

What does New Life have to Do with Ānāpānasati?

by Buddhadāsa 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. 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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we'll speak on the topic 'the new life and *ānāpānasati* meditation.' How are they inter-related? What do they have to do with each other?

Please don't go and get all excited about the words 'new life' and think that it's something special or extraordinary. When we talk about the new life, we just mean that it's something different than this current life which is full of problems. When we talk about new life, we mean something very very ordinary. A life that is free of all these troubles and difficulties.

This common life that we're living is full of all kinds of heavy problems in many different ways. For example, the physical aspect of life, it's full of some very heavy problems namely birth, getting old, getting sick, and death. These can be very troublesome difficulties for us. And then the fact that all the things in this world never quite go the way we want them and often end up completely opposite to how we would like them to be. This is troublesome for us. And then in society, having to live in a society that is full of so many difficulties, so many things that we could compare to having to live in the midst of a loony bin with a bunch of crazy, insane people. All kinds of happiness and sadness coming to disturb the mind constantly. This is what life in this world is like, full of all kinds of problem.

The first of these problems has a lot to do with the words we use. For example the word 'happiness.' This word 'happiness' can mean all kinds of things to all kinds of people and so we often don't know what it means. In terms

of the old life, it has one kind of meaning. In terms of new life, happiness means something very much different but we don't know this. We don't understand this. This word 'happiness' is very ambiguous and so this is the first thing for us to go into today. We need to understand the problem of happiness.

As for the happiness in the old way of life, you're all quite familiar with this. The things that people are calling 'happiness,' we know what these things are but the happiness of new life is something much different. The happiness of new life is above, is beyond that common happiness of the old life. This happiness of the new life is so different that it's above both happiness and suffering. It has nothing to do with this common worldly kind of happiness and suffering. This we need to understand, this tremendous difference between the happiness of old life and happiness of new life.

The common kind of happiness is opposed to suffering. In the old way, suffering & happiness are opposite but that kind of happiness isn't true happiness. In the new life, happiness is when we are completely free of, when we have nothing to do with that common kind of suffering & happiness. This is the real meaning of happiness. The happiness that is above, beyond suffering & the opposite of suffering, that common happiness, false happiness. If we can understand this, we will understand Buddhism. So we ask you to try to understand the happiness or the thing which is beyond suffering & happiness.

Even in the language of Buddhism, it can be difficult to talk about these things. We talk about the ordinary happiness and then we talk about, we say there is something 'beyond' that and so we talk about being 'above' happiness but then what are we going to call that? What do we call that? We have to go and call it 'happiness' too but it's a much different thing but we don't have another word to talk about it so we talk about 'the ordinary happiness' which is suffering and then the 'happiness, the utmost, the supreme, the fullest, most perfect happiness' which is above happiness. This is what we have to understand.

See the problem is that even if we emphasize the highest happiness, the supreme happiness, the person listening still understands that and use that in terms of the common happiness. They give this supreme happiness that same kind of quality as common happiness and so they don't understand what we're talking about when we say the supreme happiness that is above, beyond happiness. This is our problem that we have to work to try and solve.

A simple and clear way to discriminate between these two meanings or levels of happiness – that the first kind of happiness is a happiness which is a

basis for attachment, for clinging for all kinds of egoistic thinking whereas the happiness that is above happiness is no basis, has nothing to do with attachment and clinging in any of the egoistic thinking. So to understand this distinction will help us to discover and find the true happiness which is free of attachment, beyond the common happiness.

Something for us to study that requires cheerful observation is that *dukkha* ('suffering' in the true meaning of this word) always comes from attachment. As soon as there is any feeling of 'I' and 'mine' towards something, this will lead to *dukkha*. So if there is happiness and we attach, we cling to that happiness, that happiness becomes suffering. If we attach to goodness, that goodness becomes *dukkha*. Even if we attach to the state of being free of *dukkha* then that turns into *dukkha*. Whatever it is, if attachment arises towards the thing or the state then it becomes *dukkha*. There is no exception to this law.

So let's understand this word 'attachment' properly. Attachment means to pick something up, hang on to it and carry it around. You should be able to understand this easily, to carry something around with us, it's to attach to it. If we pick up a heavy rock, we pick up a rock and carry it around, it's heavy. If we pick up big diamonds and jewels and carry them around, they're just this heavy. People may think that there is a tremendous difference between rocks and diamonds but if we go and carry them around, if we attach to them, they are equally heavy. This is what attachment is like. We should understand these phenomena and be very very careful not to go locking things around, making our lives heavy.

