

The Four Noble Truths, Part 3 of 7

NOBLE TRUTH OF DUKKHA

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 8 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>.

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We'll be speaking about the matter of *dukkha*, which we didn't finish yesterday. Allow us to emphasize that the special issue or the most important point in Buddhism is the one about 'atta' and 'anatta' or 'self' and 'not self.' If the five *khandhas* – the five aggregates of life – are mixed up with *upādāna*, with grasping and clinging, then there will be *dukkha*. If the *khandhas* are seen correctly as 'anatta' then there won't be this *dukkha*. And so all *dukkha* can be summarized as grasping and clinging at the five aggregates of life.

There are two things here that we should observe: First, if there are just the five *khandhas*, or we could say the mere *khandhas*, just the *khandhas* by themselves without any attachment – any *upādāna* – involved, there's nothing tormenting about that, there's no *dukkha* experience regarding that. However, there is a quality or characteristic of *dukkha* within the five *khandhas*. This is an important thing to understand, because each of these five *khandhas* is impermanent, unstable, and constantly changing that has a quality of *dukkha* to it. However this quality of *dukkha* does not torment. But if anything goes and grasps or clings to these five *khandhas*, then because of that attachment these five *khandhas* will be a torment for that one who grasps at them. Whoever or whatever grasps at them – we could say their owner – will suffer because of that grasping and clinging. But if it's just the five *khandhas*, then there is no experience of torment or suffering. There is just the characteristic of *dukkha* that is inherent in all conditioned things.

For example with the natural conditions of birth, aging, illness and death, these in themselves are not inherently suffering. When nothing is attaching to birth, aging, illness and death as 'my' birth, 'my' aging, 'my' illness, 'my' death, then they're not a problem. Then there is just this characteristic of *dukkha* in birth, aging, illness and death. But as soon as something grabs on as 'my' birth, 'my' aging, 'my' illness, and 'my' death because of that *upādāna*, then birth, aging, illness, and death become a source of torment and suffering. So birth, aging, illness, and death are not in themselves suffering but they do have this characteristic of *dukkha*.

If we are stupid enough to take them to be 'I' or 'mine' then this becomes suffering for the owner of that birth, aging, illness, and death or then those naturally occurring conditions of sorrow, lamentation, pain, misery, and grief. These examples of these things are not necessarily suffering for one, only if these are not taken as 'mine' – 'my sorrow,' 'my grief,' 'my pain,' 'my misery' – or they're not identified with 'I am the pain, 'I am the misery, 'I am the grief, and so on. If this doesn't happen, then they're just naturally occurring things and they do not torment – they do not cause suffering – but they do have this quality of *dukkha*.

If we take them as 'me' or as 'mine,' then these become a source of suffering. The suffering arises not from the things themselves, but from this 'me' – this 'me' that gets involved, this 'me' or 'mine' that gets caught up, that messes up these natural things. With the kinds of *dukkha* which arise from craving, we meet up – we experience – things that we don't like. We are separated from the things we love, we like, and we desire things and then don't get them. These are the kinds of *dukkha* that come from craving, from thirst.

But notice in all of these there is the 'we.' It's 'me' that experiences what 'I' don't like. It's 'me' that is separated from the things that 'I' love. It's 'me' that has desires and doesn't get what 'I' want. It's because the attachment comes into all this that these are suffering for the mind, because of that craving, attachment always gets involved. And so we attach to the experiencing, we attach to the separation, we attach to the not getting, and so this is always *dukkha* for us. Because of that craving, there is always this attachment to it. But if there was no 'we' to experience, no 'I' to experience, no 'I' to be separated, no 'I' to not get what it wants, then there wouldn't be any torment, any pain for the mind.

For example, if we're with someone who's our enemy and then we think 'my' enemy, then there's a lot of *dukkha* involved. But if we meet someone who is our enemy, but we've forgotten that this person is our enemy, then there's no *dukkha* – there's no 'my' enemy, there's no problem. Or with people we love, when we are thinking of 'I' love this or that or this person, then there will be *dukkha* from the separation from that person. But if we've forgotten that we love this person or thing, then there's no *dukkha* involved.

