

# *New Life*

by Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. 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 Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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Today we'll speak on the topic of 'new life and the way of entering into new life.'

On the first day we mentioned how all of you are searching for a new life, a life that is truly satisfying because it doesn't bite its owner. A life that is cool.

Actually it's the old life. What we here call the 'new life' is in fact very ancient, something that existed long, long ago. And the life of *dukkha*, of stress and suffering, is much newer. It's this life of *dukkha* that has arisen later. And so this is why we have this need, this inbred desire for the old life, the life that is cool and free of *dukkha*, a life that isn't all busy and troubled.

This lack of correctness, this lack of peace has just happened, it's just arisen. It's just like the ocean. The waves across the ocean are one thing, and then the ocean itself is another. The waves they arise and they pass away, they arise and they pass away, but the ocean is always there. These waves are the *dukkha*, the problems, the business and craziness in our lives, but they just arise and pass away. When the waves have passed away there is the peace and the coolness. This is something very ancient and original. It's always been there. But because we've never noticed it, it's something we've just begun to know, it seems very new to us, but in fact it's older than old.

This present life of ours has waves arising constantly. There's ego, there's this sense of 'self,' this 'I & mine' constantly coming up and passing away,

arising and passing away, arising and passing away. All these waves are something that's happening constantly in this present life. All these waves are dukkha for us. And so this present life which we have is something we find undesirable. Because what we really need is peace and calm, quiet and coolness. So we're looking for a way to re-attain that original peace and tranquility.

If we can remove these feelings of ego and self, and the feelings of positive & negative from our lives, then there won't be any more of these waves, there won't be any more dukkha. And think how peaceful and calm that life would be. This is what in fact we need most of all. This is what our bodies and minds are telling us all the time.

Our problem however is that we aren't really able to forbid the arising of ego, to stop these feelings of positive & negative. This is because we don't have the knowledge and understanding we need to stop these things. So then our way of practice needs to be able to restrain and keep these feelings of ego – these feelings of positive & negative – under control. And then we steadily proceed until we can remove this ego and all this positive & negative completely. First we need to restrain, to hold it in, to keep it under control, and then work on eliminating it completely.

The waves are newly arisen. They're not the same as the water. These waves just arise in their illusions, but the water is something genuine and true. It's the same with the mind. These concepts and feelings of 'ego' and 'self,' of positive & negative – these are new. If we can get rid of them, if we can prevent them, then there is just the mind, there's just peace and tranquility. And then there is what we can call 'true life.' Take away the waves and we have true, real water. Let go of all these egos and positives & negatives and there is true life.

These concepts of ego, these feelings of positive & negative, are new products. When they come up there is dukkha, when they don't come by there is no dukkha. At this point then, what we need to realize is the fact that these concepts and feelings and beliefs in 'ego' and 'self' are just illusions. There're just these waves that don't have any real substance – they're false, they're deceptive, they're not really true, they're just these temporary waves that deceive us, but in fact there's no reality to these feelings of 'ego' and 'self.' We need to understand this from the start.

When we say that there's no real self, we need to understand that in most creeds, in fact most psychologies as well, and most religions, they teach, they believe very firmly that there is a 'self.' But this idea, belief, teaching that's found all over the world that there is some 'self' or 'soul,' '*atman*,' 'higher

self,' or whatever we wish to call it, this idea, this teaching is not Buddhism. We should not confuse the belief in a self or soul with Buddhism. The fact that there isn't any real self, this is what Buddhism teaches. This fact that there's no self, the fact of selflessness, is a permanent lasting truth. There is no permanent truth to the idea of self. If we observe, we can see that the self is just a concept or a feeling that arises from time to time temporarily. It has no lasting substance. You can't find any real truth in it. This is what is understood in Buddhism.

The famous phrase of Descartes, "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am), this cannot be taken as true. Just because I can think or feel or experience or know, just because there's thinking, knowing, feeling, experience – that is no proof or basis that there is any 'I,' any 'ego,' any 'soul.' This idea, of course, is much more ancient than Descartes. It's been talked about for thousands and thousands of years where human beings, just because there is some movement in the mind – thought, feeling, whatever – this is assumed to be 'I,' to be 'self,' to be 'soul,' but we can't really take this as being true.