In new life or for new life, we desire a life that is without *dukkha*, without misery. So therefore we must discriminate between common happiness that is a basis of attachment and the supreme happiness which is no basis for attachment; then understanding this, we can live our lives without any attachment and then there is that new life, free of *dukkha*, free of suffering which has this supreme happiness. The happiness that has nothing to do with attachment. The life that is free of heaviness. The life that has the kind of happiness which we do not turn into a burden of life. If we cling to the happiness, it becomes the burden. A burden for our lives. The new life that we are interested in is free of all these burdens and suffering.

Now let's look at the thing 'life' for a moment. In life, if we go and attach to anything that life becomes a burden for itself, that life becomes heavy because of the attachment. If in life, we go and attach to anything whether to diamonds or to rocks that life becomes a burden. If in life, we attach to being good, having

a good life or attach to being bad, having a bad life then this becomes very heavy. The rock, the diamond, the good and the bad are equally heavy if we insist on carrying them around with us. The new life – we don't do that. We don't cling to these things, we don't make these things into burden to lock around with us. In the new life, we're free of that. This is the thing we're interested in.

When we say that if in life we don't attach to it as '*me*' or '*my life*,' as '*I am this life*' or '*this is my life*,' we say that if we don't attach in this way, there is no burden, there is no dukkha. But then the problem or the question always comes up. How can we do that? How is that possible? Many people when they hear that by not taking life to be '*I*' or '*mine*,' there will be no burden, they'd say we can't do that, that's too much for us. We have to ask that instead of jumping to conclusion, thinking foolishly, or impetuously. We ask that instead. We listen carefully and try to understand this and then patiently learn how to apply this understanding in our lives in order to see that it is possible to see for ourselves how it is possible. Just by living life without this clinging to things as '*I*,' as '*mine*,' to clinging to life itself as '*I*' or '*mine*,' just doing this will free life of all dukkha but hardly anyone is willing to believe this.

The problem is that as soon as we attach to life, it becomes dukkha. Please remember this fact. Please carefully note this fact that the moment attachment arises, there will be dukkha. Please be very careful not to forget this. If we go and attach to something good then it will bite us. If we attach to the bad as '*I*' or '*mine*,' it will bite us. Whether we attach to goodness or badness, good things or bad things, they will all turn around and bite us, bite us with suffering and turn life into a burden, make life heavy and difficult to live to the point where we might not even want to live. Please remember this because all we have to do is not attach and then nothing can bite us, nothing becomes heavy. There's no burden in life. We can live it in the way that is completely free, the freest kind of life. A life that is completely void of all suffering. This is the highest kind of life. This is the most peaceful life. This is a kind of life that is above everything.

If you are a good Christian, sincere genuine Christian then you will be free of all dukkha. The thing is nowadays, we can't find any good and sincere Christians.

In the very beginning of the Bible, in just a few words, God gave the commandment, "Do not attach to good and evil." To phrase it in a little longer sentence, the word God said, "Do not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." This means exactly, 'don't get trapped within the meaning or

values of good & evil.' Don't attach to them. Don't turn good & evil into a burden. This is the commandment of God at the very beginning of the Bible. If one is a true, genuine, sincere Christian then one will understand this and follow it. A real Christian attaches to neither to good nor to evil. But although we're looking for one, we're still unable to find such a true and genuine Christian.

Please observe that God spoke only one single time or gave only this one single direct commandment. This is the only time God spoke directly to man or to humanity and gave this one single commandment but nobody found this. Nobody listened. All the Christians who supposedly love God don't even follow this very first commandment. We'd like to find a Christian who is a true one because if we could, the true and genuine Christian who follows this commandment, right there we will also meet new life.

If you think that God is the utmost goodness or the highest goodness then this understanding directly contradicts the commandment to not attach to good & evil. To think that, to understand that God, to believe that God is the utmost goodness goes against the will of God. The will of God is that we do not attach to goodness & evil. But many people still cling to the idea that God is the utmost goodness. For this reason, it is impossible to find a true Christian. If we could find one, we would find a new life, free of all dukkha.

