

Dhamma Helps Develop Life to the Highest Level

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular talks during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

All of you who are interested in Dhamma, I'd like to express my appreciation that you have come here in this way – that is for the purpose of discovering Dhamma.

I'd like to spend a little time considering how it is that this time is the most appropriate for exploring the Dhamma.

Most flowers bloom or open in the very early morning and in the same way, this is the good time for our hearts to open and bloom. Later in the day, we are so busy, so occupied, there are so many things going around in our minds that it's like our teacup is filled or even overflowing. But early in the morning our teacup isn't yet full, there's still room to pour in a little something new. This is why we've chosen this time of day as the most appropriate for discussing and investigating Dhamma.

Another thing was observing is that the Buddha awakened or was enlightened at this time of day.

It's time for us to develop an understanding of what studying Dhamma is about, what the reason and purpose for studying Dhamma is, so that life would be developed to its highest degree or highest potential. This development of life is what studying Dhamma is about.

You must be certain about certain things. You must be certain that Dhamma is the thing which will develop life or which can develop our lives. Second, we

must be certain that life can be developed. And further, you must be certain that life can be developed to the highest level or to the supreme level what we could call ‘the supreme life.’ It’s important for us to be certain about these things so that we are truly committed and motivated so that we have a strong appetite for studying and practicing Dhamma.

Life has been given to us by ‘Nature’ or if you prefer by ‘God’ as our basic stakes or capital. Life itself is our basic capital and then we work with that capital by developing life. It’s like a businessman will invest his capital in order to earn a profit. In the same way, we develop life so that our life is profitable, is worthwhile otherwise life is wasted. If we are unable to turn a profit on our basic investment of life then we wasted our lives. We just wander around aimlessly, not doing anything worthwhile or having benefited or learnt from being a human being.

When we talk of a highest life or supreme life here, what we mean is a life that is above and beyond all problems. When life is filled, immersed in or caught up in problems then there are all these things that need to be dealt with in [?? 4.50]. But when life has been developed to a level that it is a highest level, it’s above all problems. It’s freed from the problems of ordinary, worldly existence.

What are the problems, what are the things that disturb and hassle our hearts, we should observe the fact and the activity of the influence of all the different dualistic things, all the things which come in pairs such as positive and negative and see that these are the things that disturb the mind. These disturb the mind and because of that disturbance, there is pain or suffering what we call *dukkha*.

When we say that both the positive and negative are problems equally, it is often difficult for people to understand and to accept. We can try to make this a little more clear by saying that both gladness and sadness are equally problems for us. If we examine gladness, we’ll see that gladness is not peaceful just as much as sadness is not peaceful. If we observe them carefully, we will see that neither gladness nor sadness is peaceful therefore they are considered problems which disturb us. This is easier to see when we genuinely seek peace in life then we start to notice the things that interfere with the truly peaceful life.

Or to put it in terms that children can understand, we can say that both laughing and crying are equally painful. When we laugh, it tires us and crying tires us. Laughter – it’s exciting, stimulating. Crying is exciting and stimulating. Both laughter and tears stimulate, confuse and tire us. They’re equally problems. Both of these are too much, they are too much trouble. They are not

worth the trouble. So we can say that both laughing and crying are problems. If then one begins to want to be free when one definite, clearly-defined desires freedom then one sees that one can't be free until one is free or beyond both crying and laughing.

Crying bites our hearts. Laughter also bites our hearts just as much as crying does. Any kind of loving bites our hearts; not loving equally bites our hearts. The thing is to be beyond both loving and not loving, to be free of this duality – of loving and not loving. The problem is nowadays however we worship the positive. We worship our life that dedicated to bigger, better, to more and more positive ideas and attainments. We fall in love with things because of our addiction to the positive. And because of our mad scramble after the positive, we build the world that is full of problems – social, environmental, sexual and otherwise. We got so many problems that we're unable to solve them because of our infatuation with the positive. The way to make the beginning of dealing with all the problems we created is to let go of the positive, to drop or outgrow our obsessions, our addictions with the positive in order to be free and only from a position of freedom or a non-position of freedom, can we begin to respond properly and wisely to the chaos of modern life.

