.’ And if you don’t have the eye – no matter how good these other two eyes are – you’ll still get yourselves into all kinds of problems. But once you have the ‘eye,’ the attachments will no longer arise and there won’t be any *dukkha*.

So don’t cling to these two eyes stuck in your heads. But through the practice of *vipassanā* learn to develop the ‘eye.’ This is the Dhamma eye, the eye of wisdom. It’s the eye that can shine a light through the darkness and illuminate things so that everything or all things are seen according to reality.

This is the eye that is necessary. The other two eyes are useful but are superfluous. It’s the ‘eye’ – the Dhamma eye – that we must develop through *vipassanā*. So the eye is needed.

Let me point out, the word I/eye in English can be spelled two ways. One is with a capital I – the letter ‘I’ – and we’ve been talking about that a lot the last few days. But now we’re talking about E-Y-E – that eye. So it’s a different eye that we’re talking about right here. Just to clarify that.

Now with the physical eye or the physical eyes – two little balls in our heads – if a cloth or something were to cover them, or maybe we were to put on very dark, thick black glasses, or maybe some disease were to get in the eyes or destroy them or something, these are all things that can interfere with normal vision – with physical vision – and make it impossible to see.

If these things occur, then we must do something to clean up or take away whatever is obstructing vision. If there’s something covering the eyes, we need to take it off. Or we need to clean our glasses. We need to clean all that dirt and blackness away from the glasses. Or if there’s some disease, we must cure that disease – take the necessary medicine and treatment so that that disease no longer interferes with the vision.

With physical vision we must do these various things to enable the eyes – the physical eyes – to see again. With the Dhamma eye – the eye of wisdom – it works the same way. Whatever there is darkening the eyes – the Dhamma eye – or covering it up or whatever disease is affecting it, these things must be taken care of.

The Dhamma eye must be studied and understood. And then these interferences – whether it’s some kind of covering or black paint or filth or grime or it’s some sort of disease, whatever it is – this must be also studied in order that we can then clear it up, we can take away whatever is obstructing the Dhamma eye. And so this is what needs to be done with the Dhamma eye, with the eye.

The way to clean up anything that is obstructing the Dhamma eye is with vipassanā – the practice of seeing things as they really are. This will take away the disease or the covering or the filth, whatever it is, so that the Dhamma eye can shine forth. But let’s be very specific again and say it’s not just any old vipassanā. It has to be correct vipassanā.

These days there are all kinds of vipassanā going around and not all of them are correct. So the vipassanā that is needed is correct vipassanā. And the way to tell if it’s correct vipassanā is whether or not it is uncovering the Dhamma eye. If the

vipassanā that is being used is not leading to lightness – but is just maintaining the same old darkness – then that is not correct vipassanā.

So don't just go and practice any vipassanā. You must use correct vipassanā in order to open up, clean up, and cure the Dhamma eye so that it can shine forth and illuminate things as they really are.

The most important meaning of the word 'Buddha' is the awakened one. Buddha essentially means the awakened one – one who has woken up and will never fall asleep again, one who has awakened to reality and truth, and will not fall asleep.

This meaning of the awakened one is similar to the meaning of 'Christ.' Jesus Christ or Christos means the 'anointed one.' Now the anointed one and the awakened one are very different in both meaning and in connotation, and have vastly different implications. But Christ was this title signifying something special about Jesus Christ. The Buddha is another title and what it signifies is that he is the awakened one – has woken up from the sleep of avijjā, has awakened to the light of vijjā. So this is the meaning of the word 'Buddha.'

Now all of you here – with your eyes open, sitting here as if you were awake – are really sleeping. Every one of you, though you may think you are awake, you are really sleeping. You are physically awake according to the normal meaning of that word, but according to the most profound meaning of the word 'awake' all of you are asleep.

You are sleeping because the Dhamma eye has not yet opened. Just because these physical eyes are open or uncovered and free of disease doesn't mean that the Dhamma eye is functioning properly. And as long as the Dhamma eye is not yet open then you are still sleeping – sleeping in the state of unknowing, the sleep of not knowing things as they truly are.

So something must be done here to waken us all up – so that we can open this Dhamma eye, so that we will have the real eye. These physical eyes are just illusions. But the Dhamma eye is the true eye that can really see – that can see the truth, see what needs to be seen rather than see nothing but phantasms and illusions.