Not getting things that we desire – this is only *dukkha* because of the 'I' that desires. Because the 'I' comes in, the 'my' comes in, there is the experiencing of what we don't like and the separation from what we love and the not getting what we desire.

It's because this 'I,' this 'mine,' comes in that this experiencing what we don't like, this separation from the beloved and the not getting what we want, these all occur because attachment – this sense of 'I' and 'mine,' the feeling that things are 'I' or 'mine' – has arisen. If we meet 'my' enemy, that is suffering, or if we just hear the name of 'my' enemy, then that is suffering. Even to read their name in the newspaper, that is suffering in the form of anger or hatred or aversion or something like this makes that owner – the attacher – suffer. If there's no sense of this 'I' or 'mine,' none of this occurs, there's just the quality or characteristic of *dukkha*. The thing itself, that person in themselves, is not suffering, but the person becomes suffering for us because the 'I' or 'my' gets involved. Then because of this attachment, there is the 'mind' or the 'owner' who experiences suffering. But just the thing in itself has only the characteristic of *dukkha* and nothing more.

Let's take another look at these five aggregates, starting with *rupa* or the body, the bodily systems. This body is just a bunch of processes or physical functions. In the body there's constant change, there's instability, there's decay, so there is a quality of *dukkha*, but that's just the body. The body is *dukkha* in itself or for itself, but that's all that's happening. If something does something to the body, it's just something happening to the body. But if attachment arises and it becomes 'my' body,

then it's no longer something happening to the body, it's something happening to 'me,' and this is where the suffering arises.

For example, if a knife cuts a finger we don't just see it as a knife cutting a finger, we always experience that a knife cut 'me' – the knife cut 'me' – not just something happening to the body, but something happening to 'me.' Because the attachment – the 'I,' the 'ego' – gets in there, it becomes suffering for the owner of the 'me' and 'mine.'

The body has a nervous system which is used to pick up or sense stimulation from the outside world, and it's just the nervous system that functions in certain ways – it's just part of the body. But we never see the nervous system as just part of body or just a nervous system. We don't see that the nervous system picks up the stimuli or is sensitive to the stimuli. It's always 'my' nervous system – 'I' am aware of the stimuli, 'I' am this one sensing things. It's not the nervous system that sees, hears and so on, it's always 'I,' 'I,' 'I.' So then the sense activity becomes suffering – the sensual experience, the activity of the nervous system, is turned into suffering.

If this sense of ego – this 'I' and 'mine' – is too strong, it can be really ridiculous. It can lead to a kind of hysteria. For example, one child was scratched by a thorn and no blood came out in the least – there was just a scratch with no blood – and the child fainted. Another child was scratched by the thorn and thought nothing of it, just a scratch. But the first child, because of this sense of ego, the child thought it was going to die. There really wasn't anything there, but because the attachment was so strong, the first child thought it was going to die and fainted, whereas the other child didn't think anything of being scratched. This is an example of how when this ego gets too strong, it can lead to insanity. This is an example that's happened to us.

When I was young, I was playing with a friend at the garbage pile and my friend picked up some paper that had some red ink on it. When he saw the red ink on his hand, he thought it was blood and he went running home to his mother thinking he was gonna die, "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die!" The actual physical situation was just some red ink on the hand, but because of ego coming in – because of attachment – it was turned into a lot of suffering.

In the *rūpa khandha* – the body aggregate – there is constant change, constant transformation. That's just what's happening for the body, that's just the body's thing, and there's no suffering involved in that change and decay and whatever. But when we buy into the meaning that it is 'I' or 'mine,' then that change, that decay of the body, is suffering – it's torment for the one who attaches. The body in itself is just doing its natural thing. But if ever this deeper meaning is given to things – that deeper meaning of 'I,' of 'mine' – it doesn't matter whether it's 'I' or 'mine.' Both of these, the sense of 'I,' the sense of 'mine,' are *upādāna*, and it inevitably is suffering. The body itself is not suffering.