To put it even more simply, we can say that what we are after is life where we neither need to fight nor flee, life whether neither struggle nor running away. Some people would wonder if we don't fight – how can we succeed? How can we win? We need to point out that winning or victory is yet another aspect of the positive. It's another positive thing that we cling to. Winning is just the opposite of losing and to be free, we need to be free of both of them. So what we are after is being free of both winning and losing. If we win, we get caught up and trap in that. If we lose – we're losing is the opposite where the struggle is too much for us, the fighting overwhelms us and then we lose. Either way – winning or losing, fighting or fleeing is not worth the trouble. Neither winning nor losing is peaceful. No peace can be found in winning nor can be found in losing. So we're looking for something that is beyond both winning and losing where we let go of both winning and losing.

Another important pair is good and evil. If we're going to attach to either good or evil, they'll bite us in thoughts. To cling to the good, bites and hassles us just as much as clinging to the bad. To cling to the good creates all kinds of confusion and chaos just as much as clinging to the bad, clinging to evil does. We think that clinging to good is better than clinging to evil but we overlook that the results are equally chaotic and equally unpeaceful. So to really understand what Dhamma is about, to be clear about the purpose of studying

and practicing Dhamma, we need to understand that clinging to good and clinging to evil are both hassles, clinging to either one creates problems and that the thing is, to be free of both, to let go of both good and evil.

This kind of wisdom has been known to humanity for thousands of years. It's nothing new. For example, in the Far West of Asia – in Palestine, the Jews understood this. In their early pages of the Old Testament of the Bible, there's a passage where God forbids Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. God warned them not to eat this Fruit of Knowing good and evil or that they would die. So here in the early pages of the Old Testament, it's very clear that being under the influence of good and evil leads to spiritual death. Then on the other side of Asia, in the Far East of Asia in China, Lao Tzu – the first person to teach Taoism, taught to not get caught up in *yin & yang*, to not attach to *yin & yang*. Here again, *yin & yang* include in symbolize all the dualities such as positive and negative, good & evil, male & female and so on. And the message then is the same, not to cling to good & evil. Then in the middle of Asia, in India where both the Hindu and Buddhist tradition began, we find the same message. In Hindu – the old Hindu tradition expressed in terms of *punya & pāpa*. *Punya & pāpa*, is essentially the same, merit & sin or virtue & sin or good & evil again. In Buddhism, the preferred terms are *kusala & akusala* – 'wholesome & unwholesome,' the way they use to translate it. But it comes down once again to good & evil, positive & negative. The human race has discovered this wisdom thousands of years ago. That is we cling to good & evil. If our minds are trapped, are influenced by good & evil then it will create pain. It makes existence painful, miserable. It causes *dukkha*. This knowledge has been with us for thousands of years.

So how are things nowadays? What is our situation these days? It seems quite clear that, nowadays, modern humanity worships the positive far more than even before in human history, far more than primitive humanity that still lived in forest and hills. We, nowadays, worship the positive so much that we spend all of our time doing things that will make us happy, that will make us laugh. Our goal in life is just to find pleasure and to do things to make us laugh, to be entertained. This is what we take to be important in the modern world. And so we created industrial system, technologies and economies that are designed to produce consumer products. A lot of money, energy, and technologies and resources go into producing things which has the sole purpose of bringing us pleasure and entertaining us, of making us laugh and we worship these things. So nowadays our situation is that we live in the world dominated by the positive. We're bound down and worship the positive. Whatever we take

