

New Life is Most Certainly Possible

by Buddhādāsa 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 volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today in this first talk, we will speak on the topic of ‘new life’ – a ‘new life’ is something that we can have certainly, a new life is something we can have most certainly, more certain than certain.

But you all must be sufficiently interested in order to look deep enough, to look carefully and closely enough, in order to see this new life that we are talking about.

The word ‘new’ as we’re using it may be a bit of a question for you. You’re used to this word ‘new’ being used in cases such as a ‘new house,’ a ‘new car,’ a ‘new wife’ or a ‘new husband’ – this is the ordinary usage of ‘new’ – but really none of those things are new, we’ve just exchanged one thing for another, but it’s still the same old meaning, the same old thing. Our meaning for ‘new’ is much more than that, is much deeper than that – we could even say it’s a completely different meaning to the word ‘new.’

In order to understand ‘new life,’ we have to understand the old life, we have to know what is this thing that we call ‘old life,’ what is it like, what are its characteristics and qualities. We have to look at ‘old life’ from all the different angles and perspectives in order to see what it is like, in order to understand ‘new life.’

This means we need to see ourselves, we need to find or discover ourselves. This might sound a bit funny – everyone would think they know where they are, who they are and so forth. But often, we really aren’t very aware of who and what

we are, we don't really understand or we're not paying attention – or sometimes we may have some ideas or images about our self, but we haven't really discovered what we are, we just have some illusions, some *māyā*, some illusions or images about ourselves, but we still haven't found out what we really are.

The essential meaning of 'old life' is that it is a life of *dukkha*. The essential characteristic of *dukkha* is that of suffering, of being tormented. This is what the old life is like. We can compare it to having a rope tied around our necks, pulling us up, and then another rope tied around our feet, pulling down and in the middle are fires scorching us all around. If you understand what kind of state or condition we mean by being pulled in two directions and burnt and scorched in the middle, then you will understand what the old life is like.

Love, desire, wants are pulling us upward towards positivism – 'positivism' is the one rope around our necks. Then aversion, ill-will, anger and hatred pulls us downward in the direction of negativism. And then the fires of fear, worry, and confusion burn us around the middle. This is the condition of 'old life.' But have you seen this yet? Have you seen for yourself whether this is true or not, whether 'old life' is as we have just described it? This is how it really is, but have you seen it yet? You may not have looked, you may not have seen it, but it's there – but it's very important that you see this for yourself and not take someone else's word for it. For yourself, directly see this condition of 'old life.'

We are under the power and influence of the world or of the things within the world. We take some things to be positive or attractive or whatever, and others to be negative or unattractive. We take things to be dualistic like this – good and bad, positive and negative. And so we get trapped in duality, and this is what is pulling us in the different directions. But really, all these things in the world, the world itself, and everything in it, are merely just nature, just parts of nature, they're neither positive nor negative, they're not caught up in duality. But we go and see them as positive and as negative and are being pulled apart by this illusion and confusion of ours. And this is how we become trapped within the power or under the power of the world because we take things to be positive and negative.

Another way to say this is that we are slaves to the *āyatana*; *āyatana* is a Pāli word which you would do well to learn. We can translate it as 'sense bases' – the *āyatana* are the sense bases. There are both internal and external *āyatana*. We are entrapped, we are enslaved to the internal *āyatana* – the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. And we are also enslaved to the external *āyatana* – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects which make contact with the internal sense bases or sense organs.

We enslave ourselves to these āyatana, we serve them. It's their function to enjoy themselves, to please themselves with pleasant sights, sounds, and sensual experiences and when we merely use our lives to serve the sense, then we become enslaved to them, just doing whatever brings pleasure to the senses. In such a condition, where is there any freedom? Where is there any true freedom? And so this is how we become trapped in the āyatana. And when we say 'we,' we mean is the defilements, the defiled states of mind that are trapped or enslaved to the senses.

The old life is nothing but this slavery to the senses and the results of this slavery are nothing but laughter and crying or tears. All that the senses give us are laughter and tears or happiness and unhappiness. But happiness and unhappiness are not tranquility, they're not peace. Happiness, joy, laughter is one kind of busyness and agitation of the mind. Unhappiness, sadness, sorrow, tears, crying is another kind of agitation, a different form of disturbance of the mind – and neither happiness nor unhappiness is peaceful or tranquil. So this is the result that comes from the old life, from this slavery to the *āyatana*, the senses.

We ourselves and all our friends throughout the world – all of humanity – worship positivism, worship the positive. We worship it so much that we can even say that we worship the positive more than we worship God. This in fact becomes our God – we worship it, we serve it, we chase after whatever is the positive. We try and get more and more of it, to keep it, to maintain it and preserve it. All of our activities are forms of worshipping and trying to get more and more of the positive. But we never can be satisfied by this – we're always trying to get more. This never leads to a state of contentment. So this worshipping of positivism is endless. And so it leads to ceaseless problems in the old life.