There's no way we can take these activities of mind, these thoughts and feelings, as being any real self. They're just products of various causes and conditions. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind come into contact with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects. From this coming together there is a production in the mind – feelings, thoughts, and so on arise. But none of these have any absolute reality, they're just temporary manifestations of mental activity, they're just momentary phenomena. They arise and pass away – there's no real substance to them. There's no absolute reality or truth to them, and so in no way can they be taken to be a 'self.'

And so all these manifestations of mind – thinking like this, thinking like that, these and those feelings – are just these momentary activities. They're new states of mind, and all of these kinds of mind have no absolute substance or nothing about them that can be taken as 'I' or 'mine.' In Buddhism, mind or consciousness is often called an 'element.' And although we talk about the consciousness element, one should understand that we only speak of the consciousness element manifesting or appearing occasionally. The appearance, the functioning, of the consciousness element depends on causes and conditions. When the eyes and a visual object come into contact, or the ear and sounds, this is the condition under which the consciousness element can appear, can manifest. So even though we talk of a consciousness element, it's not a permanent kind of thing. And so there's just this temporary arising of consciousness dependent on causes, dependent on conditions. And so in

Buddhism we recognize that there's no actual selfhood through consciousness, through mind, or through anything related to consciousness and mind. These are all just temporary new products of the activity of mind.

The thing we call 'ego,' or 'self,' or 'soul' is merely a concept that arises because of various conditions which are surrounding us. The thing we call 'ego' or 'soul' doesn't have any reality in itself, doesn't have any true reality. It's always dependent on what we call the 'internal *āyatana*,' the sense organs of eyes, ears, and so on, and the 'external *āyatana*,' the sense objects of sights, sounds, and so forth. Always dependent on these, the concept of 'self' arises. And because it has this conditioned, concocted nature there's no inherent self, there's no true self in those concepts about 'self' and 'soul,' and in fact these concepts, these manifestations are not even the true mind. This isn't the true mind, all these thoughts and so on. These concepts of 'self,' of 'soul,' of 'I,' of 'mine' are merely reactions when the various sense organs and sense objects act upon the mind, then the mind reacts and one of the reactions that it spits up is the concept of 'I,' of 'self.'

The concept 'self,' 'soul,' whatever is just a concept that arises according to the things that make an impression upon the mind. Depending on these different objects, the mind conjures up the concept of 'self' in many different forms, but there's nothing about that which has any permanence, any lasting quality. There's nothing there which is essential – it's just all a temporary arising and passing away. When a new object arises to the mind, the mind comes up with a concept about it, and because of a lack of understanding takes that concept to be true. And so the mind thinks, 'This is *mine*,' or 'this is *me*, this is *I*.' And because of this misunderstanding, concocts the idea, the concept of self. But this is just an illusion, and we should realize this, that these are just reactions of the mind, but these reactions are not in themselves true, and they're not the true mind, either.

In these bodies there is a nervous system, and then in this environment of ours there are all kinds of objects which impinge upon, which make contact with this nervous system. Each time some object from the environment makes contact with the nervous system, there is a new situation. If this is a new temporary situation that occurs, if this situation pleases the mind, then the mind takes it as positive. If the situation displeases the mind, the mind takes it as negative. Each of these situations is new, it's just that it's a temporary phenomenon, but if it's pleasing to the mind, then there arises a positive kind of ego, and if it's displeasing, it's taken as a negative ego. If you understand this, you see then that the ego, whether positive or negative, arises after the situation

where objects impinge upon the nervous system. There're just these situations, and then there arises different forms of ego dependent on these situations.

Ego, or I, can only arise after these various situations impress upon the nervous system. For example, there's a certain physical condition that we call 'hunger.' When this situation of hunger impresses itself on the nervous system, only then can there arise the concept, 'I am hungry.' And then when there is the activity of eating, and this impinges on the nervous system, only then can be the sense of self that 'I eat.' And then only after there is a pleasant taste, a delicious taste on the tongue, only after that can there arise the concept, 'I am [experience] delicious [deliciousness], or I have deliciousness.' So always each of these kinds of ego illusions, any of these concepts of 'I,' can only happen after these various situations make contact with the nervous system.