If you're a true, sincere Christian, a really correct and true Christian then you won't attach to good & evil. And then at the very same time, you'll also be a true and correct Buddhist. As soon as we no longer attach to anything as 'I' and 'mine,' we become a genuine Buddhist. By not attaching to anything as good & evil, we also become a true Muslim, a real Hindu. By not attaching to good & evil, by not attaching to anything, we automatically become a member of all the religions at the same time. Not in the superficial way but right there at the heart of religion. To attach to anything is dukkha. To not attach, to be free of seeing things as 'I' and 'mine' is to immediately become a leading member of all the religions simultaneously.

Therefore to not attach to anything, not to God, not even to life, the life itself, this is new life. Life free of attachment.

Let us stress once again, the life in which there is no attachment and clinging to anything that is new life.

So then the question arises, do you want this or not?

Do want this or not? Are you interested or what?

If you want this then we'll continue speaking. We'll talk about *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing) because it is something that can help us to discover new life.

The essence of *ānāpānasati* is taking up everything and looking at it until we fully realize that there's not anything worth attaching to. There's not one single thing anywhere in the universe, in nature, in life that we should attach to as 'I' or 'mine.' And then we don't attach to anything anymore. This is the essence, the heart of mindfulness with breathing.

The hippies back in 60's, some of them hung around until the 70's and even the 80's, in their wandering and searching for a new life, what did they find?

'Hippy' has the meaning of being crazy about good, being drunken good, being indulging, being lost in good.

So there's no chance, there's no possibility of discovering new life.

In *ānāpānasati*, we take everything but then to speak we can summarize them into four groups. These four groups, the four basic areas of our *ānāpānasati* practice include everything in the universe and so we study them in order to see that none of them are worth getting drunk about or going crazy about and there's nothing worth attaching to.

First of all, we take up the first group or area that deals with life itself whether we study the body or the breathing that sustain the body, the breathing that is the source of life. We study this. We get to know what their basic nature is. We practice according to the system of *ānāpānasati* until we realize that this body and this breathe, that this life, that all these material, physical, corporeal things are impermanent and uncertain, are unsatisfied and are not-self. And then seeing this, we know that there's nothing to attach to. This is the first area that we practice with.

The second group deals with the very important matter of the *vedanā*. The *vedanā*, this is a Pāli word. We're not going to translate it into English because nobody really knows what the proper translation is and the word 'feeling' often confuses people. We'll talk about the *vedanā*, this is an absolutely crucial thing to study because the *vedanā* control us. When *vedanā* arise, they force ideas and thoughts and actions according to the influence of this *vedanā*. Whatever kind of *vedanā* will force the mind to think and act in a certain way. If it's a pleasant *vedanā*, the mind thinks of getting, of having, of keeping. If it's an unpleasant *vedanā*, the mind thinks of destroying, of getting rid of. And if it's an uncertain, indescribable *vedanā*, the mind runs around in circle, thinking about what this

is, trying to figure it out and getting more and more confused. This is the power of the *vedanā*. They have great mastery over us and our lives. If the *vedanā* condition craving, blind want, foolish desire then there arises attachment and we suffer. If the *vedanā* condition of this attachment and life becomes a burden, this is the great power of the *vedanā* that they condition craving. So we study the *vedanā*, in *ānāpānasati* we get to know them until we see their nature that they're impermanent and uncertain, that they're unsatisfactory and that they're not-self. When we see this then we know that there's nothing worth attaching to and so we do not allow the *vedanā* to condition craving. And there's no attachment and the *vedanā* do not force us into slavery. They don't force us into making life a burden. This is why in *ānāpānasati*, we work with the *vedanā*. This is a very very important aspect of life.

The *vedanā* when they arise are the cause of the feeling, of the sense or the belief in positiveness & negativeness. This positiveness & negativeness arises because of the *vedanā*. Pleasant *vedanā* lead to positiveness. Unpleasantness *vedanā* lead to negativeness. And then further, they are all the other pairs like optimism & pessimism, liking & disliking. All these things are rooted, are conditioned here and by the *vedanā*. And so finally, eventually, *vedanā* always leads to attachment. In order to end attachment, we have to be free of the *vedanā*.

Positiveness & negativeness lead to attachment. Positiveness leads to liking things, wanting things, attaching to things in a good way and this becomes a burden. Negativeness leads to disliking, hating, wanting to destroy things, to attachment in a bad way. Both this positiveness & negativeness lead to attachment and both positiveness & negativeness lead to the *vedanā*. In order to destroy this positiveness & negativeness which cause us attachment, we must get out from under the power of the *vedanā*. We must learn how to not allow them to force us into positiveness & negativeness.