to be positive, we seek after it. And the result of that is the tremendous competition that afflicts our modern society, people whose whole life dedicated to struggling and competing for these things that entertain and amuse us. We fight and struggle so that now there are all sorts of conflicts on all level of society and between nations. There's always a new war erupting somewhere because of this struggling competition for what we worship as positive. Although we blindly pursue the positive with such great effort, the result is that we are always immersed in the negative because we don't understand how this works. We keep chasing after the positive and bring the negative down upon us. We want the positive but we keep ending up with all kinds of negative things and experiences. This is our modern situation. Because we don't understand the situation we are in, we worship all these technologies and industry. We even worship and honor the fighting competition. We think that the chaos and the excitement is the meaning of life. Because we don't understand the situation we're in, we then create more and more a society of conflict, of injustice and of abuse of other human beings, other life forms and nature. Because of our lack of understanding, we worship the positive and have got into these kinds of situation. It's important to understand of the root causes of the problem we created which we are going to begin to solve them. All of these things are result of us worshipping the positive far too much, far too excessively.

Most children as well as most adults when they hear these words that we need to be above both positive and negative, when they hear these words, they'll think we are crazy. Most adults, when they hear this, think that we are abnormal – we are talking about something abnormal, weird or crazy. This is because we've been trained, programmed or you could even say brainwashed since we are young that we need to be successful. We need to achieve, to attain, to get whatever they take to be good or positive. We're taught this way from when we are very young and so we're totally biased or locked into that way of thinking. So when we hear someone saying that the real way to live, the wise way to live is to be above the positive just as much as we need to be above the negative. Everybody can understand why we need to be free of the negative, of evil but we need to see that we just as much need to be free of the positive. So to really get anywhere or before we go any further, you need to be very clear – is what we're talking about crazy or not? Is what we are saying sane and healthy or is it stupid and crazy? This is something you need to find out very quickly.

Most people believe that religion teaches us to get the best thing there is in life, to achieve the *summum bonum* or the utmost goodness. Most people understand that religion is to realize, achieve, get the highest good – the

summum bonum. But if we examine all the true religious teachings carefully with sensitivity, then we'll see things differently. For example, the Jewish tradition from which arose both the Christian tradition and Islamic tradition makes very clear in the very first pages of their scriptures that God commanded all humanity to be free of good and evil, to not eat of that fruit, to be beyond the influence of good and evil. The same happened in the Far East with Lao Tzu and in India with Hinduism and Buddhism. The old Brahman teachings and in the later Hindu teachings teach that if we let go of both *punya* & *pāpa* – both good & evil then we can merge in the eternal soul. One can realize the eternal soul. Buddhism teaches that by letting go of all positive & negative – all wholesome & unwholesome things that that is Nibbāna – perfect peace, coolness. All these traditions therefore teach transcending, getting, being released from positive & negative, from good & evil. There is not one genuine religion that teaches us to cling to the good, to seek only the good or the highest good.

So, please hold to the teaching from the Bible that said, don't eat the fruit of the tree that causes us to know good and evil. This teaching is most profound, please take it very seriously. It teaches us not to classify or regard anything as good or evil. Any event or experience in your life, anything that comes into your life, don't label it, classify it or regard it as being good or evil. Instead just ask yourself what to do about it? How to respond to it? How to cope with it? When something happens in life, everything that happens in life, just look at the causes and conditions of things. Where does it come from? What are its circumstances, its causes? And then ask what should we do about it? How do we respond? That's all. That's all we need to do. Don't let good and evil, positive and negative get in the way or confused things. Thinking that this is good and that is bad, would just mess things up. All we need to know is what is going on, how it happens and what we ought to do about it. This is the meaning, the significant of the most profound teaching in the Bible. Since most of you come from a Christian culture and background, it should be easier for you to understand then – the Buddhist formulation of things, especially those who are committed Christians. Please take Christianity to its highest degree and put this first teaching of God into practice. Then you'll be a true Christian and once you're a true Christian, you're automatically be a true Buddhist at the same time because this teaching is both the heart of Christianity and the heart of Buddhism. Don't eat the fruit of the tree that causes us to know good and evil.

Don't waste your time try to strike a balance between good and evil. Just try to balance them will be a hopeless and not at all rewarding task or don't try to

just stay in the middle between good and evil. That would never work and you just find yourself being burnt at both end. The way to deal with good and evil is to go beyond both of them instead of be between them or try to balance them, be above them both, be beyond both good and evil. This is where one can find freedom, peace and meaning in life. To come to study the Dhamma, to practice Dhamma, one needs to have this understanding.