Or we can talk about *vedanā khandhas* – the feeling aggregates – pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and the hard-to-determine feelings. We never see the feelings as just a mechanism of the nervous system, which has a certain survival value. We can never see it this way. It always has to be 'I' feel, 'I' feel pleased, 'I' feel displeased, or 'my' pleasure, 'my' displeasure, 'my' happiness, 'my' pain. We aren't able to see it as merely a natural process of the nervous system. The *vedanā* are just things that happen of themselves. We're unable to see that – we're always taking it as 'I,' as 'mine.'

We take something natural and ordinary and give it extra meaning, and this causes suffering. This attachment turns the feelings into a problem, then we make all kind of difficulties out of them. The feelings in themselves – the '*vedanā*' in themselves – are no problem. It's because of this

attachment to them – this ‘I’ and ‘mine’ – that there is suffering because of them. This ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is not real – it’s not true – it’s an illusion, but it’s something that we feel. Because we feel this ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ it becomes suffering, but it doesn’t have any real reality. There’s no real ‘I’ and ‘mine’ there. With these feelings there’s something that we give meaning to, and because of that meaning we take them to be ‘I,’ take them to be ‘mine.’ Sometimes our foolishness leads to a direct identity with pleasure, with pain, or with that hard-to-determine kind of feeling. Other times stupidity takes the form of taking these things to be ‘mine’ – ‘my’ pleasure, ‘my’ pain, and so on. This ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is an illusion – it’s not true. But because we feel it, but it’s not true, then there is suffering arising from it.

The next two khandhas – *sañña khandha* and *sañkhāra khandha* – work in basically the same way. There is perception and then this is taken to be ‘I’ perceive or it can be attached to as ‘my’ perception, and then this becomes suffering. These things are perceived in a certain way and then that is attached to, that is taken to be true and real and clung to, and this clinging is attachment. Or there is conception – things are conceived in a certain way. There is thought conception: Things are thought of in this way or that way. And then there is attachment to either ‘I’ who conceives – the conceiver, the thinker – or ‘my’ thoughts, ‘my’ conceptions, ‘my’ ideas. Either way there’s an illusion here, but we don’t see the illusion, we think it’s actually true. The illusion of *sañña* and *sañkhāra* occurs and it’s attached to as ‘I,’ as ‘mine’ – attaching to the perceptions and the conceptions – then this is the result of that illusion. Because of this attaching as ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ there is suffering. *Sañña khandha* and *sañkhāra khandha* are turned into suffering by attachment.

With the fifth aggregate – *viññana* (consciousness) – if we take *viññana* to be some kind of ‘self,’ a ‘soul,’ or a ‘spirit’ as in the Hindu belief, then that will always be suffering. To take *viññana* to be a ‘self’ or ‘soul,’ that will always lead to suffering. But if *viññana* is realised as just being the consciousness of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects, if *viññana* is known as just this consciousness, this direct knowing of the sense objects, then there’s no suffering. But if ‘I’ comes in and turns it into ‘I’ am conscious or ‘my’ consciousness, then we’ve gone back to that soul or that spirit or self or whatever, and that brings suffering. Then all kinds of problems happen and life become a mess because of this ‘I,’ this ‘mine,’ or ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘ego,’ whatever we want to call it.

As we said earlier, Thailand has received a lot of influence from India, especially in religious matters. Hindu teachings or Brahmanistic teachings came to Thailand before the Buddha’s teachings came. So way back when – we don’t know exactly when – the teachings came to Thailand about a certain kind of *viññana*, which is what in English we call a ‘spirit’ or a ‘soul.’ It’s often called the ‘*atman*’ in Sanskrit, which is a kind of spirit or soul. What was taught was that there is this *viññana* – this spirit – and it has a center place; sometimes it’s said to be in the heart, and then the *viññana* rests there. And when an object comes to the eyes, the *viññana* runs out to the eyes in order to see it, or a sound comes in and the *viññana* runs to the ears to hear the sound. The *viññana* is always going out to these different things, but it’s always the same *viññana*, so it’s some kind of soul or spirit. When we go to sleep, this *viññana* is said to leave the body and go wandering around, and then when we wake up the *viññana* comes back. If the *viññana* comes back, we can wake up. If we’re unconscious, then the *viññana* goes off somewhere, but we don’t know where. This is what has been taught in Thailand before Buddhism came.

