

Puget Sound University Talks series II, Part 2 of 2

DHAMMA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

Dhamma Q&A given at Suan Mokkh on 18 January 1991

Another group of students from Puget Sound University (Washington state, USA) visited Suan Mokkh. Tan Ajahn spoke about the highest ideals of Buddhism based in Dhamma rather than mere tradition. He also fielded questions from the students. Tan 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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❖ *“As of this moment there more than likely is fighting going on in the Persian Gulf. Had you had the opportunity to offer advice to prevent this atrocity, what would you have said? Or is there ever a chance for leaders who are so deluded by power to awaken and see what is really going on in order to avert an action such as war?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu ~

First of all, they're already fighting in the Gulf, so it's too late to do anything. Even if the fighting had not yet started, the situation is very difficult because the various causes and factors that have brought this situation about are very complicated, and they would have to be discussed one by one. But if we look at it in a general way we can say that what's going on is because of a conflict in interests. Because there is a conflict in the interests of various countries and people, then defilements arise. And because they're unable to control these defilements, then they act upon them, and the situation gets worse and worse. Human beings ought to be able to control the defilements. They ought to be able to calm them down instead of being at the mercy of them, but obviously these people making the decisions don't have that ability to calm down their defilements. Instead they're merely enslaved to things like greed, hatred, anger, worry, fear, and so on. So the end result is there'll be some fighting. This is unfortunately very ordinary and typical in our world because so often people are unable to calm down the defilements. So really it's a matter of defilements more than of human beings. It's defilements fighting – it's not really human beings anymore. If it were human beings, human beings have something special that allows them to resolve problems without fighting. It's only animals that have to resort to fighting in a very crude and instinctual way to solve their problems. Human beings never need to resort to such an approach, and so what's going on isn't really something human. It's a matter of the defilements.

To resolve things by fighting is inhuman. Human beings can resolve problems in situations using wisdom, using intelligence and wisdom, so it's not necessary for there to be killing. If it involves killing, that's inhuman and is quite shameful.

We must make a clear distinction between self protection – defending one's own life – and killing. There's an important difference on which we must be clear. To protect one's own life is one thing, to kill someone else is another matter.

❖ *“Can Ajahn Buddhadasa explain his concept of insight worker or laborer, vipassana samrap kammakon, and where in the scriptures he finds justification for that?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

We can call this ‘vipassana for laborers’ or ‘vipassana in laboring.’ What this is about, is that when doing any kind of work, even the lowest kind of work, one can do it in a way where there is insight. Take something very low, like sweeping the ground. One can do a lowly activity like this in a way so that insight arises if one does it correctly so that there's no liking and disliking arising while one works, no good and bad arising, where the mind isn't getting tangled in duality while sweeping, but merely sweeping the ground. That's the outer activity, but if it's done correctly with the understanding that we're doing it to benefit others, that the action is done unselfishly, then there is further or deeper insight. One recognizes that when one sweeps in this way, the heart is clean. So it's not just that one is sweeping the earth at the same time one is sweeping the heart. The heart is being kept clean by practicing unselfishness. This is one example of vipassana for laborers. The meaning is that we can do any work in a way that leads to insight. Sometimes people have very exaggerated ideas about what insight is like, but if we have a natural understanding of what insight is, one can start to see how it can arise in any kind of work, even things like sweeping the ground.

This can be applied to any necessary kind of work – exercising the body, eating, taking a bath, even sitting on the toilet. Any of these necessary functions or activities can be done in this way. Please practice vipassana or insight in every activity, in every position.

❖ *“There seems often to be a conflict between the beliefs of popular Buddhism and what the Buddha actually taught. Are these popular forms of belief a form of upaya (skillful means), or how are they justified in light of what the Buddha actually taught?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

This is very ordinary. The Buddhism of the man in the street is mixed with the local culture, with customs, traditions, and superstitions. This is ordinary. However the Buddhism of the Buddha is pure, it's clean, it isn't adulterated with any of these things.

