

Way of Obtaining New Life

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 third talk we'll be talking about the way or method of getting a new life. In the first talk we discussed how the new life is something possible for all human beings. In the second talk we discussed the benefits and advantages of a new life and in this third talk, we will talk about the technique or method of getting a new life.

This is a matter of direct seeing or direct knowing; the Thai word to be translated 'direct, clear knowing or seeing' – this is the way of getting a new life. The Pāli word, which is also becoming known in the West, is *vipassanā*, which is often translated 'insight' but we might translate it as well 'direct, spiritual experience.'

The knowledge that we human beings have comes in various ways. The first way is through listening and reading – we get knowledge or information sort of second hand, through listening to talks and reading books and things like this. The second way or level of getting inform... or knowledge is through rational thinking – taking the information we get and thinking about it in a clear way, reviewing it carefully in our minds, learning about the various cause and effect relationships through rational thinking and this leads to a kind of understanding, an intellectual or rational understanding. And then the third way of knowing something is through direct, personal experience of that thing – to see it clearly, directly, immediately, instead of knowing about something indirectly, like hearing about it or thinking about it, to know it directly, to see it directly. In Thai

this is sometimes called ‘to directly see, clearly know and penetrate, thoroughly penetrate, to be imbued in something’ or it is also called *vipassanā*. These are the three ways of knowing, the three levels of knowledge that we have.

With each of these three levels there is on one hand an activity and then the kind of knowledge coming from that activity. With *vipassanā*, the third level, the activity is we could say sparking brightness – it is to spark a light or we could use the word ‘illuminate,’ to ‘illuminate something.’ It’s comparable to the way we use a lighter to start a fire – there’s darkness and then with a small spark, a big fire starts. This is a material example. Of course the *vipassanā* we’re talking about is mental – it’s to spark or illuminate the mind, to have direct experience of something in a spiritual way, not a physical or material way but direct, spiritual experience of something. This is the activity or condition of *vipassanā*. It’s a verb used in this way.

Especially nowadays there are many different systems of *vipassanā*. There’s ‘this *vipassanā*’ and ‘that *vipassanā*’ being taught in a variety of places. Here we’re interested in the Buddha’s *vipassanā* in particular. What interests us is the system or form or style of *vipassanā* which the Buddha himself practiced and the kind of *vipassanā* through which the Lord Buddha realized perfect awakening or Buddha-hood which is sometimes called ‘enlightenment.’

Nowadays there is Tibetan *vipassanā*, Burmese *vipassanā*, Sri Lankan *vipassanā*, Zen *vipassanā*, all kinds of different *vipassanā* going under different names, labels and so forth. There are now so many of them that people are very confused and don’t know which kind of *vipassanā* to choose and they go wandering around from this one to that. This however is not an insolvable problem. What we can do is we can go back to the original *vipassanā*; the *vipassanā* that the Buddha himself used and taught. What has happened in recent times or since the Buddha’s times is that different teachers have followed their own inclinations and preferences and they’ve come up with forms or systems of *vipassanā* that suit that particular teacher or this particular teacher in various places times and cultures. And so then there have arisen these various later forms of *vipassanā* which different teachers have thought up by themselves. Here we don’t want to get into Thai *vipassanā* or Suan Mokkh *vipassanā* – we don’t want to just come up with another new system. Rather we would like to go back to the original *vipassanā* of the Buddha. This is what we study and then use that knowledge from studying in order to practice the original, the pristine *vipassanā*.

As for those newly developed forms of vipassanā, we can see that some of them require that we make sounds or noises. Other of these forms require that we use certain postures or positions of the body. Sometimes we need some external object like a Buddha image to practice some of these systems and there are various different requirements and things we need to do with these different forms of vipassanā. But with the original, pristine form of vipassanā, we don't need any of these things, everything we need to use we've already got, it's already happening naturally and we don't have to buy or make or do anything new. Instead we can use all the things we originally have within our life. And so though you may sometimes wonder why we don't have these special extras, you can begin to appreciate the simplicity of the pristine form of vipassanā, the vipassanā of the Buddha. This is what we'll be looking into and studying in today's talk.