But in Buddhism, there’s none of this – it’s just the momentary consciousness at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind sense. This is all that is meant by ‘*viññana*,’ but so many people have received this older teaching from India that that’s what is understood. So words like ‘*viññana*’ are taken to be mean ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ – some eternal substance that is knowing all these things. This is

what has happened in Thailand. This kind of belief in *viññana* has occurred. To put it bluntly, it's completely a matter of ignorance – it's a complete misunderstanding to attribute consciousness to some soul or spirit as has happened for many people here in this country.

Exactly what the situation is in Europe we don't know. You probably haven't received these same kinds of influences from India, but maybe things aren't so different because in European languages we still find words like 'soul,' 'spirit,' and 'self.' So it's possible that the same kind of misunderstanding is common in the West as well as here. If *viññana* is conceived or understood or felt to be some kind of 'self' or 'soul' or 'spirit' or lasting substance, then that is not the Buddha's teaching. That's a Hindu teaching or something else.

But if *viññana* is understood, is seen to be merely a momentary flash of consciousness in relation to some sense object, then that is the correct teaching in true Buddhism. If *viññana* is attached to in the first way, as being 'I' or 'mine,' as being some kind of self, then that inevitably is suffering. Whereas if *viññana* is understood correctly, seen correctly, then there's no suffering, there's just that momentary consciousness arising and passing away. This is what Buddhism teaches. Please be very careful to understand this point correctly because many people are careless and confuse the two, and then don't know what Buddhism is and don't know what other religions and certain philosophies are saying. Because of everything we've discussed so far, true Buddhism teaches to remove the sense of 'I' and 'mine' from the five *khandas*. Please listen to this carefully, write it down if you've got paper. What Buddhism is teaching, the genuine teaching of Buddhism – and if something contradicts this then it's not Buddhism – Buddhism teaches to pull out that sense of 'I' and 'mine,' to pull it out of the five *khandhas*, remove the sense of 'I' and 'mine' from the five *khandhas*. So then there are just the five *khandhas*, there's just life occurring naturally without any *upādāna*, without any 'I' or 'mine' making it heavy, making life into a problem. So removing the sense of 'I' and 'mine' from the *khandhas* – this is the heart of Buddhism, this is the central teaching of the Buddha.

We would like to take this opportunity to speak straight forward and direct and say something that ought to save you lot of trouble, time, and even money. Most of you – if not all of you – have been deceived by a bunch of books which have been given such silly names as *Buddhism in Thailand*, *Buddhism in Burma*, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, *Buddhism in Tibet*, *Buddhism in China*, *Buddhism in Japan*, and even *Buddhism in America*. There are all these books that are deceiving people, trying to talk about something that doesn't really even exist. Any of these books that are talking about Buddhism in Thailand or Buddhism in Sri Lanka or Buddhism who knows where, they're just talking about some illusion, they're not really talking about Buddhism at all. If we buy these books and believe what they're telling us, then we'll never figure out what Buddhism is because all these books are just about a bunch of crazy cultural practices from whatever country it is – just the crazy things that the Thais do, or the crazy things the Tibetans do, or the crazy things now that they do in the West – and that has a very little if anything to do with Buddhism. It's a bunch of ceremonies, it's a bunch of beliefs, it's a bunch of superstitions, it's all kinds of stuff. If you buy a book on Buddhism, there's no need to stick on the words 'in Tibet' or 'in Thailand' or 'in Burma.' If it's a book about Buddhism, it will talk only about one thing – removing attachment from the five *khandhas*. This is the nucleus of Buddhism. The rest of that stuff that they fill up these books with and rip off the unsuspecting public with, is just a bunch of superficial cultural stuff – it's not Buddhism. It's just who knows what. So you can save yourself the time and the trouble – there's no need buying any of these books and wasting our time with them.