If there is anybody who thinks that being beyond good and evil, being above positive and negative that this has no meaning. That is abnormal. That is lifeless or boring or that is crazy. Anyone who thinks like that, there is really not any reason for you to be here. There is no point in us talking about things because there is no common ground and there is not really much point in trying to practice Dhamma if one doesn't see any value, doesn't see the importance of being beyond both good and evil. That's why we're taking the time to discuss this in some detail.

Some of our friends who are Christian tell us that God is the utmost good, the highest good and we tell them – no, that's impossible. If there is really a God, God must be beyond good – if you are going to call it 'God.' If God is merely the highest good or the utmost good, there is no way that that could be a real God. It's just another pigment of human imagination. For something that is deserved the name God, it must be beyond good but they can't accept this. They insisted that God is the utmost good and so in the end, we don't have much to talk about because there's no room for understanding.

Some people wonder what value or benefit there is in a life which is beyond both positive and negative, beyond, above both good and evil. They think what good is it. We will insist that this life itself is the supreme life – that the true meaning of life is being beyond and above both good and evil. This is what we talk about now.

The life that is free of both good and evil is the highest life, when we speak of the highest life, it must have two characteristics or qualities. First of all, it must be *blissful* and second, it must be *useful*. For life to deserve the adjective – highest, to call it the highest or the supreme life, it must be both blissful and useful. And the only way for life to be both blissful and useful is for it to be free of the power of good and evil, to be beyond the influence of good and evil.

If we are still clinging to positive and negative, if good and evil still have influence over us, there is no way that life can be blissful. As long as we worship the positive then we fall into liking and loving things. We are full of prejudices. Life is off balance, always tending to this one extreme and so there

is no peace. As long as we worship being the positive, there will be no peace in our life and without peace, there is no bliss. Genuine bliss comes only from genuine peace. So for as long as we're infatuated with the positive or the negative, there's no way that we can have bliss in our life.

The feeling of positive and negative, feeling that this is positive, that is negative – this is the fundamental cause of all selfishness. When we cling to the positive or to good then we are selfish in a good way. What people think is good selfishness. When we cling to the negative, when we attach to bad, to evil then we are selfish in an evil way. But either way, it is selfishness. Whenever we are under the power of positive or negative, it leads to some forms of selfishness. We need to understand this so that we can transcend selfishness, egoism, self-centeredness by being free of both positive and negative.

Whenever we feel the positive about something, we like it, we find satisfaction in it. And whenever there is this liking, this satisfaction, it turns into selfishness. This is not something that you need to be told by anyone else. It's something that is quite obvious and clear that each of us can know for ourselves that whenever we feel positive about something, we start to like it. We start to be satisfied by it. And from that, comes the kind of selfishness which is most difficult to understand – selfishness of the good kind, a good kind of selfishness. It's hard for us to understand. When we're clinging to the good, this is just coming from the sense of what is positive, what makes us feel good, what satisfies us. We got this idea that is good – is good but really what happening is, we are being selfish about our own ideas, about what makes us feel good. So we don't think of others at all. We are incredibly insensitive to others. We have no concern for what is correct, what is appropriate, what is fit in. We are just selfish, egoistic according to what is positive, what seems good to us. Because of this, we worship the positive. We love the good. We obsess with what we take to be positive and good and what that means, is that our lives are full of selfishness whether we want to admit that or not. As long as we're caught in the positive then there's a whole lot of selfishness going on in our lives.

Observe that positive things enslave us. When we feel positive about something, see how it enslaves us. It transits into a certain kind of selfishness. In fact, the positive or the good enslaves us far more than the negative and the evil. Of course when we cling to the negative, it will entrap us, enslave us also. But the positive, the good has much more power to enslave us. We should observe this. So in the end, both the positive and the negative, both good and evil enslave us. They dominate us. They run our life.