So we practice vipassanā, correct vipassanā, to develop the light that will open the Dhamma eye so that we will awaken – so that we can get out of this sleep of not knowing which we're sunk into.

So let's look a little more at this state of avijjā – the condition of sleep that we're all wallowing in.

Have you woken up yet or are you still sleeping? Look inside. Are you still asleep? Have you opened your eyes yet or are they still closed? Is the Dhamma eye open or closed?

You can ask yourself . . . Or we can begin at the very beginning – the very basic question about whether one is awakened or not, or is beginning to awaken or not. Ask yourself, why were you born? Why were you born? Do you know? If you don't know then you haven't begun to waken up yet.

Why were you born? If you know why you were born then your Dhamma eye is beginning to open.

Why were you born? Well some of you will say 'Well, I didn't ask to be born, don't ask me these silly questions. It's not my fault. Somebody else did it to me.' Well, if you think this way then ask yourself 'now that you're born, what are you going to do?' You can't deny that you've been born. So here you are, you've been born. What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do? If you cannot answer this question then you're still sleeping.

Or can you answer this question, 'Why were you born?' Or what are you going to do now that you've been born? We can start here. This is the simplest question or level of avijjā. So we can begin to examine on this level to see whether we are asleep or whether we are awake, whether the Dhamma eye is closed or whether it has opened.

The next point with which to view avijjā is the question of 'What is life?' You don't even know what life is, how can you be awake? What is life? And following from this, how is life to be managed? What are we going to do with this life? How do we manage it? How do we arrange it?

And then, what should be accomplished with life? What should be attained with life? This is the second point that you need to ask yourself in working on this problem of avijjā.

What is life? How is life to be managed? And what is to be accomplished by life? Or what can life . . . what should life accomplish? Ask yourself these questions. Do you know the answers?

The next thing that we don't know – mentioned two so far . . . The third thing that you don't know is that what we have to take care of, what has to be set straight, is the mind – not this thing that we call the 'self' or the 'soul' or the *atman* [Sanskrit] or *attā*. This is the thing that we don't even know.

We're always talking about 'I have to do this,' 'I have to change that' or 'I have to work on myself' or 'my practice,' 'my this,' 'me that,' 'I.' We're always talking in these terms. And we generally don't even know that what needs to be cleaned up, trained, developed, and worked on is the mind.

This 'self' or 'soul' doesn't even exist. It's something purely elusive. It's just a figment of wrong thinking of the imagination. And so how can we do anything with this? It doesn't even exist – the 'I' or the 'self.' (The 'I like this.') It doesn't even exist, so how can we clean it up or train it or develop it or anything? It's hopeless.

But it's the mind that exists. It's the mind that can be trained. It's the mind that can be straightened out – that can be developed and trained. So this is the third thing that we don't know. We don't realize that it is the mind that must be worked on. Not 'I must work on myself.'

The fourth thing that we don't know has to do with our refuge or something that we can depend on – something that we can take refuge in. This is something that we don't know either.

Most of us are taking our refuge in things like spirits, angels, God, universities, governments, things like this. We take our refuge in external things. This shows that we don't even know where real refuge is.

Things that we can depend on are not things that are outside – that are external. The only thing that we can really depend on – the only thing in which we can truly take refuge – is within. And this thing within us – or within the mind – that can truly be a source of safety and protection is correct practice according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Don't go looking outside towards gods or angels or governments or teachers and think that they will solve your problems for you. This is hopeless. There is no security in external things. The only real security is within, in correct practice – practice that is in accordance with the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Idappaccayatā means ‘having this as condition, this arises.’ It’s the law of cause and effect. It’s the law that is linking all the phenomena that make[s] up our experience in life – both mental and physical. There is this causal interrelationship, causes and effects – this causes this, this causes this, this causes this, on and on and on and on – this interwoven tapestry of causes and effects. The law of *idappaccayatā* is what governs all these cause and effect relationships.

The only dependable thing is practice, correct practice. And correct practice is practice that is in line with – that does not ignore, that does not contradict – the law of *idappaccayatā* (the law of cause and effect).

This is the only thing that you can really depend on to prevent the arising of dukkha. This is the only source of security and safety. It’s within. It’s not outside anywhere. It’s within the mind. Correct practice according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

Those of you who take your refuge in some external protector . . . Those of you who seek your security in some god or angel or thing that’s outside . . . Whenever dukkha arises, then you will get down on your knees and beg and plead and pray to whatever this source of security you’ve put your faith in whether it’s the government or some god or whatever. Whenever dukkha arises, you’ll bow and pray and plead and beg for your protector – for your security blanket – to somehow take the dukkha away.