The same goes with the superficial distinctions between Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. To the superficialist or the Western scholar, they seem to be different things. But if it's Buddhism, it's all just one thing. There's only one

Buddhism. Buddhism can't be fragmented into these different things. We would like to point this out to save everyone a lot of trouble. Real Buddhism is just one thing – removing attachment, getting rid of that 'I' and 'mine' regarding the five *khandhas*. For those of you sitting here who are interested in going to study Tibetan Buddhism, please take notice that there's no such thing as Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism, and all that stuff. There's just one real Buddhism and this is just pulling out that 'I' and 'mine' – pulling it out of the five *khandhas* so that there are just the *khandhas*. Removing this 'I' and 'mine' out from the five *khandhas* – this is Buddhism. Everything else has just been added to make things showy to make it interesting, to make it impressive, to entertain the children, and all these things. It makes the real teachings seem very profound so that nobody can understand it, all this extra stuff. Please find out what the real thing is and save yourself the trouble of the other stuff.

When we have studied, when we've personally studied some of the important Mahāyāna sutras, they all begin with a lot of crazy stuff suitable for that culture. But every important Mahāyāna sutra ends with the same thing – removing attachment from the five *khandhas*. We've got a friend who's quite an intelligent person and now they've really gotten into translating a bunch of very-difficult-to-translate Tibetan texts. It seems that in Tibet they've got all kinds of things which haven't been translated yet – things which are very, very difficult to understand and hard to translate. This friend of ours – we won't mention the person's name – has completely gotten into this and is putting all their time and energy into translating these things. But no matter what they translate they won't really find Buddhism itself, but just find a lot of complex, difficult-to-understand things which come from the ancient Tibetan culture. They're not finding Buddhism itself, they're finding a lot of things that have been dragged into Buddhism from the old culture of that time and that place.

Real Buddhism is just this one simple thing – removing the sense of 'I' and 'mine' from the five *khandhas*. This is something to study, not from all those books, but from life. The scriptures that we ought to study are the five *khandhas* within our own life, within ourselves – to study the body, feelings, sensations, conceptions, and consciousness within our own life and see what they're like, and see how this attachment arises and then see how to remove that attachment. This is the kind of scriptural study to do, to do it right here using our own life. It's not necessary to go off to study Tibetan Buddhism or Sri Lankan Buddhism or Zen Buddhism or whatever – just study it right here in your own life. The five *khandhas* are right here. Why do we have to go off looking for Buddhism somewhere else? Now we don't deny that there are differences. For example, Theravāda Buddhism is very straight forward and it's kept within certain fairly strict limits. People who don't have enough intelligence and wisdom are unable to understand the Theravāda teachings properly. Mahāyāna has tried to open everything up and simplify things so that even foolish people – old grandmothers in the street, the ordinary man in the road – can have access to Buddhism. It's called Mahāyāna – the great vehicle – because it can take even the foolish people along. In Zen, Zen says no that's never going to work and narrowed it really down, made a very exquisite refined teaching for only the most intelligent people. If one isn't very sharp and clever, one can never figure out Zen Buddhism. It's the most direct teaching, but it's also only for the most intelligent. In Vajrayāna, the tantra and all that, they've kind of packaged the teachings in the most attractive, the most colorful, the most enticing, and interesting way. You've got these basic approaches to presenting Buddhism – the direct approach, the big approach, the quick and fast approach, the attractive approach. But even though there are these distinctions, all of these come to the same point, to the same fact, which is removing attachment from the five *khandhas*.

In a scientific era, in a time of high technology and reason, we don't have any real need anymore to be interested in all the different forms or superficial distinctions of Buddhism. In a scientific age like this, all we need is to take a very direct, natural, and scientific approach to study the five

khandhas right here. All we need to ask is how to remove attachment from the five *khandhas* – how to go about removing the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ from the five *khandhas*. In times like this, this is all we need. There’s no need to go off anywhere. Everything we need to learn from and to work with – all the tools, all the equipment – is right here.

