

# *The Highest Level is Coolness and Usefulness*

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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*In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa 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](http://www.suanmokkh.org) and [www.bia.or.th](http://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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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Listeners, today we will review by considering the phrase –

*‘Life is something which can be developed,’* and then that

*‘The highest life is one which is peaceful and useful.’*

Ordinary life is made out of three things: body, mind, and the thing they call ‘self,’ which is something people think up on their own. The sublime or most excellent life however is made up of only two things: body and mind. There isn’t any of that thing they call ‘self’ or ‘selfishness’ remaining. If we have trouble understanding the meaning of the word ‘self’ then we can speak instead of *avijjā* (ignorance) – not knowing, wrong knowing. We can say this because the ‘self’ arises from ignorance or ignorance is the cause of ‘self,’ therefore the excellent life is one in which there is just body and mind without any ignorance. The mind is purified of ignorance.

When there is no ignorance then there is *vijjā* (right knowing; correct knowing.) When there is no ignorance then there is the knowledge that everything is not-self. Instead of the illusion of ‘self,’ there is the correct understanding of ‘not-self’ and then life is freed of all problems. The ordinary undeveloped life sees everything through the eyes of ignorance, with ignorance (*avijjā*). But the life which has been developed sees everything according to *vijjā* (correct knowing).

Because of this ignorance, all forms of ‘self’ and selfishness are born. Ignorance is the cause of the misunderstanding that there is ‘self,’ that we are ‘self.’ When there is any kind of feeling or emotion and ignorance is in charge then there arise all kinds of thoughts, desires, wills, intentions and actions. And out of this, there arises the idea that if all these things are going on, there must be someone who does it. If there are these activities then there must be an actor, the one who does this action and so out of this ignorance, is born the ‘self,’ the illusion of ‘self.’

You need to study for yourself until you realize within yourself that this thing called ‘self’ always arises after the action, after any feeling, that the ‘self’ always arises after a feeling or an emotion. These feelings and emotions and thoughts and everything else come before the sense of ‘self.’ We need to examine this carefully within our own experience until we realize that then this ‘self’ isn’t some constantly existing thing. It’s just an illusion created out of the mind, created by the mind due to ignorance. We watch carefully then we’ll see that the actor comes after the action. This illusion of an actor comes after the action. If we realize this within our own experience then we have the chance to uproot this ignorance. If you tell this to a little kid, they won’t believe you. You say that the actor comes after the action. They won’t believe that. It goes against the child’s logic. So we must try to explain this to the children – how the illusion of the actor, the one who acts or does, comes after the action or activity. If we do this, if we can actually help the child to understand this then we ourselves will benefit also because we will have understood it more clearly ourselves.

There are many ways to observe this. We can observe it in, for example, we have a nervous system and when the nervous system is stimulated or excited by some visual object then there arises the activity we call ‘seeing.’ This is natural activity of seeing. And then because of ignorance, we’re always interpreted it to be ‘*I see,*’ ‘*I am seeing,*’ the same happen. But if we observe this more and more, we’ll see that this ‘I,’ this ‘me’ that sees, is a concept created by the mind. It’s merely an illusion that doesn’t have any reality in itself. There isn’t any ‘real self’ that exists there. All that exist is a concept created due to the mind’s ignorance. We can observe the working of the nervous system – seeing, hearing, smelling and so on, and we will see that the ‘self,’ the concept of ‘I,’ of ‘me’ is an illusion created after the fact.

Children might ask then, ‘this nervous system, is this the self or does it have a self?’ And we must reply to them – ‘of course not.’ The nervous system is

neither a 'self' nor does it have a 'self.' It's just a natural system that functions naturally according to natural laws. It neither is a 'self' nor has a 'self.'

Or we can take the ear, when some sound waves stimulate the nervous system at the ear then there arises what we call ear consciousness. The mental – knowing that the ear is stimulated. The physical stimulation stimulates the mind and the mind is conscious of some sounds. This just happens naturally. The sound waves, the nervous system are naturally existing things. Consciousness arises naturally. It's just how things work. But because of ignorance, we're going to misinterpret that consciousness as being 'I' – '*I hear, I am hearing.*' Instead of there's just being natural hearing, ignorance adds the concept of 'self.'

