

The Four Noble Truths, Part 2 of 7

MEANING OF ARIYA-SACCA

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 7 January 1989

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. All Ajahn's teachings are now available on:

www.suanmokkh.org,

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

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

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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok

email to: suanmokkh_bangkok@bia.or.th.

Last time we spoke about some introductory matters regarding the Noble Truths. This time we'll speak about the Noble Truths, the *ariya-sacca*, directly. Something of great importance that we must examine from the start are the words '*ariya-sacca*' themselves. Most of you have only heard the words 'Noble Truths,' and for us there's still quite a bit of doubt whether or not the words 'Noble Truths' are a sufficient and proper translation of '*ariya-sacca*.' So we should first look carefully at these words.

The word 'noble' can mean something like excellent, exalted, honorable, respectable. However, the word '*ariya*' has the meaning 'to be without enemies.' '*Ariya*' means without enemies. Do these two words correspond sufficiently? So when we speak of the *ariya-sacca*, we should understand these in the sense of 'being without enemies.' Here, 'enemies' is meant in the broadest sense – being free of things which aren't right for us, things which are undesirable. So we'll be looking at the Noble Truths in this way.

The '*ariya-sacca*' include within them *paṭiccasamuppāda*, both the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that describes the arising of suffering as well as the *paṭiccasamuppāda* or *Paṭiccanirodha* which is the ceasing of that suffering. Both of these are included within the *ariya-sacca*. The first two Noble Truths correspond to the Dependent Origination of Suffering, and the second two Noble Truths correspond to the Dependent Cessation of Suffering. The *ariya-sacca* include both kinds of Dependent Origination – the Dependent Origination of Suffering, or *dukkha*, and the Dependent Cessation of that *dukkha*. Both of these, of course, have to do with *dukkha*. It's purely a matter of *dukkha* and the ending of *dukkha*. This is what the real meaning of 'enemies' is. The real 'enemy' is suffering, is *dukkha*. So we should fully understand what is meant by '*dukkha*' from the beginning.

The Pāli word '*dukkha*' may be unfamiliar for most of you and even those who have heard it before may not understand all of its connotations and meanings. In Pāli, this word '*dukkha*' means much more than suffering. One level of its meaning is simply pain and suffering, but the second meaning is ugliness, to be completely ugly, thoroughly ugly. The third meaning is to be absolutely empty of any substance. So there are these three meanings included within the word '*dukkha*.' All three of these meanings correspond exactly with the word 'enemy.' These are three aspects of being our enemies. As for pain and suffering, that is quite apparent, quite obvious, how that is a kind of enemy. But ugliness may not be so apparent, how ugliness is our enemy. But we can say that in everything, at least every conditioned thing, every concocted thing, has a quality of ugliness to it without any exception. Even the things we want so badly – such as wealth, such as happiness, such as beauty – even these things have a quality of ugliness to them because there is so much trouble, so much difficulty and hassle involved in getting these things and maintaining these things, that within them there's an inherent ugliness. So this is how the second meaning or aspect of '*dukkha*' is an 'enemy.' It brings us so much trouble. In all the things that we find lovely and attractive, these things have tremendous power over us and they have a tremendous pull. Things like wealth, power, fame, sex, beauty – they're all these things that we want so badly and so we spend so much time and effort pursuing these things. There is this inherent ugliness in them that they bring us so much trouble, they make us so tired, they take up so much of our time. And in these things, although they seem so desirable, so attractive, so wonderful, they're constantly changing, they're absolutely unstable. They deceive us, they trick us. They're never what they pretend to be. So there is this quality of ugliness in all conditioned things. There is this impermanence and in that impermanence there is this ugliness, this inherent difficulty and hassle involved with them. This ugliness, not the things themselves, this ugliness is our enemy. If we look closely for ourselves, we can see that the things we love the most are the things that torment us the most. If we look like this, we can see clearly that these things are actually our enemies.

As for the third meaning, it means being empty of any real substance. In this word '*dukkha*,' '*kha*' can mean 'air' or 'space,' meaning in this case 'an emptiness.' There's nothing in there that we can hang onto, that we can cling to. This quality of being empty of any real substance that we can hang onto, hold onto – this is an enemy as well. Take a look at this: When we fall in love with something that is empty of any real substance, how does that torment and torture the mind? What kind of pain and suffering does that bring us? So this aspect, this emptiness of any substance is *dukkha*, is an enemy.