We should take a direct scientific approach. Philosophy won’t help us – just thinking and speculating with ideas and opinions isn’t enough. We have to take a scientific approach that deals with the real things, not just theories about things, but deal with the real things directly, experiment in a practical way. This approach will teach us how to remove attachment from the five *khandhas*. So we’ve taken the time to discuss these various characteristics of variations within Buddhism because if we understand these points, it will make it much easier, much simpler, for us to go about removing attachment from the five *khandhas*.

In summary, all *dukkha* occurs because of attachment in the five *khandhas* – attachment to one or the other or all of them together or whatever. Any kind of attachment regarding the *khandhas* is *dukkha*. For example if there’s some pain in say the foot, it’s only just a certain kind of physical situation which has a certain impact on the nervous system and that is felt as pain and that’s all there is to it – it’s just a certain physical phenomenon. If there is no attachment in there, it’s not really *dukkha*. This is something we often confuse – just ordinary pain from real *dukkha*, real suffering. We often confuse the two. But if there’s no attachment, then it’s not really *dukkha*, it’s just a physical phenomenon – it’s just something natural. But as soon as the feeling arises ‘I’ hurt, it’s ‘my’ pain, ‘my’ foot might fall off, or ‘I’ might die, or whatever, then a very tiny physical problem is blown up into a huge spiritual problem, a huge mental problem. People take simple physical difficulties and blow them up into fear, worry, neuroses. People even go crazy because of little physical ailments. Some people even die from the shock of having some minor physical mishap because of *upādāna*. Suffering does not occur because of these natural situations, suffering occurs because of *upādāna* – the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ regarding natural things.

The Buddha did his best to help us understand this situation with *upādāna*. One of the ways he tried to explain it is using a simile: There are two kinds of arrows – there is just the ordinary kind of arrow, and then there is the second kind of arrow that has been soaked in poison – the tip of the arrow has been soaked in poison. A person gets shot with the ordinary arrow, the ordinary arrow pierces this person’s skin and then there is pain obviously, but that’s all there is, it’s just pain felt by the nervous system. Then the second arrow gets shot right in the same place and the second arrow is coated with poison, has been soaked in all kinds of nasty poison. How much more is that going to hurt? How much worse is that going to make the wound? How much more damage is that second arrow going to do? The second arrow is *upādāna*. The second arrow is that feeling of ‘I,’ of ‘mine.’ So this helps us to see the distinction between physical pain or the characteristic of *dukkha* in things, and the *dukkha* that is experienced directly by the mind because of *upādāna*, because of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ Please be very careful to remove this second arrow and don’t let it shoot you again. For the most part, we’re getting shot by the second arrow pretty frequently.

When a knife cuts the finger, then the finger has been shot by the first arrow. Then when we think or feel ‘I’ have been cut by the knife or ‘my’ finger has been cut by the knife, then we’ve been shot by the second arrow – the arrow that has been soaked in the poison of attachment. Once that happens, there is enormous suffering, the mind is in torment and all of a sudden has got a big problem. It’s the same with everything. If there’s just a natural mechanism taking place, there’s no problem. But as soon as the second arrow of attachment of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ comes in, then there’s a big problem. If we can understand this point – this one simple point – then we will understand Buddhism quite well.

Our study of Buddhism is generally excessive – we study many things that aren't really necessary. We even study things that are irrelevant or trivial. We're always asking questions about, "Why do things have to be this way? Or when did this happen? Or why do monks wear that color?" and things like this. We ask a lot of questions that aren't really necessary.

The Buddha, to help us understand the danger of this, mentioned another simile: There was a man who was shot by an arrow and he was laying there in pain and his friends came to help him. They were going to take out the arrow so that he would feel better. But then he said, "Wait! Don't take it out yet. Before you take it out, I want to know who shot it. What caste is the man who shot it? What kind of arrow is it? Who made the arrow? What kind of wood is it made from? And what kind of poison is it coated with?" He had a long list of questions and he wouldn't let them take out the arrow until they answered all the questions.