Now this may sound illogical to many of you. What we're saying doesn't fit with the common logic that people have. But we can't depend on logic, we can't assume that logic is true. We have to look and see what actually happens to see what the reality is. We can't just use logic to think about it. The reality is that mind is an element, and there are all these elements surrounding the mind, and when these various elements such as eye elements [element] and sound elements [element] act upon the mind, then mind manifests and there are activities of mind. The mind reacts to the various situations with thoughts, with feelings, and all the other kinds of mental activities. These are just reactions of the mind that have no independent reality. They aren't any selves. So all of these are just products, just reactions of the mind, and then the concept of 'I,' of 'ego,' is just another reaction of mind. This may be difficult for you to understand, it may not fit with our ordinary assumptions. It may sound strange to us that the doer comes after the doing. Our assumption is that there first must be a doer in order for there to be any doing. Or there must be the actor before the activity. But the reality – logic isn't as important as the reality itself – is that first there is the activity, then there is the actor. There's the acting, and only after there's the acting can there arise the actor.

Logic, philosophy, speculation cannot be depended on when we're dealing with something as subtle and profound as this. You can think about it as much as you want, and that will never show us the truth. And so logic, philosophy, speculation can't really help us. If you don't believe what we're saying, that's OK. Go ahead and keep thinking about it, and eventually you'll realize that all the thinking and logic and reasoning just will never show us what is actually true. It'll just keep spinning up new ideas and opinions. First there is just the mind and the situations it finds itself in; mind is always arising to different

situations. And then there is an activity of mind in response to the situations or the reactions of mind. And only then with this activity of mind, all these situations and the reactions to the situations, only then, can there be the concept of 'I,' the 'I' who acts. Without that activity there could not arise any concept of the actor. The 'I,' the 'self,' the 'soul' is just a concept created after the activity. And so if we examine this then we can see that any sense of 'I,' feeling of 'I,' concept of 'I' is always coming after the activity.

This thing we call mind is just an element among the many, many elements. Of course this thing really exists, this mind element really exists, but it's one of many, many elements – this world is just full of elements. For the mind element to function it can only do so dependent on the other elements. By the way when we use this word 'element' it's a rather poor translation of a Pāli word *dhātu*, and in this word there's also a sense of potential. They are potentials that either have manifested and are functioning or are dormant, have not yet manifested. So these elements or potentials to manifest, to function, to act, can only do so when they come into contact with other elements. So when various elements come together, then there is an activity, some function. For mind to function it always depends on other elements. The appearance of mind, of consciousness isn't something that happens independently – it's always dependent. And so mind itself or any of the thoughts, feelings, and activities of mind are always dependent on these other elements. All these elements exist in themselves, but none of them can act independently. None of these elements, most of all the mind element, cannot be taken to be an 'I,' a 'self,' a 'soul' because it doesn't have any independence.

When you have studied science in school, learned about chemistry and physics, they never, never mentioned the mind element. And we're sure that you've never heard about the voidness element either. Modern science only talks about certain elements, but there are many other elements that chemistry and physics never talk about – the mind element, the voidness element, and a number of others. In Dhamma language, however, in Dhamma, the mind element and the voidness element are very important. All of these elements exist and are functioning within our lives, but to function, or for any situation to occur, for any experience, mind element and other elements must come together, must meet and then function together, then there is some situation happening. So understand that all of our experiences, all the situations of our lives, are just made up of these elements, but that these elements which make up all our experiences are not independent, they're always interdependent. This can help us to understand the nature of our reality.

So in short, the concepts of soul, concepts of ‘self,’ of ‘I,’ of ‘mine’ and whatever, don’t really exist. ‘Self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘I,’ ‘ego,’ ‘mine,’ don’t really have any truth. They’re merely the products that arise when various elements get together, when through the coming together of elements the mind element is concocted to think, to conceive, to perceive in various ways. And so when the mind element is concocted in certain ways with certain conditions, then it conceives of the ‘self,’ the ‘soul,’ the ‘I.’ These are just products arising out of this concocting of the mind element, although nothing about that can be taken to be ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ or whatever. Although many, many people, many philosophical systems, psychologies, and religious systems believe very firmly that there is some independent substance that is the ‘self’ or ‘soul’, although this is a common belief and people can believe what they wish, if we examine carefully in terms of truth what is the real nature and truth of what’s happening, we will never find any such independent self-existing self or soul or whatever. All we find are these situations of mind occurring, and all of these situations are dependent on conditions, just compounded out of elements. And when the mind element is concocted by ignorance, by misunderstanding, then the concept of self is born. But just because we can think it, it doesn’t mean it’s true. In short – ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ are not real.