It works the same way with the other senses as well, for example: the nose – the nervous system at the nose is stimulated by various volatile gases or smells and then the tongue is stimulated by tastes, flavors on the taste buds – in both cases, just the natural reactions of the world against our nervous system.

Then we come to the most important of all, the sense of touch – the sense of touch in our skin, throughout our body. This one is very important because it's being stimulated constantly and some of these stimulations are quite powerful. The positives and negatives felt by our body, by the sense of touch can be very powerful and are often extremely attractive. So when the sense of touch is stimulated in some way or another then very easily, ignorance arises – '*I am touched.*' '*I am touching.*' Through ignorance, the illusion of 'self' can come into all of the senses. They are all the same in that they work naturally and if ignorance takes over then all of them will be, in each case, the concept of 'self' will arise.

Now we come to the most important sense of all – the sixth one, the inner one. From the five outer senses send their information or their... whatever to the inner sense, the mind or the heart, and as soon as the heart or mind receives some sense input from the other senses then there are feelings. The mind thinks. It interprets and it does all kind of things. As soon as the inner sense, the mind, experiences, ordinarily there arises the sense of an experiencer – the one who experiences. You can observe this for yourself because in most cases this is what happens to us, to ordinary people that whenever there is an experience, we create the concept of an experiencer. There's feeling. There is the one who feels. There is thought. There is the thinker. Out of all these activities we create a sense of 'self.' We need to observe this carefully to realize that this concept of 'self' is merely an illusion. It doesn't correspond to any actual reality. When we

can see this then we will have the ability to experience without creating this illusion – by understanding how ignorance functions, we can eliminate ignorance so that we no longer create ‘self’ and selfishness.

There was a French philosopher few hundred years ago who thought, based on his own thinking, the way he thought, he experienced things, said, “*Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am.” This is an excellent example of what we’re talking about. Because one thinks, because this philosopher was thinking, the ordinary sense of ‘self’ that occurs from ignorance arose and he took this to be real that because of thought there existed – ‘*I exist.*’ ‘*I think therefore I am.*’ This is an old example of few hundred years ago. But more than 2,500 years ago, the Buddha was pointing out very clearly that whatever we think to be the ‘self’ – this concept of ‘self’ wherever it may lie, is an illusion created out of our own ignorance.

Thinking is just an activity of mind. It’s the natural activity. The thinker, it’s an illusion created out of thought. The thinker, the actor isn’t real. So way before Descartes, the Buddha was teaching this – that what we take to be the ‘self’ is really not-self, that all the possible things that we latch on to as being me, is not really me. It’s not me. It’s not-self.

But nowadays still, even in this century few hundred years after Descartes, we still think that ‘*I exist.*’ We feel something. *I feel.* We hear something. *I hear.* We think something. *I think.* Because of ignorance, we take all these natural functions and processes and interpret them as being ‘self.’ We attach the concept of ‘self’ to all of these things. Please examine this more and more deeply until you see for yourself that ‘self’ arises later. It’s not something that always existed. It’s not some lasting entity. It’s just an illusion of thought added to our experience. The more we see this, if we see this clearly enough then we can live with *vijjā* (knowledge) and *paññā* (wisdom), rather than with *avijjā* (ignorance). When we see that all these things are actually not-self then we can live with wisdom. When there is wisdom in place of ignorance then this whole confusion and delusion of ‘self’ were not occurred.

Now we’ll examine some of the things which tend to be misunderstood, the things that are mistaken to be ‘self.’ The world is full of such things – things that we’re misguidedly taken to be ‘self.’ So we consider them, we break them up into categories and examine them category by category.

The first category is what we call the *āyatana*. *Āyatana* means things which can be experienced. Things which are experienced or can be experienced or

things which experience and this means specifically the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind and the associated nervous system.

The first categories of things which are taken to be ‘self’ are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – the *āyatana*.

So you can see quite clearly that if there wasn’t for external sight, sound, smell, taste, touches and thoughts then there would be no existence of the inner’s senses: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. If there were no sight, sound, smell, taste, touches and thoughts, there is no way that the inner senses – sense organ could exist. We call the sights, the forms, sounds, smell, taste and so on – the external *āyatana*. The outer things which are experienced by the inner *āyatana*: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – notice that we cannot have one without the other. We cannot have the inner *āyatana* without the external *āyatana*.