So what we're saying here isn't intended to get into arguments or debates over what kind of vipassanā is better. This isn't our purpose – because in fact there's a very simple way that we can come to agreement among all the different systems of vipassanā, whether original or later versions. The point of mutual understanding is that no matter what kind of vipassanā it is, if it leads to direct realization of the non-self-hood of the five *khandhas* or of life, then it's real vipassanā. No matter what kind of vipassanā, if it leads to us seeing that the five *khandhas*, that is the five groups or basic functions of life – the physical functions, the function of feeling, of discrimination, of thought conception and of sense consciousness – these five basic physical and mental functions are called the *khandhas* or we can just summarize it as 'body and mind' or even more simply, 'life,' – to have the direct, spiritual realization that in the five *khandhas*, in life, there is nothing that is a 'self' or 'soul,' there is nothing worth clinging to as 'I' or 'mine.' Any vipassanā that leads to this realization is genuine vipassanā, whether it's in a Mahāyāna package or a Theravāda package or some strange and wonderful Tibetan package. That doesn't matter. All the important Mahāyāna suttas end with the non-self-hood of the five groups or functions, the five *khandhas*, the five aggregates. And so really we're not talking about Mahāyāna or Theravāda – these are unimportant distinctions. What we're talking about is pristine or original Buddhism that gets to the realization that in life, there is nothing that we can call a 'self' or 'soul.' Life is *anattā*. This is the meeting point of all systems of vipassanā.

Some of the superficial differences that appear before between the different systems are not really important. For example, it's common to develop concentration (*samādhi*) first and then use that concentration in the practice of

insight or *vipassanā*. This is the general approach. But in Zen, they don't do that – they mix or they combine concentration and insight and call it 'Zen' all at once and the result explodes outward in sudden enlightenment. This can work and achieve the same realization and benefit as well. The difference is more in externals. Or then there's some of the old traditional ways that we still find around Thailand where we have to break it up into a number of stages – first there is morality, the taking of moral precepts, and then developing concentration, and then practicing insight. But sometimes this all turns into a big ceremony or ritual so that the morality becomes a ceremony of taking precepts and we have to do some chants before we can even do concentration and then developing concentration becomes a bit of a ceremony and then sometimes the insight gets lost in all the ceremony. And so we have to be careful about all these external distinctions and so what we would like to advise here is a way of practice that combines morality, concentration, and insight all in one practice and this is the *vipassanā* of the Buddha which the Buddha himself taught.

Something we'd like to go into a little bit more detail on is about some of the more popular forms of *vipassanā*. The kinds of *vipassanā* that include a lot of ceremonies and rituals and bowing and chants and this, tend to be very popular, not just in Thailand but all around the world including the West. These forms of *vipassanā* where we begin by offering ourselves to the teacher, to the *vipassanā* teacher, giving ourselves up to the *guru*, these kinds of forms are quite popular. And then we do various chants or even prayers in order for our morality and then even to begin to develop concentration often begins with a chant or sometimes a prayer asking for concentration. We don't know who we're asking but somebody is being asked 'please give me concentration, please give me rapture, please give me bliss' and the various things. And then asking and praying and chanting for insight, for realization, for attainment. These forms are very popular. It seems that people like or enjoy or are attracted by the magical overtones or the sacredness, the holiness, of some of these forms. That has meaning for them. This is okay – we're not criticizing these things even if sometimes the ceremonies tend to get in the way of the *vipassanā*. It doesn't matter so much as long as it ends up in realization or insight into *anattā*, into non-self, non-self-hood or selflessness. Even if it's a little bit of a round about way, if it comes to this realization of *anattā* then it's good enough, then it gets to where it needs to go. So these different forms, some of them have various surface characteristics that attract people and so we find certain forms that are quite popular – but always remember what

matters is not the surface thing, the attractive or interesting qualities – it's the realization of *anattā*, of not-self that is the essence of vipassanā.

Now we'd like to discuss the kind of vipassanā that we need here, the kind of vipassanā of the Buddha. The first thing to do in this vipassanā is to look at our old life, look at the 'old life,' to see it for what it really is, to see how boring and wearisome the old way of life really is. Remember the way we described it in the first talk – the old life is like a rope around the neck pulling in one direction and another one around the feet pulling in another direction and then fires scorching us around the middle. This is a simile for the old life and this kind of vipassanā begins by examining the old life until seeing how boring, how tiresome, how wearisome it is.