We've talked about this thing quite a few times, this situation of people studying Sri Lankan Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and so on. This leads to some confusion about what Buddhism actually is. The difference between, say, Burmese Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, is one of the covering, of the wrapping. It's necessary that whenever Buddhism enters a culture, it will be 'wrapped' in a package suitable to that culture. If it doesn't start that way, it will eventually get wrapped up by the way that particular culture does things. So there's a difference in the wrapping, which is not really a difference in Buddhism, but just in the wrapping. And this of course is totally ordinary. The essence of Buddhism, or Buddhism itself, is the way of investigation in life that eliminates *attā* (self) and *attaniya* (related to self or of self). The rest is the wrapping. If Buddhism is to be taught or explained somewhere, it's necessary to do so in a way that responds to the needs and the tastes of the people who are being taught. In the Buddha's time, the teachings were probably pure, but in later times they picked up more and more cultural accretions, more wrapping. This is just an ordinary human thing, to respond to the needs, the wants, and the tastes of each particular culture. In the modern world, science is now coming in. Our culture which is so caught up in science and technology now requires that Buddhism respond in a way appropriate to scientific and technological cultures. This is ordinary as well. But the Buddhism itself is not these various wrappings. Buddhism is the way that eliminates self and of self, that eliminates 'me' and 'mine.'

It's your own responsibility to discriminate the true Buddhism from the wrappings. This is the responsibility of each person to not get too dependent on or lost in the wrapping. All the additions to Buddhism are necessary in order to help people understand Buddhism or the Dhamma. It's necessary to speak in a way that responds to their needs and tastes. There are adjustments made. Additions are made in order to do so. For example the Buddhism one would teach in America would necessarily be different from the Buddhism one would teach in Africa. The situations are different, the cultures are different, so the way of speaking and teaching must be different. Or the way one teaches an adult must be different than the way one would teach a child. This is just natural. There will be new additions, there will be a blending of Buddhism with other things in order to respond to the needs, wishes, and tastes of different people.

Another example is if one is teaching Buddhism to people who like art, then one must teach it as kind of an art. One must reveal the artistic side of Buddhism. However if we teach it to people who like to read books, novels, poetry, then Buddhism must be presented in a literary way. For those who think in terms of science, for the people who are fans of science, believers in science, then Buddhism must be taught in a scientific way. These different approaches are the kind of skid – the package – of Buddhism. It's not Buddhism itself. It's not so important what the

package is, how it's wrapped. What matters is that it can end dukkha, that there is the essence of Buddhism. The true essence of Buddhism is there beneath the wrapping, and then that essence will be able to end dukkha. This is what is important.

Buddhism can express itself through all these different forms and styles. No matter how many dozens or hundreds of styles and forms are needed, Buddhism can express itself through them all in order to reach all the different kinds of people with their different tastes and backgrounds. But what matters is that there is the kernel of Dhamma that ends dukkha in each form or style. Whatever the style is, there is still always the same element of truth, which will quench dukkha.

So one must be ready to speak with farmers, with fishermen, and even with soldiers who must shoot guns so that there will be some benefit for them that the dukkha – the pain in their hearts – can be quenched.

❖ *“If everything goes according to Dhamma and the natural law, including the mind which is naturally free of impurities, then how is it that the idea of self, which arises instinctually, is unnatural and impure and needs to be gotten rid of?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

This is a problem of semantics. Ordinary people understand the word ‘nature’ in one way. In Buddhism, the word ‘nature’ is understood in another way. In Buddhism, all things are natural. Things that are wrong are natural. Things that are right are natural. Things that are happy are natural. Things that are painful are natural. All things are natural. Whether they arise from the instincts or they arise from learning and intelligence, all things are natural – they all arise out of nature. There isn't anything which isn't natural. So part of the problem is the questioner hasn't understood the Buddhist meaning of nature. All things are natural. The self arises out of nature and is therefore natural.

It's a matter of the words we use and not a matter of truth. Ordinary people make an exception for something that they think is supernatural, or above nature. But in Buddhism there's nothing supernatural. Everything is part of nature, everything is natural. So if one is studying Buddhism, one must understand the word ‘nature’ correctly. Even the things that human beings have recently created, these are still from nature, they're still natural.

Even these microphones are made from nature. The things that have been put together all come from nature, and the production, the manufacturing, is done according to the Law of Nature. Nothing escapes from the Law of Nature, so even things like these microphones are natural.

So from the tiniest speck of dust all the way to perfect nibbāna, everything is nature no matter how many distinctions or separations we make, or if you divide it into how many trillions of things, it's all natural, it's all nature.

You should be aware that we have a special objective or purpose, which is to have everything be nature, to relinquish everything to nature so that we're not left with anything as self. Instead of clinging to some things as self, as 'me,' as 'mine,' we acknowledge that it's all nature. The positive is nature, negative is nature, so then what is left to be a problem? If we are above problems, then we see that everything is nature. So even dukkha is a nature, and the quenching of dukkha is also a nature. Can you see how it fits together?