Now it may seem strange to you that this is the place where we begin our study of Buddhism. It isn’t the way people usually begins studying something. But in Buddhism, our study begins with just the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind; and the sight, sound, smell, touches and thoughts. These are the ABC of Buddhism. This is where we begin our study.

Another thing that will seem strange to you is that in Buddhism we say that the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind don’t exist all the time. The eyes, etc., are not always here. They don’t always exist. This may sound strange to you so listen carefully. The more you understand this, the easier it will be for you to understand all of Buddhism.

We don’t say that the eye is always present but only when the eye performs the function of seeing, only when the physical eye is stimulated by some sight or vision, only when it is stimulated to functioning till we say that the eye exists. So when it functions, we say the eye exists or we say the eye arises. When that functioning stops then we say the eye ceases. When the eye is not functioning then we say that it does not exist. So the eye doesn’t exist all the time. It just exists when it is stimulated by light waves. When it isn’t stimulated then it stops functioning. The same is true with the ears when they’re stimulated by sound. When they function, when ear is stimulated so that it functions, meaning performing its proper function of hearing then we say the ear exists. When that function ends then we say the eye ceases. The same is true for the nose when it is stimulated by odors; when the tongue is stimulated by taste;

when the body sense would be stimulated by touch. When stimulated, each of these senses performs its natural function then we say it exists. But then that stimulation doesn't last forever and so we say is that, it ceases – the eye, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind ceases.

If you can understand this, it will greatly help you a lot in understanding all of Buddhism. Because we start to see that these things don't exist all the time, they just arise to perform a function and then cease. So what we take to be some constant existence, when through our ignorance, we think that things exist all the time. If we examine them carefully enough, we realize that their existence is only momentarily; that instead of some constants, there is existence, there is arising and passing away, arising and passing away. They exist to perform a function and then they stop existing. For example when you are asleep, your eyes do not perform their functions of seeing. The eye – the mind is not consciously seeing anything. So when we are in deep sleep, the eyes do not exist because they do not perform the activities of seeing and eye which does not see has no meaning. Just as an ear which does not hear or nose which does not smell. These things are said to exist only when they function.

Therefore when the eye sees something, don't let it become 'I see.' Study this carefully until we realize that it's just the eye seeing. This is how things naturally work. There is no 'me.' There is no ego or 'self' that is seeing. In the same way when the ear hears the sound, we need to realize that it's just the ear hearing. There is no 'me' or 'I' that hears. When the nose smells an odor, it's just the nose smelling. There is no 'I' who smell. When the tongue tastes a flavor, see carefully that it's just the tongue tasting, there is no 'I,' 'me,' 'self' or 'ego' that tastes. These are just ways the nervous system functions when stimulated, when there are strong enough stimulations, the nervous system experiences something. This happens naturally. It doesn't involve any 'I' or 'self.' When anywhere over this body is stimulated by some touch, when the sense of touch is stimulated. It is just feeling. It's just tactile feeling. There is no 'I' that feel or 'me' or 'self.' Even the same with the mind, when the mind sensed, stimulated by a concept, a memory or something, this is just the way the nervous system and the mind work. There is no 'self' involved.

We must study the *āyatana* – the senses which experience in the sense object, which are experienced. We must study them in this way – to see that they are just natural function. There is nothing more to them than that. It's the natural function of the nervous system until we realize that none of it involves

any ‘self,’ until we stop interpreting it all in terms of ignorance that this is ‘me’ or this is ‘mine.’

There are two levels of stupidity that arise here. The first kind of stupidity is that *I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch, I think*. When these natural functions take place, ignorance turns them into ‘I’ and ‘me.’ Turning these things into ‘self’ or taking them to be ‘self’ is the first level of ignorance and when we are that ignorance then we go to the second level of ignorance which is interpreting things as ‘mine’ – *my eyes, my ears, my nose, my tongue, my body, my mind*. Once the concept of ‘self’ exists then the concept of ‘mine,’ things belonging to ‘self’ arises too. There are these two levels of foolishness that occur here. And then this ignorance spreads out all over the place.