Is our approach to Buddhism the same as this where we ask a lot of unnecessary questions and so never get around to removing the arrow? Please be very careful about how you go about studying Buddhism. Don't ask questions which aren't really necessary. Whenever you have the opportunity to ask questions of a teacher, please don't ask too many. If we ask too many questions, then there will be so much information that the real information will get lost amongst all the irrelevant stuff. Just ask the necessary questions, the important questions. The most important question is, "How to remove attachment from the five *khandhas*?" If we can keep things direct and simple like this, we'll save ourselves lot of time and energy and confusion.

Thus we can summarize this all by saying that in Buddhism the important thing is removing attachment from the five *khandhas*. All we need to do, all we need to study, are these five *khandhas* right here – these living *khandhas* of our own life. Study them, study them when there are just the *khandhas*, when there are pure *khandhas* without any attachment. Then study the *upādāna khandhas* – the *khandhas* that are being clung to as 'I' and 'mine.' If we see more and more clearly the pure *khandhas* and the *khandhas* that are clung to, this is all we really need to do. This is what *vipassana* is about. It's not necessary to go anywhere to do *vipassana*. Just examine the *khandhas*, study the *khandhas*, scrutinize the *khandhas* very, very carefully to know what they are like, what the pure *khandhas* are like – the *khandhas* without attachment – and what the *upadana khandhas* are like – the *khandhas* that have been clung to as 'I' and 'mine.' This is all we really have to do in Buddhism.

In Buddhism, we have a special name for the person who has been completely successful in their study and practice to the point they've finished – they've done everything that needs to be done. We call such a person an '*arahant*.' To understand what '*arahant*' means in a very simple way – we don't have to give any complicated definition – an *arahant* is just the pure *khandhas*. *Arahant* is the name we give to body-mind that is just these five pure *khandhas* without any attachment. In the *arahant* there is no attachment whatsoever, not even the least bit. But in us ordinary worldlings – us thick ones, ordinary thicksters – there is constantly arising attachment. In some of us quite a bit, in others not as much. This is the difference between the *arahant* and the worldling – the thick one – whether there is any attachment left or not. The word '*arahant*' has turned out to be very difficult to translate into English and other European languages. Most of the translations we've seen are not very good. So to keep things correct and simple, we ought to define or understand '*arahant*' as a life of pure *khandhas* without any attachment. Where there are just pure *khandhas* without any attachment, that is the *arahant*. This is a simple and clear definition. When there isn't any attachment, there is no suffering. The *arahant* is completely beyond, completely free of *dukkha*. What this means is to have completely removed all attachment from the five *khandhas*. That's how it's traditionally said – we talk about extinguishing attachment in the five *khandhas* or removing all

attachment from the five *khandhas*. If we spoke a little more correctly, or a little more precisely, we could say that the thing to do is to prevent the arising of attachment in the five *khandhas*. To always be removing attachment is a real hassle, but to stop it before it happens is much more exquisite – what they say “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” So the real thing is to understand Dhamma, know the Dhamma, understand Dhamma, and then by being careful, by being mindful and careful, never slipping or making mistakes, preventing the arising of attachment in the five *khandhas*. So don’t just get rid of attachment, stop it from happening.

When we use the words ‘being careful’ or ‘not being careless’ – the Pāli word is ‘*appamatta*’ – these are very important words. When we say, “Be careful, don’t be careless,” what we mean is it’s like our house is on fire and we’ve got to hurry and get all our possessions out as quickly as we can. This is what we mean by being careful. If we wait and have to ask, “Well who started the fire?” “Where did they buy the gasoline, from what company?” “Who made the matches?” “What way is the wind blowing?” and all these things, then the house will burn down. So the thing is just to hurry and get everything out of the house before it burns down. Be very careful and get rid of – eliminate and prevent – all attachment regarding the five *khandhas* as quickly as we’re able to do so. We’re worried that you’ll spend too much time on studying unnecessary things, that things will go too slow, and you’ll never achieve what should be achieved.