But those of us who find their security within – in correct practice – don’t have to get down on their knees. Whenever dukkha arises there’s no need to beg or plead or do any of these things. Instead when dukkha arises, one just observes. One investigates the dukkha to find out how it arose. You look at the dukkha until you see what happened. What was done that does not go in accordance with the law of cause and effect? In what way was the law of *idappaccayatā* violated or broken? And then when it is seen how the law of *idappaccayatā* was violated, then that situation is corrected and the dukkha disappears.

This is the difference between someone who takes refuge in an external thing and someone who takes refuge internally, in correct practice. The one person is helpless – completely dependent on some figment of their imagination. There is no security in that outward thing. And so no matter how much you beg and plead and whatever, the most you can succeed in doing is deceiving yourself even more. The most you can do is to deceive yourself that there is no dukkha.

But through using the internal refuge – by seeking one’s security in correct practice – one need not beg or plead. There is always the path of opening the Dhamma eye in order to understand how the law of cause and effect was violated and then correcting the situation.

This is the difference – and it is a very great difference – between those who take refuge in external things and those who take refuge in internal things.

And by the way, by external things this also includes certain ways of sitting, certain ways of walking, and various other activities. All these so-called ‘spiritual practices’ – if they are just bodily movements – then that is just taking refuge in some physical ritual and there is no security in that.

Correct practice is in the mind. Correct practice is not dependent on the body. It’s dependent on the mind. It’s in the mind where we violate or follow the law of idappaccayatā. So see the difference between these two refuges, the external refuge and the true refuge within.

All the external refuges – all those security blankets around us – can be summarized in one word – ‘superstition.’ The Thai word for superstition is *saiyasatr* (sai-ya-satr). *Saiya* means asleep and *satr* is similar to the suffix ‘ology’ or as ology meaning a body of knowledge. So *saiyasatr*, superstition, means the body of knowledge of those who are asleep. It’s the system of knowledge and thinking of those who are still asleep.

This is *saiyasatr* and all the external refuges – all the gods and angels and rituals and all these ancient customs that have been passed down for centuries or even thousands of years – these can all be summarized as superstition.

The opposite of superstition is *Buddhasatr*. *Buddha* is the one who is awakened and *satr* is the system of knowledge of awakened ones. And this we can call ‘Buddhology.’ We’re not limiting this to just what is now-a-days called ‘Buddhism.’ Don’t take a narrow view of things like that.

When we say ‘Buddhology’ we’re not speaking about some organized religion. We’re talking about the system of knowledge of awakened ones – of awakened, enlightened beings. The system of knowledge of an awakened being takes its refuge in correct practice according to the law of idappaccayatā, as we’ve explained.

So there are these two bodies of knowledge. The one is, we can maybe say, ‘sleepology’ – the body of knowledge of those who are asleep. If you’re sleeping, please wake up. People have been sleeping for thousands of years and look where it’s gotten us.

So if you’re asleep – if you’re still caught up in superstition, in superstitious rituals and practices and beliefs – then wake up. Wake up to Buddhology, to the correct practice according to the body of knowledge – the system of knowledge – of those who are awakened.

So wake up. You’ve been sleeping long enough. Put down the refuge of superstition because it won’t work. Waken up. Awaken to Buddhology – the true refuge, true security, something you can actually depend on.

To summarize this all we can just say that *avijjā* is not knowing the law of *idappaccayatā*. Ignorance is not having sufficient understanding of the law of *idappaccayatā*. *Avijjā* – this is all it comes down to – is not having sufficient understanding of the law of cause and effect. This is *avijjā*.

When we have chosen or taken up an incorrect refuge . . . When the thing we depend on . . . When our security blanket is [a] foolish one, then we will suffer *dukkha*. Because we take up an incorrect security blanket which cannot protect us, we will inevitably suffer through the burden of life. In fact that security blanket will itself be a burden. And so in taking this foolish protection – this foolish refuge in some superstition – then there will be *dukkha*.

The next thing that we don’t know is we don’t know how to lessen the *attā*. We lack the understanding of how to lessen and diminish selfishness and egoism. We can’t slacken or abate the selfishness and egoism. This is the fifth thing that we don’t know.