When there is ignorance understanding that there is ‘self’ then anything that comes into contact with the ‘self’ is taken to be ‘mine.’ When we take the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind to be ‘self’ then whatever it’s seen, heard, smelled, etc., this is taken to be ‘mine’ so this stupidity spreads out, taking over more and more.

So please know this first category of things which are taken to be ‘self,’ taken to be ‘I & mine’ – there is āyatana.

Next we come to the second category which is more subtle than the first. These are what we call the five *khandhas* (aggregates). The five *khandhas* are what make up the system of life. The process or system of life is made up of five subsystems. These are the five primary functions that make up the human being.

The first is *rūpa-khandha* – the body aggregate, and then there is *vedanā-khandha* – feeling; *saññā-khandha* – perceptions or recognitions; *saṅkhāra-khandha* which is conceptions or thoughts; and then *viññāṇa-khandha* – consciousness. These five activities are the basic functions of life. These are the five subsystems that make up a human being. And they trick us into taking them to be ‘self’ even more than the āyatana did. These are even more easily mistaken to be ‘self’ than the senses.

The first aggregate is the aggregate of *rūpa* (form). This means all the things which have forms or shapes – all the things that can be seen with the eye. The other four aggregates are *arūpa*. They have no forms. They are mental. But the first aggregate are all the material things which have form and for example

which can be seen with the eye. This includes our bodies, includes the objects of sensual experience. This is the first aggregate.

Next are the four mental aggregates or the formless aggregates – the aggregates that make up the mind. We have to know this very well and in great detail. The feelings, the perceptions – perceiving something to be this or that, thought, conception and the fourth one is consciousness. These four mental aggregates deceive us even more than the āyatana did. They trick us into thinking that there are me or mine quite easily so it's important to know them.

The first *khandha*, the first aggregate, that gives us the form, is made up of both – it includes external objects and the internal senses or the inner āyatana and the outer āyatana. So when some forms stimulates the nervous system then there arises the fifth *khandha* – consciousness, *viññāṇa-khandha* – the aggregate of consciousness. This consciousness knows the form whether it's visual or whether it's the sound or whatever. The consciousness aggregate knows, becomes conscious of that form. When there's consciousness of some outer object depending on one of the senses, we call this *phassa* (contact). This is where the outer object has made an impression on the mind. It's called 'contact.' When there's contact, there arises the second aggregate – feeling. So in short, when the inner and outer āyatana interact, such as the eye and the form, and the ear and the sound, when they interact then there arises consciousness. This consciousness of the outer āyatana is dependent on the inner āyatana. It's called contact and based on that contact, there is feeling.

There is the second *khandha*, namely *vedanā* – feeling. When this feeling arises which will be the positive or negative then there arises the third *khandha* – *saññā*. This one is hard to translate well so we'll explain it. When something is felt then the mind will recognize it as something or the mind will classify it. This is what we call *saññā*. Depending on how it feels, the mind will classify something, will recognize it, perceive it or regard it. For example, the mind will classify – this is positive and something else as negative. This recognition or classification is called *saññā*.

Once something is recognized or classified, the mind regards it as really being that and then there arises the fourth *khandha* – *saṅkhāra-khandha* or thought, conception. The mind then thinks according to the influence of the recognition, depending on how something is recognized and classified, the mind then just goes on thinking in that way. This is very important because this is where things are either right or wrong, because conception is where the concept of 'self' arises. When the mind begins to conceive, ordinarily our thinking is



full of me & mine. So this is where things can go wrong and end up in *dukkha*, in pain. But this is also where they can go right, if the thinking is right, if it is not caught up in me & mine then there won't be any problems. So under the influence of recognition and classification then the mind thinks and ordinarily it thinks in terms of me & mine.