The word '*dukkha*' encompasses all three of these meanings – the meaning that it tortures and torments us; second, that hidden within it is this profound ugliness; and third, that it is absolutely empty and void of any real substance, any true essence. These three meanings together mean much more than the word 'suffering.' So we should be very careful to understand *dukkha* fully. If we want to use the word 'suffering,' we should understand 'suffering' to mean all three areas or aspects of *dukkha*. When *dukkha* has these three characteristics – three aspects – then we can't help but call it 'undesirable.' This *dukkha* is the thing that is most undesirable of all. All these aspects of *dukkha* are the things that are undesirable in every way, absolutely thoroughly undesirable.

The word '*ariya*' means to go away from enemies or to escape from enemies. So *ariya* is that which is truly desirable in all respects. *Dukkha* is that which is undesirable and the *ariya*-

sacca are those things which are truly desirable, because they take us away from all these enemies.

We told you the other day that all of Buddhism is contained in the *ariya-sacca*. *Sacca* means ‘truth’ or ‘reality.’ So *ariya-sacca* is the truth that frees us from all enemies, the reality that allows us to escape from all enemies, that is from all suffering. The *ariya-sacca* are the New Life, the life that is completely free of all *dukkha*. This is how we should understand the words ‘Noble Truths’ – the truths that free us from everything undesirable, everything dangerous.

What we’ve said so far should make it obvious that there’s nothing pessimistic in talking about *dukkha* as we have been doing. In fact it’s optimistic because the way we talk about *dukkha* is always with the sense of defeating it, escaping from it, being free of it, being victorious over it. There’s nothing frightening or fearful or depressing about speaking about *dukkha* in this way because we don’t get lost in it or we don’t give up to it. We just learn about it in order to be free of it. There’s nothing pessimistic about these *ariya-sacca*. In fact they’re optimistic because they show us a way of living. They reveal to us the possibility, the potential, the duty to be free of suffering. This gives us energy, courage, and confidence to practice in order to be free of all enemies.

Next we’ll look at the characteristics or symptoms of this thing which is called ‘*dukkha*.’ The first characteristics are very natural, that happen naturally for all living things. These are the characteristics of birth, illness, aging, and death. These are things that happen naturally for all of us. There’s no inherent problem in these things but there are many people who foolishly say that birth, aging, illness, and death are suffering, are *dukkha*. But this isn’t really true. If we’re trapped by our concepts of birth, aging, illness, and death, then this is great suffering. But if we can transcend birth, aging, illness, and death, we can be beyond these natural conditions and then they aren’t any problem for us. We can turn them into problems if we’re stupid. But it’s quite simple to not have them be any problems or any suffering for us. These are the first characteristics of what for many people are *dukkha* – birth, aging, illness, and death.

If you ever meet a Buddhist who tells you that Buddhism teaches to not be born, not get old, not get sick, and not die, then that person doesn’t really know what they’re talking about. They’re just repeating words that they’ve heard from someone else or read in a book. They haven’t really experienced the Buddha’s teachings themselves. Most correctly we should say that Buddhism teaches that birth, aging, illness, and death are no problem. These things are no problem for those who understand correctly. We tell you this in advance just so that you won’t be confused by certain things that you might hear from time to time. We can summarize these aspects of *dukkha* by saying that the point of these is to be free of the naturally occurring enemies that we call ‘birth, aging, illness, and death.’

Now we’ll mention some of the symptoms or conditions of *dukkha* one by one. The first is *soka* or sorrow. The second is *parideva*, often translated as lamentation, which is like a spiritual crying. Then the word ‘*dukkha*’ – pain, physical pain – and then *domanassa*, which is mental pain or misery. Then *upāyāsa*, which is grief or despair. These are some of the forms which *dukkha* can take. The Buddha has listed them as an example – it’s not an all-inclusive list. Sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental misery, and grief help us to understand what it feels like – what *dukkha* feels like – the conditions of *dukkha*.

Next are aspects of *dukkha* as they arise from craving. We have the naturally occurring kinds of *dukkha*, the *dukkha* that arises specifically from craving, from foolish desire. The first is experiencing things we don't like. We have a craving for certain things and we also experience things we don't like – this is one kind of suffering that comes from craving. Then there's being separated from the things we love and like – this is another kind of pain and misery that comes from our craving. The last is not getting the things we want. These three things – experiencing the unloved, being separating from the loved, and not getting the things we want – these are aspects of *dukkha* that arise from our foolish desires, our blind craving. You ought to work on this until you understand it for yourselves. Experience and feel it for yourselves within how experiencing things we don't like, being separated from the things we do like, and not getting what we want – how all three of these are *dukkha*, how all three of these are enemies to us.