❖ *“Ajahn Buddhadasa has written that with the proper understanding of Dhamma language it's possible to recognize the common message of all religions. How is it possible to convey this commonality using everyday language to religious zealots who do not seem to comprehend the Dhamma language of their own tradition?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu ~

The answer is fairly obvious within the question itself that when religion, even in just one single religion, when the religion is taught to foolish people, or people who aren't very intelligent, it's necessary to use people language. However when the religion is taught to people who are sufficiently intelligent, then Dhamma language can be used. In speaking with the ordinary people, they don't understand Dhamma language, and so people language is necessary. But when speaking to people who are genuinely intelligent, then they don't want this kind of baby talk and they prefer things in Dhamma language.

A more clear way of saying this is, if one must speak to people who are still clinging to things as self, as being 'me' and 'mine,' then it's necessary to speak in people language. But when speaking with people who aren't attaching to things as self, or are attaching only a little bit, then one speaks in Dhamma language. If an arahant is speaking with another arahant, then she or he uses Dhamma language, but when the arahant speaks with, say, the children who look after the cows, then the arahant uses people language. We ought to study both kinds of language until we can speak both of them fluently, then our ability to communicate will be quite easy.

The problem of trying to point out to zealous people who are clinging to their own religious teachings quite strongly, to point out to them there's something that all religions have the same purpose, this is very difficult. Because the understanding that all religions have the same purpose is in a rather profound Dhamma language, and so if they're clinging very much to the people language of their own religion, they won't be able to understand or accept it because it's Dhamma language to see that all religions seek to free human beings from suffering, from pain, from dukkha. And although the methods of doing so differ, each religion has a way to go deeply into the human condition. To see this is a matter of Dhamma language, and the people who are clinging to people language won't be able to understand.

For example, the word 'God' can be spoken in Dhamma language as well as in people language. God in people language is a personal god, a god with personal attributes, features, qualities. God in Dhamma language is impersonal, or non-personal. Some religions can speak of God in only

one way, either in personal terms or solely in impersonal terms. Buddhism, however, can speak of God in either way depending on the needs of the situation. Buddhism can speak of both a personal god and an impersonal god. We should know how to speak in the right way according to time and place, the culture, the country, the era, and the situation.

In teaching people to understand material things – or in a material kind of way – one uses people language. But in teaching people to understand the mind and heart, one must speak in Dhamma language. If you're going to introduce somebody in the ordinary way in terms of their appearance, their name, and things like this, we speak in people language. But if you were to introduce someone in terms of the reality in their heart, then one must speak in Dhamma language.

In people language we speak through conventions, we speak in terms of conventions. In Dhamma language we speak in terms of the truth, in terms of truth which need not be assumed or which doesn't depend on conventions. In short, to study and understand any religion well, or to teach a religion well, one must understand it, one must be able to speak in both people language and Dhamma language.

❖ *“How does compassion arise if you've detached yourself so much that you are not affected by the people suffering? How far does the detachment go?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

If one understands the attachment that is the problem, then the question will be answered easily. The attachment which is the problem is the attaching to things as 'me' and 'mine.' When we grab onto things as 'me' and 'mine,' this leads to selfishness, and when there is selfishness, there is no compassion, no concern, no caring for others. So we're talking about the non-attachment to 'me' and 'mine.' When one no longer is clinging to anything as 'me' and 'mine,' then there is no selfishness and one is totally free to help others, to be concerned with others. When we say 'don't attach to anything,' it should be understood as don't attach to anything as 'me' or 'mine.' That's where the problem is, and so that's where the problem is solved. When there's no attachment, it's a matter of nature, say, just the natural body or the mind's natural functions. But when we attach it becomes a matter of ego.

Another way to look at is when a dog is hungry, it's just 'nature is hungry,' but when people are hungry, it's 'I am hungry, ego is hungry.' In people it's the self – the *attā* – that comes up. But when there's no attachment, then there's just 'nature is hungry.' It's no longer 'I am hungry.' There's no longer a hungry ego.

When there's no attachment, there's no selfishness, and so then we have the *upāya*, or the trick of not doing things with selfishness. When we don't do things with selfishness, when we don't act selfishly, then there's very little dukkha, and sometimes none at all.