It's important that you understand what we mean when we say 'the old life'. When we say 'the old life' what we mean is the life of *upādāna* (attachment). The Pāli word for this is *upādāna* and it's translated into English in a variety of ways – 'to attach to,' 'to cling to,' 'to grasp at,' are ways of trying to express the *upādāna* of the old life, the clutching and clinging and grasping at things. This is to attach to things as positive and negative, as good and bad, this is the old life, the life of attachment – this is what we have to see first of all.

Without understanding attachment, *upādāna*, no way one could understand the 'old life.' So to help you, we'd like to point out there are two ways of taking hold of something, of picking something up. One way is the way of attachment – to take something and to cling to it, to clutch at it. This is *upādāna*. But there's another way to pick something up and to take something – to take an idea or a practice or whatever – and that is called *samādāna*. *Upādāna* and *samādāna* are two different ways of taking or holding something. *Samādāna* is to take something with mindfulness and wisdom, with awareness and understanding, with wisdom – to pick something up and hold it without clinging to it, without attaching to it. The distinction is very important and very clear – the difference between clinging and just holding. One way is that of the old life. *Samādāna* is to hold things, use them with mindfulness and wisdom – this is learned through vipassanā because through vipassanā we develop the knowledge and understanding of how things are and what they are and then we can take them, we can use them with mindfulness and wisdom rather than attachment. If you understand these two ways of taking something, of holding something, the difference between attaching and just holding and using, this will help you to understand the difference between the old life and new life.

There's a metaphor which shows the difference between upādāna and samādāna very clearly. If we pick something up with upādāna then it will bite us. If we pick something up with samādāna then it's safe, it doesn't bite. So we can see the difference in these two ways of holding things, of taking them – the one in which we get bit, clawed, chewed on and the way in which we don't get bitten or chewed upon. The first way is that of upādāna, to pick something up in a way that it bites us, that we are punished by whatever it is that we are attaching to. We are punished by *dukkha* itself. This is what the old life is full of – the old life is full of this holding on to things in a way that they bite us, that we are punished with *dukkha*. If we can understand the distinction between holding something in a way that we are bitten by it and holding something in a way that we are not bitten then we will be able to understand what the old life is like. Then we'll start to lose our contentment with it, we'll stop being satisfied with living life in that way and we'll start to genuinely be interested in living a new life.

The only way to see, to clearly see this difference is through vipassanā – to understand what it is like to be bitten by things all the time. And then we, through vipassanā, we truly see the old life for what it is. This first stage of vipassanā then is to see the *dukkha*, the suffering, the pain of the old life where we're getting bitten by things all the time. This is the necessary first step of vipassanā.

When there is this seeing the old life as being full of *dukkha*, then there is the loosening of attachment to that life; there's the loosening or the weakening, the lessening, the dissipating and dissolving of attachment. In Pāli this is called *virāga*. Sometimes *virāga* is used as a synonym for *nippan* but we can say at least it's the starting point, the beginning point for *nippan*, the loosening, the dissolving of attachment.

In Thai there are some words that express *virāga* very easily – they can roughly be translated as 'loosening up' or 'weakening' or 'fading' and a simile that expresses this very well is a cloth that has been dyed with a variety of colors, very strong, bright, brilliant colors. When that cloth is left in the sun, those colors begin to fade, they dissolve, they break up and become lighter and lighter, more and more faint. This fading away of these colors is one way of expressing 'virāga,' the fading away of attachment.

So you can figure it out for yourself that if something dissolves and fades away and fades away and fades away, eventually it's gone, it's finished, it's ended – there's nothing left. And so this is what happens – attachment fades and fades and fades and then there's no more attachment, attachment is ended. So this is the

third stage of vipassanā. We can see that there are at least these three stages. The first stage is seeing things as they really are, seeing them for what they are, seeing them truly, and then attachment fades away – it weakens, it dissolves, it breaks up and fades away. And then the third stage is attachment ends and there is no more attachment. These are three necessary stages of vipassanā.