There's one more aspect, the most profound meaning of *dukkha*, which the Buddha said the summary or the bottom line of all *dukkha* comes down to *upādāna*. *Upādāna* is foolish attachment, to grasp and cling to things foolishly, ignorantly. The Buddha said that in short, all *dukkha* comes down to attachment in life, from attaching, grasping, and clinging to life. Life here can be analyzed into five basic aspects or functions – body, feeling, perception, thought, and consciousness. When any of these five aggregates of life or functions of life are clung to individually or collectively, then there is *dukkha*. The Buddha said in short all *dukkha* is attaching to the five aggregates of life, the five functions of life. So we must beg all of you to do your best to understand these five things which we call the '*khandas*' or the 'aggregates.' These are the aggregates of life, the things that make up life – body, feeling, perception, thought, and consciousness. These five together make up life. Please do your very best to understand these, to see them clearly.

The first aggregate is *rūpa*, often translated as 'form' or more simply just 'body.' *Rupa* is all the physical, all the material parts of life. All the material components are *rūpa*. Sometimes we can say the corporeal, the bodily aspects. In the body there is a nervous system. There are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, the body – meaning the skin as a sense of touch – and the mind-sense or the heart. This is the real meaning of *rūpa*. In one sense it's just the superficial aspect of life, the lowest part of life, but it still requires great attention. It's very important because the body – the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind – this is the foundation for all life and so is the basis of all *dukkha*.

The word '*rūpa*' has a very interesting meaning for us. It means something which breaks easily, or something which is fragile, delicate. This implies that it breaks all the time, it falls apart ordinarily. So *rūpa* can mean fragile, easily broken. If we go and take this *rūpa* which breaks so easily, this very fragile body, as being 'I' or 'mine,' take a look and see how utterly foolish that is, how crazy it is, how insane, to take something which is always falling apart to be the 'self,' to be 'I,' to be 'mine,' and then see what great suffering is involved whenever we take the body to be 'I,' to be 'mine.'

Next we come to the mental aggregates. The first one is physical and the rest are mental. When we have these bodies with nervous systems and the sense organs, then there will result certain mental functions or mental things which are the mental aggregates. The first of these is *vedanā*. It's translated 'feeling' but one must be very careful to understand the special meaning of *vedanā*, which is much more subtle than what many people take to be 'feeling.'

Vedanā is the very simple, though sometimes very powerful, feeling of pleasure or happiness toward certain sense experiences or displeasure – even pain, *dukkha* – regarding other experiences. Then there is the third kind of *vedanā*, which is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. We can't really describe whether it's pleasant or unpleasant but it's a definite kind of feeling. These three kinds of *vedanā* are not emotions. They are very simple or even primitive kinds of feelings but they are very powerful and they have tremendous influence on life. But no matter what, all these *vedanā* – whether pleasant, unpleasant, or undescribable – all of them are concocted. They're impermanent things that have been concocted out of our basic sensual experience, so there's nothing in them that we can really depend on. If we attach to these very fleeting feelings as 'I' or 'mine,' there will be *dukkha*. This is the second aggregate – *vedanā*.

We ought to understand the *vedanā* as things which deceive us most of all. There's nothing that tricks us like the *vedanā*. Pleasant feelings deceive us into falling in love. As soon as something is pleasant, we like it and we fall in love with it. Things that are unpleasant deceive us into disliking, into anger, into hatred. The undescribable kind of *vedanā* deceives us into worrying and doubting and wondering about that thing. So the *vedanā* – the things that are constantly deceiving us – this is how we ought to understand them. Once we see how the *vedanā* deceive us and make fools of us, then we can see what enemies they are and how they are such suffering. These three kinds of feelings give rise, they stir up, they trick us into the three kinds of defilement.