We encourage you just to give your attention to the central issue – finding out what attachment is, how it arises, and learning how to get rid of that attachment regarding the five *khandhas*, learning how to remove it all. So we encourage you to give all your attention to this and not spend time asking unnecessary questions – questions that aren’t really relevant or practical. Just do what needs to be done to remove all attachment from the five *khandhas*.

The system of practice that is called ‘*Ānāpānasati*’ – mindfulness with breathing – is an excellent way to remove attachment from the five *khandhas*. You’ve come here with an interest in learning about *Ānāpānasati* and learning how to practice it. We encourage you in this and hope that you can maintain the focus in using *Ānāpānasati* to remove attachment from the five *khandhas*. This is the only thing that we need to be interested in.

We’ve been talking about the Noble Truth of *dukkha* – *dukkha ariya-sacca*. We should understand it’s important to get clear that there are many ways of talking about *dukkha*. This is one of the difficulties of language. When we use the word ‘*dukkha*’ we can mean the *dukkha* the pain, the misery itself, that which torments the mind – that *dukkha* itself. When we use *dukkha*, it can be the thing itself or we can mean *dukkha* as that which brings *dukkha*, that which leads to suffering, and this is somewhat different. Another meaning of *dukkha*, another way of using the word, is having the characteristic of *dukkha*, having the *lakkhana* of *dukkha*. There are these three ways of understanding *dukkha*: *dukkha* that is directly experienced (*dukkha* that is torment within the mind), the things that lead to that *dukkha*, and then the characteristic of *dukkha* in all conditioned things.

Because of the inherent difficulty of language – the inherent ambiguity, the way we have to twist words around to try and explain things – we’re left with these three different ways of using the word ‘*dukkha*.’ When we talk about the Noble Truth of *dukkha*, it’s important to understand that the *dukkha* that is meant here is the first kind – that *dukkha* that torments the mind. This is our problem. The others are not really a problem. The problem is this *dukkha* that is tormenting us and preventing us from being at peace. It’s this *dukkha* that we directly experience as pain and misery in the mind that arises from *upādāna*. If we understand how to remove attachment from the five *khandhas*, then we will understand this Noble Truth of *dukkha* sufficiently.

When you have understood *dukkha* thoroughly, then you will see for yourselves that it is the most ugly thing there is. It is the most frightening thing. It's the most disgusting and terrible thing there is. We'll see this for ourselves when we see *dukkha*. If we don't see this fact, if we haven't really seen *dukkha*, then we'll fall in love with it. When we don't understand *dukkha*, when we haven't seen as it is, we fall in love with it, we keep attaching to things. We fall in love with attachment because attachment has an incredibly powerful attraction. This 'I' and 'mine' is terribly deceptive and it has a very profound influence. So it's very easy to fall in love with 'ego,' with *upādāna*, with attachment. Instead of getting free of *dukkha*, we fall in love with it and then we keep plunging ourselves into *dukkha* over and over again. Why do we have to dress up in beautiful clothes? Why do we have these beauty pageants? Why must we eat delicious food? Why must we do all these things? The reason is that we have mistaken *dukkha* for happiness. We've fallen in love with *dukkha*. We've fallen in love with attachment. And so for this reason we turn life into a lot of *dukkha*, a series of difficulties and problems.

In short, please know *dukkha* in the three ways that we mentioned. See *dukkha* as being painful, as being tormenting, suffering. Second see *dukkha* as being ugly and disgusting – the most ugly, disgusting thing there is. Third, see *dukkha* as the most empty, meaningless, worthless thing there is. If one sees *dukkha* in these three ways, then one will have understood the Noble Truth of *dukkha* thoroughly. We could speak on and on and on about *dukkha*. There are all kind of little details we could mention, but what we have discussed so far is enough – what is attachment and how to remove attachment. If we understand this, then we understand the Noble Truth of *dukkha* – *dukkha ariya-sacca*. This is enough talking about this First Noble Truth, and so we'll finish our talk on *dukkha* – the *dukkha ariya-sacca*. That's it also for today. The meeting is closed for this morning.

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

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