Even worse than that, we haven’t even thought about lessening it. Not only we don’t know how to lessen selfishness, we’ve never even thought that we ought to lessen the ego – lessen egoism and selfishness. Instead we just think about how to add to it – how to build up selfishness, how to puff up pride, how to develop status and stature. We tend to go in the wrong direction and add to our *avijjā* rather than lessen it.

And on top of that – and because of it – we don’t want to lessen the *attā*. We don’t want to lessen selfishness. This is because we love selfishness. We love the *attā*. We love ourselves. This ‘we’ that loves – it’s an illusion and it loves this

illusion. It's so caught up in this illusion. It loves it. It's very satisfying and pleasing to itself.

So this illusion becomes self-perpetuating. And then this 'we' – this 'I,' this 'self' – it doesn't even want to lessen selfishness. It's so caught up in this self-love that it's not willing to lessen itself. This is how this aspect of avijjā – of wrong knowledge – gets going.

And finally this all gets so carried away that we think we can be happy without lessening selfishness. This ignorance develops to the point that we think that we can actually be happy here. We can genuinely be happy without lessening the 'self' or selfishness.

We think that we can be really happy without doing anything about dukkha. We think we can just ignore dukkha and that we'll still be happy. And I'm sure there are many of you who have thought – if not all of you at least once, if not often – during these talks: 'well I don't see what's so bad about dukkha; I'm still happy most of the time.' If you think you can really really be happy without lessening dukkha – without beginning to free the mind of dukkha – then you're way off track.

This idea of the 'self' and not wanting to lessen it – it's really confused when we think that we can really be happy without doing anything about selfishness, without doing anything about dukkha.

This happiness where don't have to lessen and diminish attā – where we don't have to do anything about selfishness – this is the happiness of avijjā. This is the ignorant joy because this is the happiness that comes through attachment. This is the happiness of craving, of ignorant desire, of attachment, of defilement.

This is the happiness of avijjā and it always turns into dukkha sooner or later – usually immediately. This happiness of ignorance that is based in attachment, selfishness, and defilement always becomes dukkha. This is the inevitable result of the happiness of avijjā – the happiness where we can keep being selfish.

What we've just said is based in the fact – the truth – that this ignorant happiness comes when the mind foolishly takes some defilement as the 'self.' Some defilement includes some kind of craving, greed, hatred, anger, fear, worry, confusion, jealousy, selfishness, attachment. These things are taken as the 'self.' And when the mind takes defilement as the 'self,' then there will be some kind of ignorant happiness which is very very fleeting and then becomes dukkha.

In these cases the mind does not take *pothi* [Thai; Pāli, *bodhi*] (true knowledge) – knowledge of the way things are, knowledge of the way that leads out of dukkha. The mind doesn't take *bodhi* as the 'self.'

Be very careful on this point. Don't confuse what we are talking about. With ignorant happiness, the mind is taking defilement as the 'self' instead of taking – what we can call – enlightened knowledge as the 'self.' Defilement is taken as the 'self' instead of enlightenment. This is the problem that results in ignorant happiness.

When the mind has ignorance or is caught up in not-knowing or in wrong knowledge, then it has the hope that some external thing – that someone else – will solve its problems for it. The ignorant mind thinks that somebody else or some other thing will come in and clear up the dukkha for it. This is what happens with the ignorant mind. It takes . . . It depends on externals – on someone or something else – to solve the problem which is hopeless.

Or the mind puts its hopes and wishes in something that is impossible. The ignorant mind is trying to get something or it's hoping for something that is just absolutely impossible such as that everything will last forever or that this or that will not change or that impermanent things will be permanent. This is another foolish kind of wishing that arises in the ignorant mind. It wants what is impossible.

Or we wish for more than is possible. We hope for something that is more than possible. In the world now-a-days we're obsessed with what is good and positive. We only want positive things and we want more and more of them. This is more than what is possible. Some good in some positive things are possible. But to wish for only good in positive things is impossible. So this is another form of wishing that arises in the ignorant mind – wishing for what is more than possible.

Thus the burden of life arises because we are unable to control the mind. The mind is out of control and it is not trained to stay within the boundaries of what is possible. Because of ignorance, the mind is always strained beyond its limits – always wishing and hoping for things that are not possible. So this is how the burden of life arises. Because of the inability to control the mind. Because the mind is not mastered and trained so that it is kept under control.