The first kind of *vedanā* – this satisfying, pleasing, nice feeling – stirs up the first kind of defilement, that of *rāga* (lust) or we could say *lobha* (greed). Greed and lust are toward these satisfying, lovely kinds of feelings. So because of these pleasant feelings, it makes us want to pull things in, to suck things in. The second kind of *vedanā* – the unpleasant, the disagreeable, the not very nice kind of feeling – leads to the defilements of *dosa* (hatred) or *kodha* (anger) which is this unpleasantness, this disagreeableness, that makes us want to push things away, knock them away, or even destroy them, kill them. The third kind of *vedanā* leads to doubt, to worry, to confusion, where the mind runs in circles around whatever it is. If something has this undescribable – we really can't say whether it's pleasant or unpleasant – kind of feeling then this really confuses the mind and the mind spins round and round whatever it is.

The three kind of *vedanā* lead to these three defiled reactions of trying to suck in or trying to knock away, to destroy, or then spinning around in very confused circles. It must become apparent to us how all the inherent *dukkha* of these – the *dukkha* of sucking in, the *dukkha* of knocking away, the *dukkha* of running around in idiotic circles – how these three conditions are our enemies. All the problems in the world can in fact be traced to the *vedanā*. The tremendous power of the *vedanā* to deceive us gives rise to all the problems that exist in this world. These *vedanā* are *dukkha*. There is tremendous ugliness in them. So we ought to observe them carefully in order to understand how the *vedanā* are our enemies. This is the second aggregate of life to which we so often cling – the second enemy.

The next aspect of *dukkha*, the next enemy, is called '*saññā*.' This third aggregate can be translated as 'perception.' But don't just grab onto the English word – it's important to understand how this works. *Saññā* is the result of *vedanā*. Or we can say *vedanā* is the cause, the source of *saññā*. Whenever there's an experience, and then there is a feeling toward that experience, then there will naturally be *saññā* regarding that experience. *Saññā* is to regard the experience in one way or another, to regard it as something, such as to take it to be

beautiful, take it to be ugly. This is a kind of discrimination which the mind will naturally do toward anything that is felt. Once this happens, once the mind discriminates it, perceives it as beautiful or ugly, as tall or short or whatever, once this is done, if it is done firmly, this becomes memory. That thing, that label, that discrimination, is stuck away in memory. Then every time we feel something there is this ‘regarding’ things in terms of often past experience. So we take this thing to be ‘this man,’ ‘this woman,’ ‘this dog,’ ‘this cat’ and so on and so on. Regarding things as ‘this’ or as ‘that’ – this is what *saññā* is about. Part of *saññā* is memory but the important thing is regarding things as something specific, particular. This is *dukkha*. This is an enemy for us because it’s always done under the influence of ignorance. We’re regarding things not as they really are but as they aren’t. For example, things that are *dukkha* are regarded as happiness. Things that are impermanent – constantly changing – are regarded as being permanent. Things which are selfless – which are not ‘self’ – are taken to be ‘self,’ are taken to be egos. So because of perceiving things incorrectly, misperceiving them, this *saññā* is a lot of *dukkha* and is our enemy.

We ought to understand *saññā* as attachment. *Saññā* is very similar to attachment because once we regard something as ‘this’ or as ‘that,’ then we’re generally attaching to it – it must be like this, it must be like that. So every time we go and discriminate and regard something as beautiful, as ugly, as pleasant, as unpleasant, as happy, as sad, then we go and attach to that. With *saññā*, there is almost always this attachment. This becomes even clearer when we see how so often we perceive things as being ‘my husband,’ ‘my wife,’ ‘my this,’ ‘my that.’ Perceiving things in this way is basically the same as attachment, so we can see the *dukkha* of it, of always taking things to be this, taking them to be that, especially when they’re taken to be ‘mine’ or ‘me.’ They become very heavy and they become enemies. Even regarding the earth as ‘earth’ and the sky as ‘sky’ isn’t quite correct. We perceive them, we regard them in one way but they don’t really work exactly how we perceive them. They don’t turn out as we perceive them, so this is a lot of *dukkha* for us. We’re always taking things to be a certain way and they’re never that way. So this is a real problem for us.

Saññā is very broad. We’re perceiving things constantly but almost never as they really are. But no matter how much *dukkha* *saññā* is, it’s something that we just have to have. *Saññā* is something we can’t do without. *Saññā* is necessary for our lives, to perceive as ‘Mr. A,’ ‘Mrs. B,’ ‘Mr. C,’ ‘Mrs. D,’ or to perceive ‘this is Suan Mokkh,’ or perceive things as ‘America,’ ‘Australia,’ ‘England,’ and so on. Perceiving things in this way, all this *saññā*, is necessary but none of it is really true. None of it will happen the way we have perceived it. So we must understand them in this way – to see how the perceptions, how *saññā* can bite us, how it deceives us and tricks us, and how it can bite us and claw us, and how that is an enemy, how frightening all these perceptions are.