Hunger, thirst, want, desire, pursuing, chasing after positivism – this is what the old life is, chasing after all these things and never being satisfied. This is something completely different than the new life. If we talk about a 'new home,' a 'new car,' a 'new wife or husband,' it's still part of that old hunger and thirsting and chasing and struggling, having to work and sweat and slave, to get these things that we desire – a life that is so full of sweating and toiling that we just become familiar to it, addicted to it, we become numb to it, and it becomes habitual so that we don't even realize what it really is. But the new life we're talking about is to be completely free of all that. So it's not just a change from this kind of desire to another kind of desire, it's something completely different, completely opposite, to the old life.

'New life' is something completely different. Instead of being full of hunger and desire, 'new life' is to be content, 'new life' is when desire is ended,

when we are fulfilled and content – but don't misunderstand this from the perspective of 'old life.' In 'old life' we think that the way to be content and fulfilled is to eat and drink and get the things that we want. This is what we think satisfies us. But the contentment, the fulfillment of 'new life,' the perfection in 'new life,' is to stop hungering, to no longer have thirst and desire. So this is how it's completely different, it's the opposite, of the old life. It's a completely new perspective and way of approaching life. The old life is hot – it's full of flames, and burning. The new life is a contentment and satisfaction that is cool because all those flames have died away. So please understand 'new life' in this way. 'New life,' the new life of Dhamma is the new life in which we are content and satisfied because we no longer hunger and crave. Please don't confuse the two – it's very important that you understand 'new life' from the perspective of 'new life,' of Dhamma.

We can compare the old life to just running back and forth, running this way and running that way, trying to escape from the negative, and chasing after the positive – that's all the old life is: running back and forth with no opportunity to rest, to relax, to be peaceful, because hunger and desire keeps us running back and forth, up and down, this way and that. The new life is a life that is restful, calm and peaceful because we no longer have to run this way and that. If you understand, if you have begun to see how boring, how tiring and weary the old life is, all this running back and forth, chasing after illusions and deceptions, if you've begun to be bored by this, then you'll be able to have a genuine interest in the new life, and then you'll begin to look for it earnestly and you will be able to discover the new life if you realize how boring and tiresome the old life is.

There's a verse which expresses this very succinctly and clearly.

*“A thing of strife is household life
it's filled with toil and need,
but free and high as the open sky,
is the life the homeless leads.”*

So the meaning, the household life, the life of struggling and toiling to fulfill our needs and being caught up in all the worldly affairs of the home life, this is full of strife and toil and makes us very, very tired. On the other hand, there is the homeless life which is free like the open sky. In the homeless life, there's none of these limitations and traps of the household life. This is something that you may want to look at. And by the 'household life' and the 'homeless life' we don't mean so much whether one is living with a family or not, it means more one's attitude, how one is reacting to whichever living situation one has – whether one is trapped within it or if one is free, above and beyond it.

There's a secret I'd like to mention. And the reason it's a secret is because nobody notices it or takes any interest in it. Those of you who come from a Christian background or have been or are Christians, you'll notice that there is a teaching that God himself gave to mankind – not a teaching of Jesus Christ, but God himself told Adam and Eve not to eat the Fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is a secret that nobody pays any attention to. The meaning is that eating the Fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is to attach to 'good' and 'evil,' to become slaves to 'good' and 'evil,' or to the positive and the negative. This was the first thing God taught to mankind, but nobody takes any interest in it. But if you have been practicing Christianity according to this first commandment of God, if you have been actually been doing what God said, then you will have had a new life all along.

When Adam and Eve didn't pay any attention to God, and went and ate the Fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that was 'original sin,' which is attaching to 'good' and 'evil.' If you are really a Christian, if you are a correct Christian who has been successful at practicing and living Christianity, then you will already have a new life as we mean it here. You'll have the same kind of new life that Buddhism is talking about just by practicing this first commandment of God. But we human beings haven't bothered to listen to God – Adam and Eve didn't listen and all of the decedents of Adam and Eve haven't listened either. And so even nowadays we're not listening, we're not paying attention to what God said, and so we have to pay the penalty of this 'original sin' and so we're stuck in 'old life.' But if we can just stop this attachment, then we can realize the 'new life.' Really, the 'new life' is older than the 'old life' – it was there before there was 'old life.' 'New life' is the original, primal, primordial life. But since none of us know about it, we've overlooked it, to us it seems to be very new, when in fact the 'new life' is older than 'old.'

Now we would like to praise the new life. In the new life there are none of these ropes around our necks and feet pulling us apart. In 'new life,' we're not worshipping the positive, we're not running after the positive like ordinary people who are basically just insane, this insane worshipping of the positive. 'New life' is to be free of that, to no longer be pulled apart by these ropes and no longer be scorched in the middle by the fires of fear and delusion. This is the new life which is truly satisfying.

The new life has the kind of religion that is evolutionist – an evolutionary religion – not creationist religion. In the new life there is no creator god who makes things and controls things, for them be this way and that. No such god can make the new life. The new life is part of the evolutionary religion. The new life arises out of the law of evolution.