If there's just the body and mind, then death has no meaning. There's just the natural body and mind that has no meaning, but when there's ego, death has a lot of meaning.

❖ *“We have read Dhammic Socialism, and in Dhammic Socialism a caste system based on function and responsibility is discussed. We have also learned that the Buddha rejected the caste system in India. So I was wondering if Ajahn Buddhadasa could please explain what he means by caste and how it is to function in dhammic socialism?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

Actually, the term ‘caste system’ is the problem here. Instead of a system of classes and castes, we must distinguish between the classes and castes which can be eliminated and done away with, and the classes and castes which cannot be done without. This is directly in line with what the Buddha said. The class or caste which we can get rid of is the kind that comes from birth where you're born into a caste or a class, and you're stuck in it for the rest of your life. That we can get rid of, and this is what the Buddha objected to. But then there are the castes and classes which are necessary, the castes and classes of duty. If you perform the duties of a king, then you're in the kingly caste, and if you perform the duties of a priest, then you're in the priestly caste. This is just natural – it can't be done away with. Whatever duties one is performing, that is the caste or class one is in. And of course this can change; it's not dependent on birth. The first kind of castes and classes doesn't fit with dhammic socialism, but the latter kind is a necessary part of it, recognizing the different duties that people perform in society. And that will have a kind of natural castes and classes, though it doesn't become such a system which is imposed externally. It's just naturally by the duties each person performs. This we can't do without.

If we are born from good parents, we ourselves are not yet good. We have to go out there and make good. If we're born from parents who aren't so good, we can still make good ourselves. So there's the kind of class which is born from one's parents; that can be gotten rid of. But the class of what one is actually doing; that cannot be eliminated.

The purpose and meaning of dhammic socialism is to have a society that functions peacefully, that works peacefully. One can't have such a society just by having some political philosophy or some ideology, some ‘ism.’ Things will only go well, things will only be good and correct if our actions are good and correct. So the point is not having some ideology or theoretical belief system, but that we act and behave rightly and correctly.

Allow us to object to liberal democracy. Liberal democracy which takes the individual as being the main principle, the individual as being important, creates nothing but endless opportunities for selfishness. So we object to liberal democracy on the grounds that it ends up being just constant selfishness. Dhammic socialism, however, doesn't take the individual as being most important, but takes society as being most important. Instead of emphasizing the rights of the individual, the rights of society – the good and benefits of society – are taken as being primary. If

this happens through Dhamma, then it won't be taken over by selfishness. Just the aspiration to do what's good for society, to think in terms of the common good, this itself is unselfish.

❖ *“My question has to do with kamma and duty. It seems to me that there are two different duties, a higher one and a lower one: one to the self or to the ridding of the self, and one for the community, to society. I was wondering which duty comes first. An example that I thought of was an animal that was struck by a car that was still alive but in deep suffering and he would die in time. You had a duty to the animal in the sense of society to end his pain, but you also have the duty to the self of not killing the animal to end the pain.”* ❖

(Translator's note: By the way, part of your question is based on a cultural assumption which is not shared in this part of the world, that when a dog is suffering you kill it. That's not the Thai way to put it out of its suffering.)

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

One must be careful not to mix things up too much, to mix up these duties. One should clearly separate the two duties, the duty for oneself, and the duty for society. Further, one should see that in terms of one's duty towards oneself, there are two levels: There's the basic duty of survival; this is the first duty, to survive. And then the higher duty is to realize the best thing there is in life. One has to do what one can to survive, and then one does the best one can to realize the highest best thing in life. And if there is opportunity and time, one also does things to benefit others. There's no need to mix these up.

If we complete all the duties there's no problem. If you look at duty too much from the outside in terms of your own cultural conditioning and opinions, then it gets very confused. We need to look at the Dhamma, then duty from inside in terms of how nature is happening right now. As long as we just approach duty as assumptions, we are unable, actually, to do our duty.

An interesting question that ought to be asked is, “When all things are not self, then who does the duty?” Is there anybody who's got an answer to this one?

It's the duties of the things which are not self. Whether you understand what we're saying or don't understand is your own business. All these things that are not self, it's their duty. Whatever is hungry has the duty of finding food. Whatever is suffering has the duty of ending suffering. All these things are not self. That doesn't mean there isn't a duty.

When something which is not self is struggling with dukkha, when it's suffering, then it will naturally struggle to get free of that dukkha. Although there's no self there, it just naturally does what it can to get out of dukkha.