We say 'we.' There's no other 'we' than the mind. So we're talking about the mind can't control itself even if we say 'we can't control the mind.' 'We can't

control the mind' is an ordinary way of speaking but don't be deceived by it. When we say 'we' there's nothing else but the mind.

When we talk in this normal way, people who don't understand things – people who are still asleep – understand 'we' to be some 'self,' some individual, some person. But those who are awakening and beginning to understand know that when we say 'we' that we just mean the mind.

And so when you're talking about the mind can't control itself – the mind is out of control – and it's not up to any 'we' to control it. The mind must do that by itself. Because the mind doesn't have enough understanding of the way things work, it cannot maintain itself in a state of correctness. The mind can't train itself to be correct and then develop itself so it stays in a state or condition of correctness – of rightness. Because the mind can't do this, it gets caught up in dukkha.

When the mind is correct – when it gets in that state of correctness and stays there, maintains itself there, when the mind lives correctly – then it does not pick up any of the burdens of life and there is no dukkha. But because of ignorance, the mind is unable to do this. It can't control itself. It can't maintain itself in correctness. And thus there is dukkha.

The mind that is out of control gets involved in defilements – in attachment. And these all bring upon it burdens and dukkha. So when the mind is not correct – when it's not under control – it gets into these problems which we've discussed.

So now we're going to give you a list of nine things which you can use to examine yourself – to see whether the mind is correct or not. Don't worry about examinations you take in school or to get government jobs or things like that. Those examinations are of secondary importance. We're going to give you a list of nine things to take the examination that really matters to see whether the mind is correct or not.

So we'll give you these nine things. If you've got some paper you can jot them down. Otherwise you'll have to memorize them. The nine things are:

Love, Anger, Hatred, Fear, Worry, Possessiveness, Jealousy,
Stinginess, Possessiveness¹

¹ "He had nine things but my translation might have come up with . . . Is that nine? I'm sorry, I can't come up with a good translation for all these." [added by the translator]

These nine things are just examples however. They're examples of the various things which lead to dukkha. There are many more, but we give you these nine as prime examples.

Now we need to look at how these causes of dukkha – these sources of dukkha – are related to the five *khandhas*. The relationship is that these nine things occur because we do not realize that the five khandhas are *anattā* (not-self).

When we talk about *anattā*, this includes within it *anicca* (impermanence) and *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness). So when we talk about *anattā*, the understanding of *anattā* must include these other two. So when we say that these nine kinds of wrong thinking arise because of not understanding that the five khandhas are *anattā*, this means that they arise because of not understanding that the five khandhas are impermanent, unsatisfactory, & not-self.

So if we say just *anattā*, understand that we're talking about impermanence and unsatisfactoriness as well. These two are always included within *anattā*.

We'd like to take this opportunity to say a little bit more about *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, & not-self) because almost everyone has a very fuzzy and unclear understanding of this matter.

Even in Thailand which has been a so-called Buddhist country for hundreds of years and which is crammed full of monasteries and monks, there are still many people teaching *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* in a very fuzzy and unclear way. So we want to take the opportunity to give you a very clear and concise explanation of this. So we encourage you to either jot it down or memorize it.

Anicca is continual or continuous change through rising and ceasing. *Anicca* is continuous change through arising and ceasing.

Dukkha is the squeezing affliction or pain that arises from that continuous change. *Dukkha* is the affliction that arises from continuous change.

Anattā is that there is nothing, there is no thing that can stop that affliction of *anicca*. There is no thing, no 'self,' no 'I,' no person, no individual – there is nothing whatsoever – that can stop that affliction of *anicca*. This is *anattā*.

And so these three definitions of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* can be used for everything within the universe. Everything in the universe can be defined and described according to *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* as we have just explained them to you.

If we pare it down just a little bit – shorten it just a little bit – we can say that continuous change, affliction, and nothing can stop it. Nothing can resist the continuous change and affliction. So we can summarize it: everything – all the experiences and phenomena of life – we can describe as continuous change, affliction, and no thing can resist it.

So now let's bring these back to the five khandhas. The five khandhas are continuously changing. We can see continuous change in the five khandhas. This continuous change of the five khandhas is affliction. It afflicts in the five khandhas. And there is no thing within the five khandhas or outside the five khandhas – there is nothing anywhere – that can stop this continuous change and affliction of the five khandhas.