The creationist religions have been around for a long, long time. The idea that we can rely on some god or various holy things to solve our problems by believing in them, by praying, and worshiping these external, holy things – this is a very old and ancient idea. It took a while for mankind to develop the ability to understand the evolutionary perspective, to see that everything is just an evolutionary process. And so the evolutionary religions arose later, after the creationist ones, but it is this evolutionist religion which is appropriate for the scientific age. The evolutionary perspective fits with modern science and it is the religion which is fitting and proper for the atomic age, the nuclear age, the scientific age or whatever age we are in.

Let us stress that this thing called ‘religion’ (*sāsana*) is absolutely necessary – human beings can’t survive without it. By religion, we mean a system of practices or techniques which tie or which connect humanity with the highest thing. This is what we mean by ‘religion’ – the practices that bind mankind or humanity to the supreme thing. This is something we all have to have. The question is whether we will have the old kind of religion or the new kind – the creationist kind or the evolutionist kind. So we all need religion, but we ought to find and choose the kind of religion which is most fitting and proper for us and the kind of religion that will lead to the greatest and most perfect satisfaction.

When we say the ‘highest thing’ or the ‘supreme thing,’ in creationist religions, they say that the ‘highest thing’ is God, or Heaven, or to be united with God in Heaven – something along these lines is the supreme thing of the creationist religions. In our evolutionist religion, the supreme thing is to be above and beyond the influence of positive and negative. Our supreme thing is to transcend positivism and negativism, to be beyond and out from under their influence.

So even the highest thing can be separated into two kinds – the highest kind that is for the old life, and the supreme thing for the new life which is to be completely free of the power and influence of negativism and positivism. This is something to contemplate and to strive for.

There are a number of things we can observe about ‘old life’ and ‘new life.’ In ‘new life,’ faith or confidence follows from right understanding, from wisdom. In the ‘old life’ faith comes before understanding – begins with faith and then hopefully, right understanding will develop later. So in ‘old life’ and ‘new life’ even faith is different – one is the faith of wisdom and the other is a foolish, blind faith.

On the deepest level, we can see that, the new life realizes that in life, there is nothing but body and mind, there’s no third thing such as a ‘self,’ or a ‘soul,’

or some separate, individual personality. There's just body and mind, and with the body and mind there are these senses and through the senses all the different kinds of activities arise and then because of the misunderstanding of this sense activity and sense experience, we become deceived and we think that all this thing that is happening is happening because of some 'self' or 'soul' – but that's a misunderstanding. And so in the new life we realize that what is taking place is merely body and mind with the senses and there's nothing else, no *attā*, no 'self,' no *ātman*, no 'soul,' involved.

The belief that there is a 'self,' a 'soul,' an *ātman*, or whatever leads to another kind of thinking or feeling which is the feelings of selfishness. The belief in a 'self,' of an 'ego,' leads to selfishness and out of selfishness comes all kinds of problems and crises and disasters and suffering for ourselves and others. In the new life when we realize that we no longer have this belief in a 'self' or 'soul,' then selfishness doesn't arise and without selfishness, none of those problems arise also and then life is very peaceful and free.

The selfishness of the old life leads to the defilements of greed, anger, and confusion. What these defilements, greed, anger, confusion, are like, we don't have to tell you – you already know from your own experience how hot and burning and disturbing they are. Now what's funny is that there's not a person in the world who says that selfishness is a good thing. None of us want selfishness – none of us aim or desire to be selfish. But still, all of us are selfish – all of us are stuck in the old life. This is something worth contemplating, worth reflecting upon. In the new life all that selfishness disappears and none of the fires of greed, anger and delusion remain. We should also reflect upon this.

When there is no greed, hatred, delusion and confusion, when all these fires have gone out, have been extinguished, then there is only coolness and coolness is the meaning of Nibbāna [Pāli] or Nirvāna in Sanskrit. Nibbāna is the aim of the new life – it's when all those fires have gone out and then there remains only coolness. This is the goal of the new life.

There's one thing that is very certain which is – if you know the old life or we can say if you know yourself, if you really look and get to know yourself as you really are and then understand what the 'old life' is really like, if you see it clearly, then there is hope, there's a possibility of the new life. If we really look at the old life until we see it for what it is, we will become very bored and disinterested with it. Our love and passion for the old life will dissolve and fade away and we'll start to let go of our attachments, to stop attaching and then we will have the new life. So the new life is possible if we get to know ourselves and come to understand the old life.

What we have talked about so far is an overview or an outline to give a comprehensive perspective of what is involved so that you can understand life from all different angles, in all different respects – both ‘old life’ and ‘new life.’ And if we develop this overall perspective then we can begin to see what needs to be done in order to realize the new life.

The new life can be successful through the tool of *vipassanā* or insight meditation, mental development leading to seeing directly into the nature of things. If our meditation is correct, then it will become vipassanā and the new life will be certain. So this is the tool, the way, the path, to the new life is through meditation, through correct and wise meditation.

And so it comes down to you starting to know where you are, what point have you gotten to in life, what point have you reached or achieved in life. Do you know where you are? This is where it begins to realize where we are now, right now, where have we gotten to, what has been achieved so far. And then we can start to understand and have a hope of the new life. So start by learning where you are, finding out where you are. And on this point, we request that this lecture be finished. Thank you.

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