A very simple example of the problem of *saññā* – the difficulties with *saññā* – is with our memories. We try very hard to remember things, we try to store up and protect our memories, but then so often when we need to remember something, we can’t. We try to remember and we just can’t remember. This is how undependable *saññā* can be, what a hassle it can be. It’s not the way we want it to be. We want to remember and we can’t. This is a very simple example of the *dukkha* of *saññā*.

But *saññā* is really much more than memory. In fact the essence of *saññā* is not really memory. Memory is more of a result. We remember the things that we have regarded. First

there must be this discrimination and regarding of something as ‘this’ or as ‘that,’ as ‘man,’ ‘woman,’ ‘tall,’ ‘short,’ ‘good,’ ‘bad,’ whatever. Once we’ve discriminated and regarded it in this certain way, then we store that as memory. But the really important thing to see is this discriminating, regarding. It’s a kind of labelling. That’s the essence of *saññā*. We can never really depend on it. Things are never the way we regard them, so there is always a kind of frustrating undependable *dukkha* to it all.

The biggest, most enormous kind of *saññā*, as well as the lowest, most foul and despicable *saññā*, is that of *attā saññā* – perception of ‘self’ or regarding things as ‘self.’ *Attā* means ‘self.’ This is the whole problem of *saññā* – that we are always taking things to be ‘self.’ We’re perceiving things as ‘selves,’ as separate entities and then regarding them accordingly. We actually believe that I’m a ‘self,’ this is a ‘self,’ that’s a ‘self,’ all these ‘selves’ all over the place. And then this becomes the foundation for all the rest of *saññā*.

Descartes came up with the line “*Cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I am.” But there was nothing really original about this. Much earlier when mankind began to perceive things as ‘self,’ just to think that ‘I’ exist just because ‘I think,’ is to regard the thinking as ‘self.’ So Descartes was just putting into words something that had been going on for thousands of years – this regarding things as ‘self.’ This is the whole problem of *saññā*. This is what makes it so heavy. This is how *saññā* can bite us and claw us and torment us because we’re always regarding things as ‘self.’

Mind and body – this mental and material combination that makes up life – it can experience, it feels, it can think without there being any need for any ‘self.’ Please don’t believe Descartes who says that because we think there must be an ‘ego’ or a ‘self,’ that ‘I’ must exist. It’s a very natural process that the body and mind experiences, feels, and thinks. It doesn’t depend at all on any kind of ego or self. But because the way we do experience and think, because of ignorance we go and assume that there must be a ‘self’ in there. So we perceive things as ‘selves’ and then this bites us. This causes all kinds of troubles and hassles in life. But in fact there’s no real self or ego there. So there’s no need to believe what Descartes said. We shouldn’t assume that just because we think, there must be a self. We should look at thought and see how it really works before making assumptions. So this is the third of the aggregates that we cling to, the third kind of natural function that we turn into an enemy because of our own misunderstanding, especially this misunderstanding of ‘self,’ that things are ‘selves.’

The fourth aggregate of life is called ‘*saṅkhāra*’ – in Thai ‘*sangkhan*,’ in Pāli ‘*saṅkhāra*.’ *Saṅkhāra* as the fourth aggregate specifically emphasizes thinking or thought. We call it ‘*saṅkhāra khandā*,’ but the word *saṅkhāra* has a very broad meaning. *Saṅkhāra* means ‘conditioning’ but there are these three aspects to it: The one who conditions – the conditioner – the causal aspect of conditioning. Then there’s the thing that is conditioned – the conditioned – the effect aspect of conditioning. And then there’s the process of conditioning – the conditioning itself. So there are these three aspects, interrelated, interconnected aspects of *saṅkhāra* – the conditioner, the conditioned thing, and then the conditioning, the process. All three of these, whenever there is a living body and there is feeling and there is perception, this conditioning will be going on all the time. But the most important aspect of this for us is that when this conditioning is happening, it’s constantly conditioning thought, all kinds of thoughts and ideas. So *saṅkhāra* has a very broad meaning.

It applies everywhere but here we're using it in a more limited sense – *saṅkhāra khandā* – that whenever there's life and feeling and perception, then there will be this conditioning of the mind, this stirring up, this concocting of the mind, which is essentially the conditioning of thought, of thinking. And then once this thinking takes place, we go and regard it as being 'self,' as being 'I.' We think about things in terms of 'I,' and so we think that 'I' am, that 'I' exist. So this is the fourth enemy, the fourth thing that bites us.