So please observe this until you see how closely they interact, how these five sub-functions depend on mutually interdependent that you can't have one without or each functions dependent on the others. It begins with *rūpa-khandha* – the senses and the forms in the world. This stimulates consciousness – *viññāṇa-khandha*, when there's then contact, the feeling *khandha* arises. When something is felt then it is recognized and classified which is *saññā-khandha*. And the last, when something is recognized and classified, it's thought about which is *saṅkhāra-khandha*. Each, they arise in this sequentially like this and they depend on each other in this way. When you see more and more clearly how these five different functions together, how you see how they interdependent then you realize more and more how none of them are a 'self' and there is no need for a 'self.' When we see how these naturally work together, we can see how a human being, a human life can function without any need for some 'self,' some ego. None of these needs to be taken as me or mine because they naturally function on their own together. But because it's one after the other, after the other, after another, you can't take any one of these as being a 'self.' You can't take them altogether as a 'self' or separately as being 'self.'

If we observe these five khandhas throughout the day, we'll see that in any moment there is one of them operating. There isn't any moment of life when one of the khandhas isn't operating and we also see that they don't occur simultaneously. They occur, they function sequentially, one after the other. As we watch them functioning throughout the day, we'll see more and more how this happens naturally and how none of them needn't be or can't be taken as me or mine, as being 'self.'

We'll see how the *rūpa-khandha* – the form, the aggregate of forms functions. We watch it functions. We'll see the feelings, the perceptions, the recognitions – *saññā-khandha*. The thoughts of *saṅkhāra-khandha* and the consciousness of *viññāṇa-khandha*, see how one follows the other over and over again until we see more and more how human life is.

The more we see this, the more we are able to look at life as being not-self and then we don't turn life into any problems or difficulties.

This is something we should observe very carefully throughout the day until we know these five khandhas as well as we know the things that in our houses. All the stuffs in our house we tend to know quite well. We need to know these khandhas even more than that, even more subtlety because each of them is inviting us, deceiving us into taking them as being ‘self.’ So we need to know them well enough that we’ll no longer trick by them.

The first category of things which trick us into thinking there are ‘me and ‘mine,’ are the *āyatana* – the inner senses and the outer sense objects. The second category of things which deceive us into thinking there are ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ are the five khandhas. The third category is what we call ‘dependent origination’ – this is the most subtle and deceptive of all.

‘Dependent origination’ is an English translation of the word, *paṭiccasamuppāda* [Pāli] or in Thai, *pa-tij-ja-sa-mup-baht* (ปฏิจจนุปบาท). This is an activity or reality that is of the mind which is always present. A constant process of dependent origination is occurring within the mind or we could say the mind is this process of dependent origination. This is going on all the time and so it can deceive us unless we see it very carefully.

When we talk about this flow or process of dependent origination, we can speak of twelve conditions or twelve symptoms of these twelve. These are the twelve conditions or the twelve links of dependent origination.

It begins with the *āyatana*, the inner senses and the outer sense objects. When these come together and interact then there arises consciousness (*viññāṇa*). This is where dependent origination starts, right here after meeting with the *āyatana* and the arising of consciousness.

We need to observe these and know them until we realize that none of them are ‘self.’ The inner *āyatana*, the outer *āyatana* are not-self. This consciousness which arises, is not-self, to see all of these whenever it’s happening as not-self.

When these three things we just mentioned meet together or happen together, when the inner *āyatana*, the outer *āyatana*, the consciousness, when these three meet, there occurs what we call *phassa* or we call this meeting of the *āyatana* and consciousness – *phassa* (contact). Contact is where the experience impressed itself on the mind, on consciousness. This is also not-self. These are natural function. These things occur naturally, working together. There is contact arising out of this natural process but this contact is not-self.

When there is contact then there certainly will be something coming and what comes after contact is feeling. Whenever there is contact, the mind will

feel some way about that contact or experience. When contact is not-self then feeling is also not-self. Feeling is just a reaction to the contact. It's nothing more. There is no way that we can take feeling as being me or mine.

When feeling arises, there will arise a desire, a wanting. When feeling is positive, there will be a certain kind of desire. It will go in one direction. When feeling is negative then desire will go in another direction. But here, this desire is always ignorance. The desire we are talking about now is just foolish desire or craving. We are not talking about the want that comes from wisdom, from correct understanding – that's called 'aspiration' or 'aim.' But here when the mind has been conditioned into feeling positive or negative then it will desire according to that feeling. Now this feeling is ignorant feeling or *taṇhā* is also not-self. It's based on things which are not-self and although it thinks in a way that creates a sense of 'self,' it is not in itself 'self.' This desire cannot probably be taken as me or mine.