In the development of Indian philosophy, there eventually came about what are called the Upanishads, and in the religious philosophy of the Upanishads it talks about the *atman*. The *atman* was their name for the ‘self,’ which inhabited each life, very much like what Plato and many Christians following [after] Plato called the ‘soul.’ And then supposedly this *atman*, when the body died, would go and be reincarnated – ‘reincarnate’ means to ‘take on a new body.’ The *atman* would get a new body, and that body would die and the *atman* would go and get another body. And this process went on and on and on – the *atman* reincarnating over and over again. At the time of the Upanishads this was the highest teaching in India. A few hundred years later, while this teaching was still very strong and dominate in India – that there was some kind of *atman* being born and reincarnating over and over again – the Buddha appeared. And the Buddha arose in the middle of a culture dominated by this teaching, but the Buddha taught something different. The Buddha taught, based on his own experience, that there was no self – this *atman* didn’t really exist – and so he taught non-*atman* or not-*atman*. This is the genuine teaching of Buddhism that whatever we call it – ‘*atman*,’ ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘I,’ ‘ego,’ whatever, in whatever language – it doesn’t really exist, it’s just a concept concocted by ignorance. However, this Hindu teaching – back then they didn’t call it ‘Hindu,’ it was ‘Brahmanism,’ it’s now called ‘Hinduism’ – from the Upanishads spread all

over Asia, including to Thailand, and then Buddhism came later. To much of Asia, Buddhism came after these Brahmanistic teachings of the Upanishads. And so nowadays we find this situation that many Buddhists misunderstand Buddhism. People who call themselves ‘Buddhists’ foolishly mix up non-Buddhist teachings in with what they call ‘Buddhism.’ And so there are many foolish Buddhists who believe in this idea of reincarnation of this ‘self’ or ‘soul’ that gets reincarnated. Or some of them don’t use the word ‘reincarnation,’ they use ‘rebirth,’ but it’s the same mistake. And so please be very careful – many foolish Buddhists have made a mess of Buddhism by dragging in things that are not the Buddha’s teaching! So one has to be very careful to always see this fundamental teaching of the Buddha that everything is not-self, not-atman, and to not get misled by people talking about things getting reborn or reincarnated. This is just part of the situation we live in where people are always prone to misunderstanding.

Please distinguish clearly and absolutely between the belief that there is an atman, soul and the teaching that there is no atman, of non-atman, not-self. There’re these two fundamental understandings – please distinguish between them. The genuine Buddhist teaching is that of not-self, not-atman, not-soul. Generally most people just go with their own instinctual feelings, and in Christianity this subject has not been examined carefully. Christianity has not analyzed it very much, and so in Christianity, for example, things are talked about in the ordinary terms that everybody already believes. Most people assume that there is a ‘self’ or a ‘soul.’ There is kind of an instinctual sense of ‘self,’ which is just created by ignorance. The instincts are not necessarily wise, and so this sense of ‘self’ is concocted, and most people just take that to be true without examining it. So the common assumption is that there is something that ‘I am,’ some ‘self,’ some ‘soul,’ some ‘ego.’ And Christianity has just gone along with that, and tried to make it better and better. But in Buddhism, if we’re interested in Buddhism, the only real issue is that of *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*. And so Buddhism goes deeply into things until one can see that there is in fact not-self – there is nothing that can be called a ‘self’ – and seeing this, *dukkha* can be eliminated. Seeing that there’s no positive, no negative, this is how Buddhism goes much deeper than the common understanding, goes much deeper beyond self, beyond positive and negative. And this is how Buddhism eliminates suffering.