Therefore in life there's just body and mind. Body and mind are sufficient for performing all duties. They can take care of all duties as they appear. Even though these things are not self, they

can do all duties. Whenever there is dukkha, then body and mind respond in order to get free of – to eliminate – that dukkha. So even though things are not self, they can do this duty. This point is very important. If we don't understand it, then we'll get confused about everything. We won't know who's supposed to do what, when, or how. But if one just understands the things that are suffering, they have the duty to end suffering although they're all non-self.

When you are hungry, how do you experience it? Do you experience it as 'I am hungry?' Or do you experience it as merely the nerves in the stomach are hungry? Do *you* feel hungry, or is it the stomach and the nervous system which feel hungry? If it's just the stomach and the nervous system there's only a very minor problem or difficulty, but if it's 'I am hungry, I feel hungry,' then you've got a big problem. The nervous system that the stomach feels hunger is totally natural, but ego is something added to nature, something extra and unnecessary.

The purpose of Buddhism is to eliminate the self illusion so that there's just the natural body and mind. Don't take the body to be self, don't take the mind to be self. There's just this body existing naturally. And then the mind is mindful, and there is intelligence and wisdom in order to respond to things properly. So one shouldn't take the body as being self. One shouldn't take the nervous system that feels and senses things as being self. And the mind shouldn't be taken as self. When none of these are taken to be self, there's just the body and mind left functioning naturally.

Some groups teach that the mind is self, or that some aspect or function of mind is self, so they end up with three things – the body, the mind, and then the self or soul or whatever it's called. But Buddhism doesn't teach that way. In Buddhism there's just the body and the mind – we don't see anything about the mind that can be taken as self. So in Buddhism there's only body and mind responding naturally with mindfulness and wisdom to all these situations and experiences of life. However there are some who claim to be Buddhist and teach in some way or another that mind is self or some aspect of mind is self. What they've done is they've borrowed a teaching from outside of Buddhism and dragged it into Buddhism. So things in some places are getting very confused because there are people teaching that mind or some aspect of mind is self. This is incorrect. In Buddhism there is just body and mind. There's no need for any third thing or any self or soul.

So to understand Buddhism, one must understand *anattā*, or not self. This is the only way to understand Buddhism properly. Otherwise one will sneak in some kind of self, and then it's no longer Buddhism. So you need to study for yourself, to experience for yourself, no longer relying on books or somebody else's word, that when there is *attā* (self), then there will be concern for *attā*, and this is selfish. When there is self, there's only concern for the self, and this is what is meant by selfishness. This must be seen by oneself, realized in one's own experience.

Our lesson here is to not to let the feeling or illusion of self arise. We call this 'doing without a doer.' Do everything that needs to be done, but don't let the 'doer' get involved. You walk here without needing any 'walker' and after the talk you can walk back without a 'walker.' To do things without a 'doer' is totally correct in line with nature and the Law of Nature. This isn't some kind of show or game or pretense. We're not just pretending to do it, but to do it is fully correct and in harmony with nature.

It's quite funny, we can do anything without a 'doer,' we can walk without a 'walker,' stand without a 'stander,' sit without a 'sitter,' eat without an 'eater,' breathe without a 'breather,' bathe without a 'bather,' think without a 'thinker.' We listen without a 'listener.' We can do everything without any 'doer.' There's no need for an *attā*, a self, as we do the required activities of life. The thought that there is someone who's doing the activity, to identify the 'doer,' this is the basis for selfishness.

❖ *“Sometimes when I think about all the big problems in the world, it seems like we're kind of heading toward Armageddon – extinction of mankind. Is this just paranoia or are we really in trouble this time? And how does Armageddon fit into the whole Buddhist view?”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

We must ask when there's no self, who is Armageddon going to happen to? So we make ourselves free of self, then there's nothing to be afraid of Armageddon, then there's no paranoia. We call this liberation or emancipation – the mind, the heart, is liberated from the prison that we have erected. Because we feel there's a self, we feel afraid, and that's when we're afraid of Armageddon, only because of self.

The translator then asks, “What should you do about the worsening world situation?” and the teacher's reply was, “Don't have a self. When there's no self, where will there be a problem?”