We should consider how this begins. It's instructive to study children, newborn especially. The newborn infant is born and soon after tastes milk, suppose from its mother breast. That milk tastes good; feel positive for the infant and the infant's mind, not knowing any better – attaches to that positive. And then later it tastes something else, something bitter or whatever and it considers that to be negative, comparing it with what it's attached to its positive. And so very quickly, the infant is caught into positive and negative – liking the positive, disliking the negative. This way of discriminating experience, this way of thinking and reacting grow and develop further and further until we are adult who worship the positive and hate the negative. In many ways very violently, our mind is going from worship to hatred. This is a development we can easily understand of how we get inflame to positive and negative. This is just one example of what happen with young children in their development.

When life is dominated and run by the positive and the negative, when the positive and the negative are pushing in, pulling out here and there, all over the place, there's no way that such a life can be blissful or useful. In order to live a life that is truly blissful and useful then we must eliminate the positive and the negative. We must let go of the positive and the negative and live a life that is beyond them.

When you come here to study the Dhamma and to practice meditation, it is solely for the purpose of living life above and beyond positive and negative. What we are learning and what we are practicing have solely this purpose. Now even if you aren't able to do this completely in the time that you're here, you should be able to understand well enough what needs to be done and how to do it. So that after you leave, you can keep developing your understanding and practicing it in your life. So that one day, eventually, one's life is freed of positive and negative. This is the purpose in coming here. So we hope that your study and practice will enable you to know what you need to do and how to do it so that your life can be developed as high as possible until it is beyond positive and negative, good and evil.

So even if you came here as a tourist, you came to Thailand and then Suan Mokkh as a tourist, may you leave as a pilgrim – a pilgrim that carries in your backpack the knowledge and wisdom of how to live free of good and evil.

There are two matters of importance here – the first is to know what is going on, to know what is happening in life, to understand the basic fact of our existence, of how positive and negative arise, how we attach to them, how this creates liking and disliking and leads to selfishness and then all of our problems

follow from that. This is the first matter to understand how all that works. Then the second matter is, to deal with them, to practice in the right way so that we can get free of all that positive and negative, all the reacting and attaching associated with it. Even if we understand all these business of positive and negative attaching to it and so on, it doesn't mean we are able to get free of it. So the second matter is, knowing how to practice, to get free, to cope with this addiction to positive and negative. So there are these two basic things to discover here. We'll do what we can to help you to understand this. So first we must all study the law of dependent origination which explains how positive and negative arise and how that turns into... how that... [?? 46.15] attachment that turns into selfishness which creates all the problems, all the hassle, all the pain and misery in life. We need to understand that and then we need to know how to practice *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing). So that through this kind of meditation, we develop the ability to get free of the positive and negative. These are the things that we try to help you with here. These are the two necessary things that we need to understand. To understand here means that we know what is happening, what to do about it and how to do it.

It probably won't be possible to be one hundred percent successful in what we're talking about within only ten days. It's doubtful that anybody can complete this within ten days but it is possible to know what needs to be done and how, so that we can continue working on it. If we understand what it is – what mindfulness with breathing is and we know how to do it then we can continue developing our minds until one day we are able to transcend positive and negative. Probably nobody can do this within ten days but if we learn here what to do and then we work upon it consistently and if we keep trying then one day we can do it. What we are all trying to do here is to pull ourselves out of slavery to positive and negative, to pull us out from the selfishness, to free ourselves from the selfishness that arises due to positive and negative. We hope that you can understand what need to be done so that you can work on this until you are fully successful.

You won't be able to know anything completely just by studying it. The kind of knowledge that comes from what we call 'study' will never be complete. It's a start but to make our understanding complete, whole and sufficient, we need to practice. It's through practice that understanding really blossoms and becomes sufficient to solve our problems. So we begin by discussing, by listening in order that we have the kind of understanding and knowledge that comes from study but then we must practice. We must put that study knowledge into practice so that the knowledge is fully understood, so that

the fact, the reality are truly known, then we are successful. So we begin with study but then we take that study and put it into practice.