You may be surprised when we tell you that in Buddhism we consider ignorance to be just another element. The ignorance element is just another element like all the others, but it’s an element that’s all over the place. It’s



ubiquitous, it's everywhere in the atmosphere, the universe around us. And so when the body and mind are in some situation, when the various elements of body and mind are coming together in a situation, this ignorance element is always kind of 'there' ready to come in and go to work. So whenever body and mind start to function, the ignorance element can come in and then concoct that function of body and mind with ignorance. And so if the ignorance element influences or works in the mental functions, the mental processes, then there is the conception of ego, of positive and negative. But this is just an element; it's not something eternal or lasting. Ignorance is not 'I' or 'mine,' it's just an element that can get involved in the functions of life.

So in any ordinary day, every time the eye makes contact with sights, every time the ear and sounds make contact, the nose and smells, the tongue and taste, the body and touches, and the mind sense and mind objects, anytime these normal functions of life occur, the ignorance element can enter in, the ignorance element can work upon these things. We call this *avijjā dhātu*, *avijjā dhātu*, the ignorance element or the element of ignorance. And it could enter into any of these basic experiences and activities of life. And when this ignorance element works upon consciousness, then consciousness or mind comes up with concepts of 'I,' of 'self,' of positive and negative.

Now when the sense organs and sense objects are functioning, ignorance element keeps coming in. We aren't able to stop it, we aren't able to prevent against it, so then ignorance keeps concocting the concepts of ego, of positive and negative. However, there is another element, which we call *vijjā dhātu*. The ignorance element is *avijjā dhātu*, but *vijjā* means right knowledge, insight wisdom. You can even use the word 'enlightenment,' so *vijjā dhātu* we could call the element of right knowledge, the element of enlightenment. Normally, we don't have this *vijjā dhātu*, and so the ignorance element is always able to do its work and concoct the mind. But if there is the *vijjā dhātu*, if the *vijjā dhātu* manifests, appears, then it prevents the functioning of the *avijjā dhātu*. In simple terms if there is a glimpse of truth, if there's a glimpse of truth, that glimpse gets rid of ignorance. And so then in that moment the mind is not concocted by ignorance, by stupidity. And then in that moment no concept of 'I,' of positive or negative, is concocted. But normally this isn't the case. Ordinarily for most human beings it's the element of ignorance that is functioning.

Ignorance is just an element, and like any other thing, ignorance arises momentarily. The belief or the teaching that many Buddhists propagate incorrectly that ignorance is there all the time – this is incorrect. People are always implying that there is ignorance in the mind constantly, all the time.

They try to turn ignorance into some permanent thing that's always in the mind, that we're always, the mind is always ignorant. This is completely incorrect. Ignorance just arises momentarily in the mind depending on conditions. It is correct, however, to say that the element of ignorance is always there ready to come in, ready to influence the mind. But ignorance is not in the mind all the time, it just arises momentarily. This is a fundamental fact in Buddhism that phenomena including ignorance arise momentarily and cease, they arise and cease, arise and cease, arise and cease. They don't exist permanently. They don't have any permanent lasting existence. Now this ignorance element is always ready to come in, and it's given the advantage the way we live. The way we behave gives the advantage to the ignorance element so that it can influence the mind quite easily. The enlightenment element, the element of insight, however, is always ready as well, but it's not easy for it to come in. The way we live makes the enlightenment element, the *vijjā dhātu*, disadvantaged. What is required then is *sati*. With *sati* (mindfulness) it's possible to bring in the enlightenment element. Without *sati*, ignorance is free to come in, the ignorance element is free to concoct the mind. But with mindfulness, attentiveness, carefulness, then the enlightenment element can function. And so this *sati* is the necessary condition for bringing in wisdom, bringing in correct knowledge. So *sati*, you've probably noticed, is the last part of the word *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing). And thus mindfulness with breathing is the way to new life. First of all through mindfulness with breathing, the *vijjā dhātu* is developed. One gets much more familiar with it, experienced in using the *vijjā dhātu*, the element of enlightenment. And *sati*, which is just another *dhātu* as well, is developed. And then *sati* creates the opportunity for wisdom and insight. And so *ānāpānasati* by developing these is the way to new life.