❖ *“I'm a little more confused now when you talk about getting rid of the self. The way I saw it before is, though you rid yourself of the self, you are still a part of this world, and things in the world still affect you. As such, it seems that things like war or the destruction of the environment will still affect the aggregates that compose an individual. Though you do not have a self, the first duty to survive is threatened, and these problems must be addressed.”* ❖

~ Response by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu ~

Yes, there seems to be some confusion about not self. The thing to understand is that with the body in contact with the world, feelings arise, perceptions and evaluations about those feelings and experiences take place, there's thinking about all that, and there's the basic sense consciousness to which we are aware of things – all of these are not self. These five natural functions of a human being are all not self. When none of these are taken to be a basis of self – when there's no ignorant clinging to the body, the feelings, the perceptions, the thinking, and consciousness as being self – then there's no problem. When there's no self, there's no basis on which to set up or build the problem. This is the first thing to understand. This is what Buddhism

is about – how to eliminate the foundation for the problem by recognizing that the five *khandhas* are not self.

Because we understand incorrectly, because we act improperly, we go and take this body and mind to be self. In fact, the body and mind are the five aggregates, are just nature, but through our wrong actions we take them more and more to be self. Then when there's this self, there is selfishness. When there's a self, we act selfishly, and this creates all the problems in the world. But when we understand that all of these things are just nature, and stop clinging to any of them as being 'me' and 'mine,' when we recognize that it's just nature, it's not ours, it's nature's, then there's no self and no selfishness. And when there's no selfishness, there won't be any war. There's only war because of our selfishness.

So the fact that the five *khandhas* are not self is the essence of Buddhism, whether Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, or whatever. The heart of every school of Buddhism is that the five *khandhas* are not self. The five *khandhas* are void of self and belonging to self. So please investigate these, study, train in them, and then you will understand Buddhism. There's just this body, and in the body there are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the sense of touch on the skin. There's this nervous system, and when it's stimulated then there is consciousness, and then we feel – there are feelings, positive and negative feelings arising towards experience – and then we perceive or we recognize and evaluate those experiences as being positive and negative, and then we think about how to get the positive things and how to get rid of the negative things. There're these five *khandhas*, these naturally occurring functions, and they just happen naturally. It's the nature of these kinds of bodies in this kind of world, and all of them are not self. You ought to study these carefully and deeply, and then you will understand Buddhism. You'll be able to live with five *khandhas* but without a self. The more you study them, the more you'll see that in the five *khandhas* there is dependent origination, there is the stream of dependent origination. If the five *khandhas* function with ignorance, then they dependently originate dukkha. But if the five *khandhas* function with mindfulness and wisdom, they don't turn into dukkha.

To study this you don't need books or teachers or anything. You just study it within one's own body with one's own mindfulness and intelligence. But because you don't know *how* to study it, you have to go looking for books and teachers to explain to you how to study the fact that the five *khandhas* are not self. If you knew how to study this, you wouldn't have to come to Thailand, you wouldn't have to come to Suan Mokkh, you wouldn't have to go to India, or wherever. If one knows how to study the five *khandhas*, one doesn't have to go to any of these places looking for books, teachers, and so on. But because you don't know how to do this, then you have to come to places like this. So please learn how to learn! Learn how to learn that the five *khandhas* are not self, and then you won't have to spend so much time reading books.

Please study the five *khandhas* within yourself. There's this body and its nervous system, and when the nervous system is stimulated, consciousness arises. When consciousness arises, there's seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mental experiences. And there's feeling about these experiences, and then perceptions, conceptions, thinking. This is all happening within the mind. This is all happening within ourselves. So the classroom in which to study this is in our own minds. The lesson is in our own minds.

If one knows how to learn, then one doesn't have to go reading books, finding teachers, enrolling in universities, and all the other things that are popular these days. The Buddha insisted that the place to learn is in these bodies, these six-foot-long bodies, together with consciousness and experience. But you don't have to believe the Buddha. You can just find it out for yourself and you'll know for yourself that it's all happening in here, and so one has to study it in here rather than in books or in lectures or whatever. So learn this inside, learn this within. It's not necessary to read lots of books.

We call this 'nature seeing things for itself.' Nature is understanding things itself. There doesn't have to be a student or a learner or a see-er who understands these things – it's nature is understanding it all for itself. So there's the studying, the investigating, the learning, the experiencing. All of this happens naturally. Nature does all this. There's no self to take the credit.