Now even the study must be more profound than it usually happens. To just study from talks or books is not to really study something. To really study is to study something in its reality. Instead of just reading words and ideas, theories in the book, study these things in life itself, study their reality of things as they actually happen. It means not even study from memory, from what happen last year but to study from what is happening now – today. This is what it means to truly study something, to study things in themselves not in the ideas and theories. This is the kind of study that goes together with practice, when we put something into practice then we have the opportunity to study it in this way. It means to study in our own life, in our own experience now. What is positive? What is negative? How do they arise? How do we cling to the positive? How do we cling to the negative? How does this positive bite us? How does the positive turn to a mad dog that bites us? How this negative become a rabid dog that bites us? How does this lead to selfishness? What is that selfishness like? What does that selfishness do to life? What kind of life do we lead when at the center of life is selfishness, self-centeredness, egoism? What are the results of all these? What kind of world does it make? To study this, is to study it in our own life, in our own experience as it unfolds. This is how to really study something.

In Buddhism, the thing which is considered to be the worst, the most evil, the ugliest, the most disgusting, the most sinful, the most satanic is selfishness – the selfishness which comes from attaching to positive and negative.

The one who has selfishness gets bit, suffers because of that selfishness. The one who is selfish suffered for it and then when there is selfishness; it also reaches out to bite others, harms others and makes them suffered. Selfishness harms and bites both the one who is selfish and the one around that person. This is why we consider selfishness to be the most wicked, evil, ugly, sinful and dangerous thing there is. We need to work together to eliminate selfishness in ourselves. When there is no selfishness in us then we are blissful. And to work together to eliminate selfishness in others, this is what it is to be useful. When we can eliminate selfishness both in ourselves and in others then our lives are both blissful and useful.

Selfishness arises instinctually in human beings. In children, we taste something and it is delicious. We taste something else and it is not delicious. It tastes bad. Then that ordinary positive and negative get attached to it and selfishness arises regarding what taste good and what taste bad. It happens

instinctually in young children but then the kind of societies we have, the kind of educations we have – our economies, our cultures – surround children with all kinds of things to trip them into more and more selfishness. Our world is full of things which are designed to make us greedy and selfish, to make us hateful and prejudice and so this basic instinctual selfishness is developed. It is surrounded and encouraged to grow and grow. So as we grow older, we are more and more selfish. Our lives are more firmly established in selfishness. So there are two kinds of selfishness: there is the ‘instinctual’ and then there is the ‘learnt’ or the cultivated, the acculturated selfishness.

The more we sustain lives on positive things the more selfish we become. The more we depend on positive things the more our lives depend on or are conditioned by selfishness. So we need to be very careful about all this. We need to be careful in how we live, what we use to keep ourselves alive and all that. So that we don’t get so trap and enslave by positiveness.

Our world is getting closer to destruction or at least to some kind of holocaust and more, greater and greater tragedies because selfishness is growing very rapidly in our world. Just study the newspaper a little bit and you will see that is full of examples of selfishness being valued more and more – that being more and more attached, the world is more and more fighting over thing that is valued. And selfishness is justified, supported, encouraged, even honored, worshipped more and more in this world. And for this reason, the tragedies, the injustices are getting worst and worst and our world is getting closer to its own destruction.

The capitalists are selfish. The workers, the labors are selfish. The employers are selfish. The employees are selfish. The governments are selfish. The citizens are selfish. This is the problem. This is the crisis that is confronting us in our modern world – unlimited selfishness abounding everywhere. Because of our great material advancement or development, life is more and more dependent on the positive. So people are more and more selfish in competing to get, to have, to keep these material goods and all the things that we consider to be positive. This is unmitigated selfishness. As it grows, it’s confronting us with greater and greater dangers. This is the problem that faces us. This is our challenge that needs to be met and found – what to do about all these selfishness.