Obviously *sati*, this thing we call *sati* or 'mindfulness,' is crucial because *sati* has the ability to keep away the ignorance element and to bring in the enlightenment element. *Sati* is what prevents ignorance and what makes possible insight and wisdom. And so now you might be thinking that *sati* is quite a good thing, and you may really love *sati*, this is really wonderful stuff. And then you may be going, 'Well, *sati* must be the *self*. Maybe *sati* is what *I* really *am*.' This, of course, is to misunderstand things once again. *Sati*, mindfulness, is just another element – that's all. There's no way that *sati* can be 'I' or 'mine.' It's just an element arising dependent on conditions – no way it can be 'I' or 'mine.' This may be sounding funny to you, but in Buddhism everything is just elements. Everything is merely *dhātus*. 'Element' in English can mean the smallest particle of something, but *dhātu* doesn't mean the smallest particle. It just means the fundamental building blocks, which are much

more like potentials which appear or don't appear. In Buddhism everything is just dhātus, and dhātus come together, function and disappear, and they function and disappear, and they function and disappear. Sati is just one of many dhātus, and so we can't take it to be 'I' and 'mine' because in no way can it be independent. It can only operate dependent on other dhātus. Still, sati is crucial, but don't go and take it to be 'I' or 'mine' even though sati may seem very positive to you. We should see that sati is that which can help us to get rid of all positiveness and negativeness. *Sati* and *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness with breathing, is the means or the way to get rid of all the positive and all the negative.

In the science and chemistry that we've learned in our modern education, we've been taught that element means the smallest particle of things, and we have the Periodic Table with the 103 or 105 elements, which are the fundamental material particles of things. In fact in Thai, they use the Pāli word *dhātu* to translate the English word 'element.' And so when they teach children about chemistry they use the word *dhātu* or *thaat* in this very limited way. That's how it's understood in modern science, which is generally limited to physical and material things. But in Dhamma, when we're talking about natural truth, *dhātu* means something that exists naturally within itself. Things that exist within themselves, maintain themselves, or let's just say that exist naturally within themselves. We could translate it as 'natural essences' or 'natural elements.' But they're natural, they're not-I, they're not-mine. They happen naturally. They can't be possessed or owned or controlled by any 'ego' or 'self.' So this is how we should understand the word *dhātu* – naturally existing elements, natural essences, that exist by and of themselves. No one or nothing can control them, own them, be them, possess them. If we understand this meaning of *dhātu* (element), then we can see how everything is elements, everything is just dhātus, naturally occurring dhātus.

The body, the physical part of life, is just elements, merely these dhātus. The mind, consciousness, is merely dhātus, these naturally existing essences. And then even the spiritual part of life, the spiritual, is just elements. Although the spiritual is much more subtle, it's still merely dhātus, these natural essences which exist in themselves. Everything is made up of, are, just dhātus. And so when anything that's just dhātus – none of that can be taken to be 'I' or 'mine' – it's just these natural essences. There's no 'I,' 'self,' 'soul,' 'mine,' 'ego,' or any of that.

Even higher than that, or even further than that, we can say that all these things that are concocted are just elements. When we say everything is just

elements, there are these concocted elements. They're these things which can be concocted and which are concocted. These are all elements. And that which is unconcocted, which can never be concocted, which is completely unconcoctable, that too is an element. Or what is called 'phenomena' are just elements, these natural essences. And that which is called 'noumenon,' the noumenon, is also just a natural essence. Everything is just these dhātus. Everything is made up of the *saṅkhata dhātus*, the elements of concocting, and the *asaṅkhata dhātu*, the unconcocted natural essence. So everything is just dhātus. There's nothing that can be taken to be 'I' or 'mine.'

Please forgive us if anyone here is a Christian or Jewish, but we have to say that even God is just a dhātu.

There's just no exception to the fact that everything is dhātus. Satan is just dhātus, God is just dhātus. Everything is just these natural essences.

Whenever one has this understanding that everything is just these natural essences, these natural *dhātus*, whenever there's this understanding, then one has *atammayatā*, one understands atammayatā.