So this is how anicca, dukkha, and anattā relate to the five khandhas. These five khandhas are continuously changing and that change is affliction. It's painful. It's at least ugly to look at and hateful and disgusting. And there's nothing that can stop it. Nothing is outside or inside or opposed to or identical to the five khandhas which can resist that change or affliction.

So these are the three characteristics of all compounded things. Whatever kind of thing arises because of causes and conditions, that thing is continuously changing, it is affliction, and there is nothing that can stop that change or affliction. This is the characteristics of all conditioned things.

Because of ignorance – because the mind does not yet know, because there has not been the enlightenment experience through which the mind sees and understands things as they really are – without this there arises the burden of life. Through this avijjā the five khandhas are attached to as an 'I' or a 'self.' These khandhas are taken up as burdens because of ignorance.

And so we have situations arising like the child who has the argument with the chair – just the way a husband and a wife can get into arguments and fights. Through attachment to the five khandhas the child gets in a fight with a chair. And this is all because of ignorance through attaching to the five khandhas.

And so – because of avijjā – the defilements have an opportunity to be the 'self.' Because of ignorance, the mind takes the defilements – takes defiled mind states – as the 'self.' And thus the burden of life arises because of this attachment.

Because the defilements are always being taken as the 'self,' then there is no opportunity for *bodhi* (enlightenment) or *sati-paññā* (mindful wisdom) to be taken

as the ‘self.’ The mind is always grasping onto defilement and it’s never taking up and using enlightenment and sati-paññā. So in this way the burden of life is constantly carried around, weighing down the mind.

And now finally we come to the question: ‘what do we need to do in order for life to achieve the highest and most exalted state of which it is capable?’ What needs to be done for life to receive the highest possible benefits? This is the question.

The answer is we have to study the ultimate truth . . . or, excuse me, the mind . . . The mind must study the ultimate truth of all things. The mind has to see – deeply penetrate into and realize – the ultimate truth of all things.

For most sentient beings – for all sentient beings – because of avijjā there is only relative truth. These are the suppositions, the assumptions, the opinions, the half-truths of foolish people.

Most of us are caught up in a world of relative truth and do not have direct experience of ultimate truth. Even in the finest universities in the world they’re still learning and studying and talking and arguing on the level of relative truth. It’s still the suppositious half-truths of fools. It is not the ultimate truth of ones who truly see things as they are.

To solve this problem we need to study ultimate truth. We need to see the ultimate truths of all things. And so we have to enroll in the Buddha’s university or, if you don’t want to go to the Buddha’s university, then go to the university of some other enlightened being where they are teaching ultimate truth.

Relative truths are just these suppositions and opinions and assumptions and hypotheses of fools. But ultimate truth is the truth prescribed and taught by an enlightened being. So enroll in the university – one of the universities – of one of these enlightened beings and start to study the ultimate truth.

So in the end it all comes down to studying the ultimate truth of the five khandhas – studying until directly experientially realizing the ultimate truth of the five khandhas. This ultimate truth is that the five khandhas are *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (unsatisfactory or afflicting), & *anattā* (not-self).

The ultimate truth of the five khandhas is that within them there is nothing whatsoever that can be attached to as ‘I,’ as ‘mine’ or as ‘myself.’ In the five khandhas – within them, either individually or as a group, or outside them – there

is nothing whatsoever that can be attached to as ‘I,’ ‘me,’ ‘mine,’ ‘myself.’ You cannot find anything in there that can be properly called a ‘self.’ This is the ultimate truth of the five *khandhas*.

To realize this truth is to toss away the burdens of life. To realize this truth is to stop attaching and to let go – to drop – all those heavy weights that we’ve been carrying around in the mind. And then, in this way, all the fires go out. The mind is light and cool. Then there is the coolness and the spiritual tranquility.

This is what human life is meant to attain. This realization is nothing magical nor sacred. It is something within the abilities of all sentient beings. This can be done by all beings if they have the desire to know. And in that way, in this way – through the realization of ultimate truth of the five *khandhas* – then life can be liberated from the burdens. And then it is cool.

This is the highest benefit of which mankind is capable. This is the highest achievement. This is the purpose of life.

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Transcribed by Arthur Brown in July-Aug. 2015

Audio file: 1986-12 (5) Origination cause for life becoming a having burden on dukkha.mp3

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