The more material advancement, the more industrial and technical development there is the more selfish we become. The more selfish we become the more problems there are in life. The more we create all these positive things

to chase after, to possess, the more we become selfish. The more that selfishness dominates and determines our lives the more that our lives bite itself and the more our lives bite others. In this world of great selfishness each life is biting itself, gnawing on itself and it is biting and tormenting others at the same time. This is the problem of selfishness. We need to understand this and then learn to control our material advancement. This technological development needs to be brought under control so that it doesn't foster selfishness as it does now. We need to learn how to deal with, how to master development: material, technological, scientific development so that it doesn't create more and more selfishness.

We need to know ourselves well and more and more correctly from day to day.

We need to understand ourselves much more deeply. We can see that there are two kinds of people in the world. Everybody is basically a body and a mind. All of us are essentially body and mind. But one group of people has something extra. They have the third thing, namely selfishness. So for some people, there is body, mind and selfishness. But then there is another group where there is just body and mind and no selfishness. This is the group that doesn't have any problem. This is the group that lives and is peace. So the problem is, not having a body and mind and that we are all the same, the problem is selfishness. Where there is the third thing in those people life is biting itself and biting others. But where there is just the natural body and mind, all that is necessary for life, then there is no problem. We need to observe more carefully until we understand what life is and to see where the problem lies.

Selfishness comes from the feeling that one is or has a 'self.' Selfishness comes from a sense of ego or from egoism at the center of our lives. When we conceive of or attach to life as having a 'self' or being a 'self,' that egoism leads to selfishness. So we need to examine this illusion of selfishness or the illusion behind selfishness and the illusion that one is a 'self' or one is an ego in order to see that these are warped perspectives – they are twisted way of looking at life. Egoism and selfishness are just a sick way of looking at and understanding life. When we can see this, when we can see the insanity of it then we will be able to find the means to get free of it. But until we see through the illusion of 'self,' we will be daunt and tormented by selfishness. But by understanding that what we take to be a 'self,' what we take to be me and mine is not truly me and mine then we can be free from selfishness.

We need to explore this in reality itself, not just to fool around with philosophy or psychological ideas but to study this in reality itself, in the experiences that life presents. For example, when the eye sees something, notice how we always take it to be 'I' – not the eye in our face but the 'I - ego' sees this or that. When the ears hear the sound, notice how it is always taking it to be '*I* hear a sound.' It's not understood that it is just the nervous system receiving some sensory input and then processing it in a way that suited for the needs of our survival and well-being. But it's always '*I* hear' or instead of when the nose smells some odor, it's '*I* smell' something. When the body is touched, it's '*I am* touched' or '*I* touch.' Even when the mind thinks a thought, it's '*I'm* thinking,' 'it's *my* thinking.' We can study in the basic experiences of life – in seeing, hearing and so on – how ego arises, how the sense of me and mine comes in when they are just the natural functioning of the nervous system, to notice how ego comes in, how the 'self' takes over. And then how, out of that, selfishness arises – to start to notice the kind of twisted thinking of selfishness, how it arises towards our basic experiences. We can study this right here in our own lives, right now.

Take an easy example, when a knife cuts our finger – maybe we're peeling something – and the knife slips and cut our finger. We never experience as the knife cuts a finger. We are all in the experiences that the knife cut 'me' or the knife cut my finger. As soon as ego comes into ..., you know, the knife cut ego. As soon as the ego comes into the experience then what follow is really stupid kind of thinking. Because of the ignorance of this self-thinking, this egoistic thought then we respond in truly foolish way – we get angry at the knife like it's the knife's fault and we throw it or break it or we yell at somebody else in the room's scapegoating now or something. As soon as ego comes in, the thinking that follows is truly stupid. It's very selfish. It can be very destructive. This life abounds with little examples like this. Because the ego is not some lasting entity the way we think it is. The ego is just a twisted perception in the mind. It has no reality beyond that kind of temporarily insanity in the mind. So it's happening over and over again but each time it's transient, it doesn't last very long. So we can start to observe each moment that this sickness occurs, where ego comes in, every [?? 1.07.26] time that egoism, selfishness arises in one form or another. We can observe as it happens and then drops away and it happens again and then it fades away and it happens again. We can watch that as it occurs over and over again each day. To start to understand what ego really is? What the 'self' is? Is there a real 'self'? Or is it just this warp delusion and then to see how as long as the mind functions in terms of ego. Life is full of positive and negative and all that positive and negative is the basis for selfishness. So in just these ordinary

experiences of life, we can explore all these confusion of me and mine, of egoism, of selfishness.