The *sukha-vedanā* (the 'happy' *vedanā*) enslave us. This is very easy to understand how these pleasant feelings enslave us. But the 'painful' *vedanā* (the *dukkha-vedanā*) enslave us equally just as much. This is difficult to understand. When there is unpleasant *vedanā*, this unhappy *vedanā*, then we're trapped by the thing. We have to deal with it. We have to correct that there're some problems we have to cope with and come to terms with it and so it ties us up, it binds us, it can even make us cry. This is how the unpleasant feelings enslave us as well. Pleasant *vedanā* & unpleasant *vedanā* enslave us equally. Positive feelings & negative feelings trap us. They turn us into slaves.

Not being enslaved by any of the *vedanā*, that is new life.

So this is how the second stage of *ānāpānasati* helps us to the new life.

The third stage has to do with the *citta* (the mind, the heart). In stage three we study and get to know the true nature of the mind so that we're not foolish or stupid enough to cling to it as 'I' or 'mine.' We study the *citta*, we watch it how it works until we know its nature and then we see that this *citta*, this mind or heart is merely a natural element that is conditioned in a natural way and that merely by foolish think, by ignorance, we take it to be 'I' or 'mine.' If we study the *citta* until we realize this knowledge then we'll have new life just the same. When we know that the mind is not to be clung to as 'I' or 'mine' then this is what the third stage of *ānāpānasati* is about and how it helps us to the new life.

In Buddhism, we do not hold or believe that there is a permanent 'self' or a permanent 'soul.' Rather, we observe that this *citta*, this mind is merely a natural element which changes and transforms according to the various conditions and situations that meet it. There's no permanent 'self' or 'soul' involve in that. It's merely a natural arising process. When we see this then we see there's no need to attach to this *citta* as 'I' or 'mine' and then no problems are made or created out this mind.

When we understand this *citta* properly then we are able or the mind is able to do everything and anything correctly. Whatever we need to do, the mind can do perfectly well. We're able to control the mind though practicing this third stage of *ānāpānasati*, we can make it joyful, delighted, cheerful, refreshed if we wished or we can make it stop and be still and quiet if we need to. And most important, we learn how to make it let go of attachments, to release all attachments. When we train in this way, then we can say that we have power or influence over the mind and having this power, this control of the mind, this is the new life.

Now we come to the fourth stage or fourth area of our *ānāpānasati* practice which has to do with all things, has to do with everything. The word in Pāli is 'Dhamma.' Dhamma means 'thing' or in this case 'all things,' everything without exception. In the fourth area we come to know all things as they really are. In Pāli, we have the word *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*. *Saṅkhata* means a conditioned thing, a compounded thing and *asaṅkhata* is the unconditioned, the uncompounded, the non-concocted. When we say knowing all things, this means to know both *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata* or if you put in into your own language, into English we can use the word 'phenomena.' Phenomena means conditioned things. Things which are created and which have an end, which

arise and cease. These conditioned concocted things are called, in singular, ‘phenomenon’ and, plural, ‘phenomena.’ And there’s another thing which is the opposite of these concocted phenomena and that we call ‘the noumenon’ I don’t know if you have heard this word or how you understand it. But my understanding of this word ‘noumenon’ is that it is the unconditioned thing that which has no beginning, no end, which is not concocted. To understand all things means to understand phenomena and the noumenon. The noumenon can only be singular. There’s only one. To understand these is the fourth aspect of practicing ānāpānasati.

When we say ‘all things,’ we really mean it. There’s no exception to this ‘all things’ so in ānāpānasati, we know that all things are neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine.’ There’s nothing about them that we can take to be our self or our soul, to be ‘my’ or ‘mine.’ When we understand all things both conditioned things and the unconditioned things in this way then there’s nothing that we can attach to. When we understand everything correctly, attachment is impossible. When attachment is impossible then there’s no attachment, there’s no clinging to things and *this* is the new life. When we see that everything is not worth attaching to then there’s no attachment to anything in nature, in the universe. We see that things are merely natural elements or just naturally-arising elements and there’re neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine,’ ‘you’ nor ‘yours’ and then we’re free. Free of all attachment and this is new life through the power of ānāpānasati.