At the present time we don't have atammayatā, we don't understand this. At the present moment we're generally ignorant. We misunderstand things. So we don't see that everything is just natural elements. And so one ought to be very careful to realize that the way we see things now is incorrect. And so therefore the way of seeing, the way of understanding that is the opposite of how we see things now – that's what's correct. To see things completely differently than we see them now is correct. In the Pāli language of the Buddha this is called *aññathā*, to be completely different, completely opposite. To see things as completely opposite, to see everything completely differently from the way we see them now is to see that everything is just these natural essences, these *dhātus*.

Now our understanding is incorrect, we misunderstand just about everything, although this misunderstanding is just arising and passing away dependent on conditions. But almost all the time we take this body to be something permanent, to be 'mine.' We take the mind to be permanent, to be 'mine' or 'me.' We take the thoughts to be permanent, to be 'mine.' We take happiness to be permanent, we take it as 'mine.' We take pain as permanent, as 'mine.' Every time one of these phenomena – body, mind, pain, dukkha, happiness, whatever – once any of these phenomena appears it is immediately misunderstood to be permanent and to be 'mine,' to be 'self,' to be 'me' or 'mine.' But we don't realize this, we keep doing this, the mind keeps getting

concocted by the ignorance element, but we don't realize it, we're not aware of it. And so we take that which is untrue as the true. We take this misunderstanding as the truth. So we need to see things in a completely different way to see that our present understanding is incorrect, that seeing everything as being permanent is false. Everything is impermanent. None of it is 'I' or 'mine.' We need to look at things in this completely different way.

Now when we talk about the truth and untruth of things, there're a few things that can be a bit humorous and amusing, so you'll have to listen very carefully because we have to be careful about such things. Everything has its truth, everything has its truth. In untruth, in fact, there is truth, there is a reality to untruth. So that when we have our misunderstanding, it has a truth to it. There is truth in non-truth. There is truth in untruth, but we don't take the truth of untruth as our truth, and this deceives us. If we take the truth of untruth as the real truth, this is deceiving, it's a false truth, but this is what we're doing. In the positive, in the negative, in happiness, in sadness, there is a truth, but this is a kind of truth which is a false truth. Or it's a truth that doesn't do us any good, it doesn't really help us. We need to find the truth of truth that is really true, and that doesn't deceive, which isn't false. There's the truth that is genuinely beneficial. In everything there is some truth, but there is the false truth that isn't any good, the truth of untruth. But then there is the real truth, the truth of truth, which doesn't deceive, which isn't false, which is truly beneficial. We call this kind of truth the *ariya-sacca*, the Noble Truths. *Ariya* literally means 'that which has no enemies,' so it's the enemy-less truth. This is the truth that leads beyond all suffering, that transcends all suffering, that ends all suffering. This is the truth that is truly beneficial.

To put it simply, in lies there is the reality of the lie, there is the truth of the lie. In anything that isn't true, there is the truth of that untruth, or the truth of the reality of that untruth. If we see the truth of everything, if we see the truth even in untruth, the reality even of untruth, if we can see this, then we will understand truth completely, thoroughly.

The truth of people who are still influenced by ignorance is called 'relative truth,' *sammuti-sacca*, the truth of assumptions and suppositions, the relative truth. But the truth of those who are truly intelligent, people who are no longer affected by ignorance, we call this 'absolute truth' or 'ultimate truth,' *paramattha-sacca*, the truth that transcends, that goes beyond.

When we're born into this world, all we get are the *sammuti-sacca*, the relative truths. From the moment of our birth we're taught, given, trained in,

educated to, just the relative truths. Never in our childhood, or even for most people in adulthood, are we told about ultimate truth. No one ever teaches it, you don't find it in the schools or on TV. Nobody is talking about ultimate truth. Even if we went and told children about ultimate truth, for the most part they wouldn't believe it, they're so hoodwinked by relative truth, the truth that is has the nature of lying to us. In relative truth there is always the lie hidden with it. But now all of you have lived life long enough, you've spent enough time with relative truth, you've had enough experience with relative truth that you ought to be ready to hear some ultimate truth. So the time has come to hear about the ultimate truth, the truth that doesn't deceive in any way. It's about time that you heard at least a little bit about ultimate truth, absolute truth.