It's pathetic in a way that in Thailand, and in maybe other countries as well, the word *saṅkhāra* is only understood as meaning the body. For many Thais if they say the word *sangghan*, they just mean the body. This isn't completely wrong but it's not very correct either. It's just a little bit correct. *Saṅkhāra* in the broadest sense includes the body but there is much more to it than that. To think that *saṅkhāra* is just the body is to miss the most important aspect of it. *Saṅkhāra*, we can understand it in terms of the things being stirred up or the creation and then the dissolution of things. This is *saṅkhāra* – things being created and then they dissolve. This arising and passing of things is the essential process of *saṅkhāra*.

A word that can help us to understand this is the word 'conceive.' Conceive, we use both to conceive thoughts but we also use it when the sperm fertilises the egg and then a new physical life is conceived. This *saṅkhāra* can be understood as the starting of new things, the giving birth to new things. So because of all this *saṅkhāra*, thoughts are constantly born in the mind and then this constant activity of *saṅkhāra* keeps the mind spinning around, keeps it very busy, and that can be a lot of *dukkha*. For the ordinary Thai in the street, in the colloquial usage of the word '*saṅkhāra*,' if we say 'to put out the *saṅkhāra*,' it means to die. In English we would say 'to pass away.' Thais would say to '*dap sangghan*' – to put out the *saṅkhāra*, meaning death. But this isn't what it really means. To put out or to quench, to extinguish the *saṅkhāras*, means to just stop all that conditioning and concocting of the mind. All that concocting is very tiresome, very troublesome. It doesn't allow the mind to have any peace. To extinguish this concocting of the mind has nothing to do with dying. So we should understand it correctly. When all that *saṅkhāra*, the conditioning, concocting, is going on, the mind can never be at peace. But to extinguish that is very cool, very peaceful, very open and free. So the *saṅkhāra* – this concocting of the mind – is the fourth aggregate of life which can cause us so many problems.

When this concocting – all this *saṅkhāra* – is going on, then it is never peaceful. But we should understand here that when we talk about *saṅkhāra* like this, we mean the *saṅkhāra* that is a result of ignorance. When things are misunderstood then there is a concocting of the mind which inevitably leads to *dukkha*. But when this ignorant concocting of the mind, this *saṅkhāra*, ceases, then there is great peace, there is a very calm and spacious joyfulness. A very common saying in Thailand is "*tesaṃ uppasamo sukho*," which means the calming of the *saṅkhāras* is bliss, the calming of the concocting is happiness. Whenever this concocting of the mind, this concocting through the power of ignorance, whenever this calms down, quiets down, then there is joy. If that gets stirred up again through the power of ignorance, then the joy disappears and there is *dukkha*.

Another phrase is "*saṅkhāra parama dukkha*." *Parama* means 'supreme.' Concocting is the supreme torment. This constant stirring up and concocting and grinding and spinning around of the mind is the ultimate *dukkha*. But always understand that this concocting we're talking about comes from ignorance, from misunderstanding. If there is correct understanding, there

is no *saṅkhāra*, the mind is not concocted. There are just the natural processes of life taking place, and that's not what we mean by '*saṅkhāra*.' When in addition to that there is this stirring up, this busying, this concocting of the mind, then there is *dukkha*. This is the fourth aggregate.

At every funeral ceremony in Thailand, at every kind of ceremony involved with funerals or memorials to people who have died, the monks always chant the line "*tesaṃ uppasamo sukho*" – stop the concocting and that is happiness. Stopping the concocting is the supreme happiness. This is repeated over and over again. The average Thai hears this hundreds of times in their life. It's being repeated all over the place but unfortunately it's had almost no result. People are hearing all the time, "Stopping the concocting is supreme happiness." But it's pitiful that nobody seems to hear or to listen. It's like playing a flute for rhinoceroses or playing a flute for turtles. It just never gets through. So please give adequate attention to this *saṅkhāra*, this concocting of the mind. Whenever this happens there will be *dukkha*. Life will not be at peace. This *saṅkhāra* here is inevitably the result of ignorance. If there are correct knowledge and understanding, this *saṅkhāra* as we're using it here will not happen. It's only the result of ignorance – of looking at life stupidly – and then this concocting of the mind takes place. Whenever the mind is concocted by ignorance, then there occur all kinds of foolish thoughts and all of this becomes an enemy for 'me.' When the mind has been concocted, then there is 'me' exists, 'I' exists, and then all this concocting is a problem for 'me.' It's 'my' enemy. So we ought to very careful about it all.