This point is very dangerous. We need to be very careful. It's very easy to take desire as being 'self.' We need to watch it very carefully to be aware that it is not-self. Feelings – these feelings of positive and negatives are just illusory and they condition the desire. And if this is the case, the desire doesn't have any lasting reality in itself, it is just a passing phenomenon. If we are not careful, we will make the mistake of Descartes. Once there is desire, once there is experienced feeling, we'll think because I can desire, I am. Desire is just a kind of thinking. If I think therefore I am. I desire therefore I am. This is the common assumption we make. We must be very careful here to see that desire just the natural reaction to feeling. When the mind is functioning ignorantly, desire is the natural consequence of feeling, seeing this we need not take it to be a real 'self.'

Now we come to the most important and dangerous step which is that *taṇhā*, ('desire' or 'craving') conditions *upādāna* (attachment). Attachment is where the mind grasps, clings clutches. It reaches out and grasps onto and then clutches that something. It attaches when there is desire, when the mind has been conditioned by desire then *upādāna* (attachment) will attach to desire urge, the thing that supposedly desires. It will attach to the object of the desire. It will attach to the fruits so whatever we think we are going to get from the object of desire. Desire conditions grasping, clinging, clutching in this way and even this attachment is not-self. It is merely a conditioned reaction.

When there is attachment then there is *bhava* or in Thai *pob* (भव) which can be translated – existence. So when there is attachment, there is existence. But

although this word means existence, it doesn't mean full complete real existence. It's just the beginning of existence so sometimes it's translated as 'becoming.' It's like conception. For a pregnancy to begin there must be conception. Bhava is like this, conception which begins a pregnancy so due to attachment, there is this existence.

When the fetus in the womb, once the fetus is conceived then it grows and develops until one day the fetus is mature enough to be born. In the same way bhava is the basis for jāti which means birth. But here we don't mean physical birth as with the example of the fetus in child, here we mean a mental birth of what is called ego, of me and mine. Dependent on bhava, the sense of self grows until it is born as a complete 'I am,' a complete ego. The mind is now fully dominated by 'I,' by ego. Even this birth of 'self,' of ego is not-self. It is merely concocted. This is condition concocted by the process that we've been describing. It doesn't have any independent existence or reality that we could call a 'self.' Even birth is not-self.

This ego is delusive. It's delusive ego. It arises out of ignorance, confusion, delusion. So this delusive, it's an illusive ego. This ego creates from the imagination. It doesn't have any reality to it. It's just an illusion, a mental image so we say this ego is both delusive and illusive. It's not-self.

Now when this ego is born, it takes in everything that into contact with it as being mine. Once there is this 'me,' anything that associates with it or it has anything to do with it, is taken to be 'mine.' This is how the ignorant mind functions. For example, when there is ego then this ego will attach to physical birth. The fact that one has been born, this physical birth will be attached to as *my* birth. Any illness, sickness or pain will be attached to as *my* illness, *my* sickness, *my* pain. Aging becomes 'mine.' *I'm* getting old. Death becomes *my* death. *I* will die. All the things associated with the ego are then taken to be 'mine.' Wealth, possessions, money, jewels, fame, honor, status, husband, wife, children, house, home, car, pets – everything associated with this ego becomes mine. So can you see that the ego is carrying around all these stocks? The ego doesn't do anything except carry around all these burdens. So we call these, the burden of life. The only thing the ego does is carrying around this heavy load because everything that comes into contact with it, it's taken to be 'mine.' Now this ego itself or all the things that are attached to as 'mine,' as belonging to the ego, all of these are still not-self. All of the things in this process of dependent origination that we've been discussing are not-self. None of them exists in any way that could be rightly considered as 'self.' Ego is not-self. All the things that are taken to be 'mine' are not-self.

To remember all this, we can express it in just one sentence. Please try to remember this sentence –

*‘The ego or ‘self’ is the one that carries the burdens.’*

The ego is the carrier of all burdens. Whether we’re speaking of the āyatana, inner and outer or the five khandhas or whatever, the ego carries all these things around as a burden. Because of ego, all these things become heavy loads. To make it even simpler, we can just say, ego is what carries the burden of life. When there is no ego, there is no burden. When there is no ego to carry around all these heavy weights, there is no burden. That means there is no suffering. So ego is the carrier of the burden. No ego, no burden.