The word *aeṅg* is very important. *Aeṅg* can be translated 'self,' but it's just a grammatical form, the reflective when you say 'myself, yourself.' It's that meaning of 'self' – 'oneself.' This is very important that one studies within oneself. One studies by oneself. One studies for the benefit of oneself, for the highest benefit. So this 'oneself' is very important. It must be in oneself, by oneself, for oneself.

The first stage is to look, to look within oneself. And if one looks, then one sees, one sees oneself. But if you don't know how to look, of course you won't see, but by looking within, one sees. If one can't look, one doesn't see. Then after seeing, one understands the thing one sees. So there's looking, seeing, understanding. The fourth is to investigate and analyze the thing that is seen. And the fifth is to know what should be done, and then finally to do it. When you know what needs to be done then just do it correctly and the problem is over.

So this is the meaning of the word 'study,' or '*seuk saa*' in Thai (the Pāli word is *sikkhā*) in Buddhism: to look within, with oneself, look within oneself and then see. And by seeing then one comes to understand, and then the thing understood is analyzed, investigated to know what to do about it, and then we do that, and problems are finished. In Buddhism, study has these five stages and they all happen within oneself. So the meaning is that all five of these must be by oneself, through oneself, with oneself. The school, the lesson, and the examination are all within oneself. We teach ourselves, we test ourselves, we even grade ourselves. We examine ourselves, we test ourselves, and we grade or judge ourselves.

All of this is for a single result – the one result of knowing that it's all *anattā*, that all these things are not self. If one asks, "What does Buddhism learn?," Buddhism learns that all things are not self. Without any exception, everything is not self. When there's no *atta*, no self, then there's no selfishness. Problems disappear. When there's no selfishness, there's no war, there's no pollution, there's no crime, or any of all the complicated and terrible problems confronting modern society. If there isn't selfishness, none of these problems would exist.

Even the problem of drug abuse and drug addiction, as well as some of the very nasty diseases which are killing many people, all of these exist solely because of selfishness. Because people go

and do things they shouldn't be doing, then these problems develop because of the selfishness of people.

You can see that when we have ended our own problems, then we can help others to end their problems. To look in the other direction, which is quite saddening, that the more development there is, the more selfishness. The more progress and civilization there is, the more selfishness. And then with the problems as our societies progress and develop, there's more and more selfishness. As the selfishness grows and grows, then there are bigger and bigger problems, but we call it 'development' and 'progress' and 'civilization.'

The more one learns, the more clever one is. The more we learn, the more clever we become, and the more clever, the more selfish. All our learning nowadays is increasing the selfishness because our education is incorrect. All it does is engender and support more and more selfishness. We need to rearrange, we need to redo the education we've got so that it doesn't just increase selfishness.

Why not study Dhamma? Why not learn about Dhamma? The more one understands Dhamma, then the less selfishness there is. The more one understands Dhamma, one is free of self, and then there's no basis for selfishness. And when there's no selfishness, the problems are gone like that. The problem is really very small – it's just this one little thing. Because of illusion there is self, and because of self there is selfishness. The problem is right there. You can try and make it all complicated with lots of theories, but the real problem is just this one little thing.

If we look at another kind of truth, or another truth, the world is developing with selfishness. The world is developing true selfishness. The employers are selfish, the employees are selfish. We used to say the communists were selfish and the capitalists were selfish, but there aren't so many communists anymore, but the capitalists are still selfish.

In our universities the professors are selfish and the students are selfish. Now the doctors are selfish, the teachers are selfish, the judges are selfish. And then what about in congress where they're supposedly serving the country? Can you tell us there's no selfishness in the congress or the administration, which is always acting in the interests of the people? Of course it's even worse in congress and in the administration – the selfishness is even more rampant.

And so the war that is happening today is happening solely because of selfishness. If it wasn't for selfishness there wouldn't be a war. And it requires the selfishness of both sides. It's not that one side is selfish and the other isn't; it's that both sides are selfish. It takes two selfish sides to make a war.

One's selfishness might be too good. If they curse us, we don't curse back. If they hit us, we don't hit back. If they attack us, we don't attack back. But that might be too good. So it's about time that we have peace by being unselfish. It's about time that we had some peace in this world.

We've been talking for more than two hours. We ask to call it quits at this point. Thank you for being good listeners. So walk back to wherever you're staying without a 'walker.' Wherever you're walking, walk back without a 'walker.' Do everything without a 'doer,' and then there

will be peace, at least a little peace in this world. And then you'll see for yourself whether this is correct, and you won't have to believe anyone. We ask your permission to end today's meeting.

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