The next and final aggregate is called '*viññāṇa*' in Pāli. In Thai they call it '*winyaan*.' This can be a tricky word because it's been given many different meanings. In Thai, many Thais think *winyaan* means 'spirit.' This is related to the Hindu definition of *viññāṇa*, which existed before Buddhism, which meant a soul or spirit that spun around within many births, within many reincarnations. It was in pre-Buddhist thought, the thing would leave this body when it died and go and be born in another body, be reincarnated – that was called the '*viññāṇa*.' But that's not the understanding of Buddhism. That's not what *viññāṇa* means in the Buddha's teaching. In Buddhism, *viññāṇa* is the thing or the function that causes consciousness of various things. Whenever there is consciousness of something, it happens through *viññāṇa*. There're six kinds of *viññāṇa* – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind *viññāṇa*. Whenever we're conscious of anything through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind, that is through the functioning of *viññāṇa*. It's the very basic knowing or consciousness or awareness of something, of anything. In a way there are two levels to this. The first is when the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or body receives some stimulus, and then there is consciousness of that stimulus. This is the first level of *viññāṇa*. Then mind consciousness knows the meaning of that thing, it's known directly in the mind. First, there's the outer senses kind of consciousness – consciousness of the senses being stimulated by this thing. Then the mind consciousness knows the meaning of it and this leads to the feelings toward things – the *vedanā* – and then the perceptions and all the *saṅkhāra* that we've talked about. This is the fifth aggregate and it's happening everywhere. Wherever there is consciousness of anything, there is this *viññāṇa*.

In Thailand the Hindu teachings came here first, way before Buddhism came. When the Hindu or Brahmanistic teachings came to Thailand, they brought this idea, this teaching of *viññāṇa* in the sense of a soul or spirit that inhabited all kinds of things, not just people but trees and rocks – all over the place. All things had this spirit and then when that thing died,

the body died, that *viññāṇa* would go and get reincarnated. This is a Hindu teaching which existed in Thailand long before Buddhism came and it was very firmly, deeply implanted in the Thai religious culture. Later when Buddhism came, everybody already had this Hindu understanding of *viññāṇa* and so many people have been unable over the centuries to understand the Buddha's teaching of *viññāṇa*, which must be understood in light of the central teaching Buddhism, that of *anatta* – that in life there is no self, no soul, no spirit in the Hindu sense. Buddhism denies that there is any such thing. So the meaning of *viññāṇa* in Buddhism is the reaction that arises when a sight, a sound, a taste, or whatever stimulates the respective sense organ and then there arises this consciousness. So we must discriminate between the two kinds of *viññāṇa* – the kind that was the Hindu teaching which came to Thailand first, and then the Buddha's teaching which came later. If we don't discriminate between the two, we'll be very confused.

In the Buddhist scriptures, in one of the discourses of the Buddha, it's recorded how one of the monks who had been staying with the Buddha had confused this issue of *viññāṇa*. This monk was named Sati Kevattaputta (Sati the fisherman's son), *Kevatta* means 'fisherman' and *putta* means 'son'. This monk had the opinion or the understanding that just this *viññāṇa* thinks, speaks, and dies, and then goes to be reborn somewhere else. He was going around saying this – that it's the *viññāṇa* that thinks, that speaks, and that goes and gets reborn somewhere. The monks heard him saying this and they went to talk to the Buddha. They reported this to the Buddha, and the Buddha called him in for a little talk and asked him, "What is your understanding of *viññāṇa*?" The monk told him and the Buddha basically said "You've got it all wrong. In this teaching here, *viññāṇa* is something that arises right here as a reaction to stimulus of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Whenever there is a sense stimulus, there arises *viññāṇa*." According to this monk, *viññāṇa* was some everlasting thing that was always there. This is directly against what the Buddha was teaching. These were strong words of the Buddha to show that this monk had been living with the Buddha and had gotten such an important point completely wrong. It was a bit embarrassing for that monk and he became very depressed. This shows that even people living with the Buddha himself had trouble and could confuse this point of *viññāṇa*. But what's very important is to see that *viññāṇa* isn't some lasting substance as it's understood just about everywhere – this is the common human understanding – but that *viññāṇa* just arises, it's just this awareness that arises with the stimulation of the senses.