Let’s look at all four of these together now, we see that life, the body, the breathing is not-self, is not-soul, is not ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ And then the feelings, these are not-self, they’re not-soul. We can’t take them to be ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ And then the *citta*, the mind-heart, nowhere in there can we find a self or soul. It’s not-self. It’s not-soul. There’s no self or soul about it. And then all things, everything, it’s seen to be not-self (*anattā*), not-soul, *anattā*. There’s nothing to be taken as ‘mine’ or ‘I’ or ‘me’ or ‘myself.’ We look and we don’t see, we can’t find a true self anywhere. Seeing this, there’s nothing to attach to. There’s no attachment and we are free. This complete freedom is the new life, the real genuine new life.

If we know voidness, we know that things are void of self and of soul. This is called ‘*suññatā*.’ This is what Buddhism is about. Realizing the voidness of things. Buddhism is a religion that teaches ‘not-self’ or ‘not-soul.’ In Pāli, this single word *anattā* means not-self, no soul. ‘Self’ and ‘soul’ in English might have different meanings but the Pāli word ‘*attā*’ includes both their meanings. So Buddhism teaches not-self, no soul. In realizing this, that there is no self or soul anywhere and that realizing that what there is, what we have right here, this

life is not-self, it's not-soul. There's no self or soul to be found and what we do have is not-self or not-soul. To see this is to see *anattā*. To see *anattā* means there's nothing to attach to. We're incapable of attaching and then we are free. The mind, the heart is perfectly free and that is the new life.

A good Christian should interpret the symbol of the cross as the cutting of the 'I.' The upright of the cross is the 'I' which stands for the *attā*, the 'Igo.' And then the other, the cross piece cuts the 'I.' destroys the 'I,' the *attā*. A good Christian ought to interpret the cross in this very profound way.

In seeing *anattā* fully, we see as well *suññatā*. *Suññatā* means 'voidness.' Voidness of self and soul. To see that there's no self, no soul, no *attā*, no 'Igo,' this is to see *suññatā*. In seeing *suññatā* profoundly, we see *tathatā*. We see that things are just like they are. They just go along in their own way. Conditioned things just go along in the way of conditioned things and the unconditioned thing goes along its own way. Things just are thus, are such. Seeing this suchness, this thusness of all things is seeing *tathatā*. Seeing *anattā*, *suññatā*, *tathatā* makes it impossible to attach to anything and the mind is free.

Seeing this *tathatā*, thusness of things, then we'll come to the most important realization of all. Seeing thusness leads to the realization of *atammayatā*. *Atammayatā* is to see that that's enough, this is enough, meaning that's enough of attachment. Don't want to have anything more to do with attachment. We've had enough. This is called *atammayatā*. Seeing the nature of thing to the degree that in seeing the nature of attachment fully, we've had enough. We don't want to have anything more to do with it. Seeing this is called *atammayatā* and then the mind can't help but be free.

Atammayatā means no more dependence. No more dependence on anything ever again. This word *atammayatā* – when we looked in the big, fat, Pāli-English dictionary of the official Pāli Text Society in London, we looked in this dictionary of Mr. Rhys Davids and couldn't find this word, *atammayatā*; but it's written in the Pāli scriptures and that dictionary's supposed to have every word within the scriptures. It seems that the people who put the dictionary together didn't understand this word. They didn't know how to explain it and so they were afraid to put in their dictionary a word and then write definition 'unknown' and so they left it out. And so for many years, nobody's paid any attention to this word because the scholars haven't been able to explain it. And then no one has been able to make use of this word. Well, now we'll make use of it. *Atammayatā*. Enough. Had enough. Not going to be dependent on attachment ever again. And be free.

Please memorize this word, *atammayatā*. Some of you have been asking about Mahāyāna Buddhism. Well, if you'd like your own special mantra, please use this one, 'atammayatā, atammayatā.' With this mantra, this most wonderful mantra in the world, you can drive away Satan. You can drive away Mara. You can drive away any devil or demon. If you want a prayer or whatever, a mantra then we offer you atammayatā, it will take care of all your problems. Atammayata, atammayatā. No more dependence. Enough.

Practicing *ānāpānasati* fully to its end will lead to the realization of *atammayatā* and then you'll have this most wonderful mantra to use whenever you need it. I think time's up and we'll finish today's talk now.

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