If you tell your children that deliciousness and foulness are equally hassles for us, they won't believe it. If you say that things that taste good and things that taste bad are equally difficult, they won't believe it. Or to say that beautiful and not beautiful are equal problems for us, they won't believe it. Or to say that sweet-smelling and foul-smelling are equally difficult for us and troublesome, they won't believe it. You can't tell a child that the positive and the negative are equally problems for us; they just won't understand. One must wait until each person has had enough experience with these relative truths, has come to understand, see these relative truths for what they really are. Then one is able to understand that the positive and the negative, the beautiful and the unbeautiful, the sweet and the foul, are equally hassles and troubles and problems for us. Our cultural, educational, and intellectual heritage is just one of the relative truths, but there comes a time when we're ready to hear about, to learn about, and to start to pay attention to ultimate truth.

The gentlemen and gentlewomen who are the ordinary followers of a religion, including Buddhism, when they come here, we try to tell them that good and evil are equally dangerous for us, that virtue and sin are equally dangerous for us. We do our best to explain this to these good men and women who come, and who consider themselves to be followers of Buddhism, but they never believe it, they just won't believe it. They can't understand it and they don't believe it. When we say that positive and negative are equally dangerous and harmful, they just won't accept it. All the ordinary people who call themselves Buddhists never really become Buddhists because they won't accept the ultimate truth. People when they first get interested in religion, they're very interested in what's good and positive, they're interested in being good, being virtuous, being moral in order so they can go to heaven or something. They're very interested in being good. They even become crazy and obsessed with being

good and virtuous and all that. When we tell them that good and evil will kill you both, both of these will kill you, which is exactly what God told Adam and Eve – good and evil kill, equally. But they don't believe this. We try and explain it over and over again, but the ordinary good men and women just won't accept it. This is the difficulty that prevents people from ever getting to the true religion, whether Christian, Buddhist, or whatever – the inability to accept ultimate truth, clinging and grasping at relative truth for as long as they can.

Relative truth helps us to get stuck in the positive and to hate and be frightened of the negative. Ultimate truth allows us to be free of, to transcend and go beyond both positive and negative, to go beyond both gladness and sadness, beyond happiness and *dukkha*, beyond right and wrong, beyond good and evil. Ultimate truth allows us to go beyond everything, to transcend everything.

In relative truth of ordinary common people, there is happiness and suffering. And when we tell these ordinary people that there is something beyond happiness and suffering, that one can live completely free of happiness and suffering, they're not at all interested. They say, 'What's in it for me? What good is there in being beyond happiness and suffering?' This shows that they're still stuck, still obsessed with happiness, with the positive. And so we tell them there is a happiness which is beyond happiness. Real happiness is beyond happiness. If we speak in relative terms, we use the word 'happiness.' If we speak in ultimate terms, we use the words 'the end of *dukkha*.' The end of *dukkha* is in ultimate terms the end of positive and negative.

We tell them that the happiness which hasn't any meaning or value of happiness, that is the true happiness. And then they say we're crazy!

When we have ended the stupidity of 'self,' of 'soul,' of 'I & mine,' then happiness and suffering end. All happiness and all *dukkha* end, and then the positive and the negative end, and we're beyond all problems and troubles. But first the illusion of self, of ego, of soul must disappear.

And so then we need to tell ourselves all the time,

'I am the I which is not really I. I am an I which is not really I.'

And then we should be telling our friends,

'You are a you which is not really you. You are a you which isn't really you.'

If we can understand this then it will be of tremendous value. And even if they say we're crazy, don't worry about it, just keep saying

'I am an I that's not really I. You are a you that's not really you.'

And give them a chance and someday they may understand. If we can understand this it will help us, it will help us quite a bit. And when we really see that 'I am an I which isn't really I,' then *atammayatā* will be right there, will arise instantly.

So that's an outline of the new way of life. Tomorrow we'll go into more details about the new way of life and how *ānāpānasati* can help that. As for today our time is up, so we'll close now. And once again thank you for listening very patiently and very attentively.

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Transcribed and lightly edited by Bill Weir ([arizonahandbook@yahoo.com](mailto:arizonahandbook@yahoo.com)) in Sep. 2015-Mar. 2016

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