Then there's a bonus – this bonus or extra special step may not be absolutely important but it's considered vipassanā as well. Once attachment has ended then the bonus is to realize that the mind is liberated, the mind is released, has transcended all attachment, is completely free and at peace – this is the bonus step. So there are these four stages to vipassanā. First, seeing things truly. Then, the dissolving and fading away of attachment. Third, the end of attachment. And fourth, this special bonus of realizing that the mind is completely liberated from all attachment.

Some of you may have remembered that we talked about morality – that the Buddha's vipassanā includes morality – and so maybe you're wondering 'well, where's the morality in this?' The answer is in having the discipline, having the self-control to make oneself do this practice, to do what is necessary for these four stages of insight to occur. That is moral training or moral practice, being able to apply oneself, to force oneself, to do what is necessary. This morality is automatically including in vipassanā.

And then where is the concentration in all this? When we are determined to see things as they really are, when our mind is really focused and steadfast and determined to realize the truths of vipassanā, then concentration, sufficient concentration, will arise. This happens automatically or naturally, that when the mind is really determined to do something, enough, adequate concentration will arise. For example, if we want to throw a rock or a stone at a target – to do that, the mind will develop sufficient concentration to successfully do it. If we're really determined to do that, the concentration will arise. This is a very natural thing that when there is enough determination, the concentration will arise. The way this works with vipassanā is when the mind is really set on developing insight, on seeing clearly, then that concentration will arise. Concentration and insight go together like this. The Buddha said "There cannot be concentration, unless there is wisdom [wisdom and insight are synonyms] and there cannot be wisdom without concentration." If one has wisdom, there will be concentration. And when one has concentration, there will be wisdom. They arise together, they're natural, they support each other, we can't really separate the two. And so even in

something like shooting aiming and shooting a gun, that requires concentration and the necessary concentration will arise if we're genuinely determined to do it correctly. So in this vipassanā concentration – enough, sufficient concentration, nothing fancy but enough to get the job done – will arise naturally.

And then where is faith in all this? When there is vipassanā, faith will arise automatically as well. In an evolutionist religion like this, faith follows from insight and wisdom. In creationist religion, faith comes before wisdom. There is some belief and faith in something outside oneself, and then wisdom will follow after that faith and belief. But in the evolutionist religions like Buddhism, faith comes after insight. When we see something clearly, to the degree we see it clearly, we have faith in that truth and as vipassanā develops, then faith develops after that development of insight or we can see there is some insights and then faith follows from that insight. That faith supports the further development of insight and then faith grows as well and as faith is growing it continues to support the development of wisdom. But in vipassanā, in Buddhism, faith is following from wisdom, it doesn't come before. And so, you can see that in vipassanā, there is moral training, and there is concentration and there is faith automatic, all within the one thing of vipassanā.

Then we can look and see if any of these is weak or insufficient. If there's not enough morality or not enough concentration, not enough faith, then we can work or train, we can study train or practice specifically on that area. For example, if we see that morality is weak, then we can specifically work on developing morality, but to do so, we have to use insight and wisdom anyway so that it is wise morality. Or if concentration is inadequate then we can work at strengthening concentration, but to do so we do this with insight as well. And then if faith is lacking, we can study, we can consider and do whatever is needed to develop stronger faith, but still this is done through vipassanā. So no matter what we can't avoid vipassanā – to have morality, concentration, faith or whatever, we need to be practicing and developing insight or wisdom.

Finally, we can't avoid reminding or insisting that the way of practicing this complete and correct vipassanā is through *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness of breathing, the 16-step or 4-tetrad approach to *ānāpānasati* practice as taught by the Buddha. Through this practice a complete and correct vipassanā will develop and be practiced and there will be nothing lacking or missing – it will be perfect vipassanā. So please be very interested in studying further the practice of *ānāpānasati*. Today we've explained the essence of *ānāpānasati* which is

vipassanā – *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness of breathing, is *vipassanā*. There are more details to it which we recommend you to look into, study and then practice further. And so today, we'll leave you with this reminder that to practice *vipassanā* correctly, successfully, for the highest benefit, there is no better way than by practicing the 16 steps of *ānāpānasati* as taught by the Buddha. This is the original or pristine *vipassanā* and the rain is forcing us to end the meeting at this point so we'll have to stop a little early so we all don't get wet and catch cold.

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