If you've ever seen a child walking carelessly and bump into a chair and then kick the chair, if you ever see these kinds of thing happened. Because the child bumps into the chair and there is pain and then it's my pain – ego arises. And then from this stupidity of seeing the pain or seeing itself as ego, the child also projects ego on the chair. I'm an ego. It's an ego. And then I fight it. The child feels attack by this other ego and so it fights back by kicking. There are plenty of examples like this in ordinary life – how ego arises. Ego wasn't there at the beginning. It just arose when there was the pain. The child didn't like the pain. Ego was born and then there is this struggle, this fighting of one ego against another ego. But what ridiculous about the whole thing is that there is no real ego anywhere. The child is not an ego. The chair is not an ego. This is just an ignorant way of thinking that occurs when we are careless and then all kind of selfishness and fighting, destruction and harm result from them.

So in summary, we need to see that what we take to be ego or 'self', arises just in these different experiences that the ego is not some lasting reality or entity that with us all the time. But it's just a certain kind of thinking that occurs when it is stirred up by certain positive and negative experiences. We need to study these facts of ego – what it is, how it arises, where it goes – so that we see that it's just a delusion. It's an illusion which is the product of delusion. When we see the delusive nature of ego then we understand what we need to know in life. When we see through the illusion of ego then we understand everything in this world – including all Buddhism.

We should be able to see that the actor comes after the action. If we observe how the mind works, you'll see that the actor comes after the action. Children will think this is illogical because we habitually think that there needs to be someone to do something before this something happens. There needs to be an after that there for there to be any action, that how we habitually think about things. But when we actually examine what is going on instead of just believing blindly, we notice that first there is some actions, to do that actions there is some positive or negative that attached to and then the concept of an actor or the ego that acts, is born. When we see this clearly enough, when we realize deeply enough that the actor comes after the action then we have the means to remove 'self,' to get rid of ego. When ego is gotten rid of then there is no selfishness. Life is no longer enslaved to positive and negative. There is no selfishness. Our life is neither self-destructive nor other destructive. This is the means to getting

free, to observe the reality of ego – in seeing that the ego that acts, comes after the action.

The highest truth that Buddhism or that Dhamma wants us to understand is that the ‘self’ is nothing but an ignorant thought in our minds. It has no true reality in itself that what we consider to be ‘self’ or ego or a soul – it’s just an idea in the mind that arises temporarily. That arises in different situations when ignorance is at work. So the ‘self’ is just a product of ignorance. It’s something we imagine to exist although it doesn’t exist anywhere but in our imagination. This is the highest truth, the basic fact of life that Buddhism wants us to understand. For this reason then we study dependent origination so that we see how this illusion of ego occurs and how we buy this lie of ego and then we practice mindfulness with breathing so that we have the means to control this situation, to master it so that we stop falling into this illusion so we stop believing in the illusion of ‘self.’ So by studying dependent origination and practicing mindfulness with breathing, we have the means to free life from all egoism and selfishness. The knowledge, the understanding, the means is available to us all. You come here in order to learn about them. We hope that you understand and will be successful in putting this into practice so that your life can be free of all egoism and all selfishness.

So in short we can say that the life that is egoistic and selfish bites its owner. Any life that is operating with egoism and selfishness will bite its owner. But the life that is free of and beyond ego and selfishness, that life doesn’t bite its owner. When this unselfish, this non-selfish life doesn’t bite itself then life is blissful and that life can be truly useful for the benefit of the world.

Finally, may we express our thanks that you have been very good listener for over two hours. This is the end of the talk. We thank you for listening very patiently.

That’s all for this morning.

May you all be successful in your study and practice. Good bye.

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Transcribed by Nueng (*nuengnai100@icloud.com*) in 2014-2015

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