In many religions, just about all religions, such as the Hebrew religion that existed before Christianity, or you can find it in Greek philosophy, and all over the place, you find talk or teaching about the spirit, the soul. In fact for most of you sitting here, there is probably this kind of an understanding, some belief in a self or in a spirit or soul of some kind. Everyone is free to think as they wish, but please don't bring that idea into Buddhism. Don't apply the word 'spirit' or 'soul' to the word '*viññāṇa*' in Buddhism. *Viññāṇa* is merely the basic consciousness or awareness of sense-objects that stimulate the sense-organs. If we confuse this issue, it will be very, very difficult for us to ever understand religion. This whole question of *viññāṇa* – and all the very many interpretations given to it – make it very difficult for us to really understand spirituality. If we don't understand *viññāṇa* correctly, then it is impossible to ever quench *dukkha*. We'll always be tormented by *dukkha* as long as we misunderstand *viññāṇa*. If we take this *viññāṇa* to be some kind of spirit, then it will be like a ghost which will keep haunting us, keep tormenting us. It's necessary if we would like to free

ourselves of *dukkha*, to understand, to find out what *viññāṇa* really is, how it really works. Most of the time it's deceiving us, it's tricking us. We're constantly taking *viññāṇa* to be 'I.' This quality of awareness that is with us right now – we're identifying with it for the most part as 'I' see, 'I' hear, 'I' smell, 'I' touch, 'I' taste, 'I' know. All this attaching to *viññāṇa* is a very deep-rooted habit and which turns *viññāṇa* into an enemy. It makes *viññāṇa* bite us, makes us suffer.

So this is why I requested earlier that you try your best to know, to understand, these five *khandas*. If we don't understand the five *khandas*, then there's no way that we can understand Buddhism. If we haven't gotten to know the five *khandas*, Buddhism will always remain a mystery to us. So it's absolutely essential that we start to understand them, otherwise we'll keep taking them to be 'self,' keep taking them to be 'I.' Sometimes we cling to these five aggregates as 'I' and sometimes as 'mine.' We cling to them as 'self' or as belonging to 'self.' So sometimes 'I' am the body or sometimes it's 'my' body or 'I' am these feelings. Sometimes it's 'my' feelings or 'I' am the perception. Sometimes it's 'my' perceptions, like this. But whenever we regard any of these *khandas*, any of these aggregates of life as 'I' or 'mine,' when we take them to be 'self' or belonging to 'self' like this, then it bites. It bites the mind, it inflicts *dukkha* on the mind. So it's crucial to understand these five *khandas*. If we really understand them, if we really see them as they are, we'll see that they are not 'self,' that none of these *khandas* or any combination of them or anything outside of them can be taken as 'I' or 'mine.' Only by knowing the *khandas* thoroughly can we understand Buddhism. Until this happens, they will create endless problems for us. We'll keep grabbing onto to various aspects of life as 'I' or 'mine' and that turns life into our enemy.

This is why the Buddha said *saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandā dukkhā*. The Buddha said that if we speak concisely, the five aggregates that are attached to are the essence of *dukkha*. In short all *dukkha* comes down to these five aggregates when we cling to them. This means that the essence of *dukkha* is attachment, or the Pāli word is '*upādāna*.' Whenever there is *upādāna* in any of these five functions of life, then there will be *dukkha*. The Pāli word *panca* means 'five.' *Upādāna* khanda is the aggregates of clinging or these aggregates that are clung to, attached to. This is the essence of all *dukkha* – *saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandā dukkhā* – all *dukkha* comes down to these five *khandas* that are clung to. So the keyword here is the word '*upādāna*.' It's not so much the aggregates themselves but this *upādāna*. In Buddhism this can be a tricky word to understand, so we'll give the best definition we can of it. *Upādāna* is to regard something according to the power of ignorance. Whenever regarding something under the influence of ignorance – that will be attachment. Regarding things through ignorance – this is attachment. As soon as there is this regarding things ignorantly, foolishly, stupidly, then there must be *dukkha*. The matter of the *dukkha ariya-sacca*, the Noble Truth of *dukkha* isn't finished yet but the time is up. So we'll continue tomorrow.

* * * * *

Transcribed by Bill Weir (arizonahandbook@yahoo.com) in May. 2023

© Kevala Retreat, 2023