One more sentence,

*‘The final goal of the most excellent life is to throw away the ego.’*

The most beneficial, the most useful and advantageous thing we can do in life is to take the ego and throw it away. This is the final goal of the most excellent life.

So the ego is what carries the burdens of life. The ego is what makes life into a burden. If there was no ego, life would not be a problem; life would not have any problems.

When there is, whether it’s a positive ego or a negative ego, whether it’s attached in a positive way or a negative way, all of these are still burdens. Positive things are burdensome in one way. Negative things are burdensome in another way. But it’s all heavy and painful nonetheless. Therefore the one who doesn’t give any meaning to positive and negative, is one who doesn’t feel any burdens. As long as we still take things to be positive and negative then these things will become burdensome. Or the one whose mind is above all positive and negative, that one is free. That person doesn’t carry, that one, that mind doesn’t carry any burdens.

Something that is very difficult to see and understand is that the positive ego is just this burdensome and painful as the negative ego. Because all of us want a positive ego or good ego, we live in the world that is infatuated with the positive; that worships the positive so it’s very difficult for us to see that this positive ego is just as burdensome as negative ego.

One way to help you see how heavy the good positive ego is, for example, laughter, if you laugh all day long from dawn to dusk, it would probably kill you or if you were happy all day long then you wouldn’t even be able to go to

sleep. If you observe things like laughter and happiness which people want so badly and worship so highly, you look at them honestly, you'll see that these aren't really natural, healthy or even sane. Then you'll see why we say even the positive ego is a burden. If we can look at this more and more carefully, clearly, honestly, then we have the potential of getting free.

As long as we are trapped in ego, as long as we are carrying around this burden then life is painful. But when we let go of ego, when we understand what we've been taught about and let go of ego then life is free. This is what we call liberation or salvation. So observe things very carefully, notice, if you watch carefully, for example, you'll see that there are only very few moments when the mind is free. There are not many moments when the mind is free of ego. There are occasional lapses or pauses when the mind is void of ego but dependent origination is always waiting around to stir up the mind. For as long as there's ignorance, the mind is always spinning around in this cycle of dependent origination and so almost all the time the mind is being conditioned by ego. There is some form of ego. This can even happen while we are asleep. We can dream in egoistic way. But if we observe this more and more carefully until we see this truth then we have the potential to get free. When we really see this thoroughly then we can drop it and be free. When we see the heaviness and painfulness of the positive and the negative and the ego that is ensued then we can step back, step out and be free. But if we don't see this, if we don't observe how the ego is there almost all the time then we have no chance of getting free.

There is one sentence which is very easy to say but very difficult to understand in real life. The sentence is,

*'We are caught in the prison of ego all the time.'*

*'We are trapped in the prison of ego all the time.'*

It's a very simple sentence, easy to say but it is very difficult to understand. Its meaning is very profound. We are caught in the prison of ego all the time. If we can understand this or we must understand this, we must examine this more and more deeply until we understand this, until we see the great imperative to get free, until all we're asking is how to get free of this prison and then we must try, to keep trying until we do get free of this prison of ego. We are trapped in the prison of ego all the time.

The practice of *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing) is the only way that is going to get us out of this prison of ego. To practice *ānāpānasati* is the best way to get free of the ego prison. If we practice mindfulness with breathing

correctly and sufficiently then we'll see that the āyatana are not-self. The five khandhas are *anattā* (not-self). We'll see that all the links and conditions of the process of dependent origination are not-self. When we see that all of these things are not-self then we will know how to deal with all the experiences of life. We won't fall into the illusion of positive and negative. So please do your best to practice mindfulness with breathing so that we see that everything is not-self, that we will escape from the prison of ego. Through ānāpānasati, we will be able to deal correctly with dependent origination.

So you have been practicing ānāpānasati now for over a week. You have been practicing it. You should know how to practice so keep on practicing; continue to develop this until we realize the truth of not-self. Keep practicing *ānāpānasati* until *anattā* (not-self) becomes absolutely clear and then we will escape from the prison of ego.

Thank you for being good listeners. We will end. This is all for today's talk.

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