

Elements, Senses, and Aggregates

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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 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 Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

In today's talk we will continue to discuss the topic that all things are *anattā*, all things are not-self, because we did not finish this the last time.

In the previous talk we examined how the six *dhātus* (elements) are *anattā* (not-self). And we examined how the six *āyatanas* (sense media) are also not-self. To re-establish the continuity, and to examine this more deeply we would like to continue looking into these things.

It seems that this word or thing, *dhātu* (element) is very old and is something which human beings have known of for quite some time. And not just in India, but all cultures, every civilization, wherever have known of these elements, have considered these elements important and so we see it turning up in all cultures or religions. It's something given great importance and something which people have felt they can receive a lot of benefit from. And so it continued to be of interest even till today, even in modern science.

This word 'element' appears all over the world, but in Buddhism it is given special importance and meaning. In Buddhism we go so far as to say that everything is element. There isn't anything which isn't nearly element. When we speak of the six elements these are just the six basic elements, but that doesn't necessarily include everything, so this is just as the basic examples. But in fact, everything from the lowest to the highest including even Nibbāna is an element. Everything without exception is an element or is made up of elements. And so we can say that everything is element. The word *dhātu* (element) is close to another word, the word *dhamma* which means 'thing'. We say 'all things are elements' – that means that all dhammas are dhātus, all dhammas are elements. When we say that all things are not-self, that means that all dhammas are not-self. And in the

same way, if all dhammas are elements, then all elements are dhammas, then all elements are not-self. So the meaning of ‘element’ (*dhātu*) is quite profound. All things are *anattā*. All dhammas are *anattā*. All dhātus, all elements are *anattā*. And that leaves room for absolutely no exception.

With this word ‘element’ we should distinguish two basic meanings. Especially the English word ‘element’ has the meaning of the smallest possible component. When we separate things into their parts, the smallest unit, is given the name element, which is the original meaning of the English word, where it’s impossible to separate it or break it up any further. This is the smallest indivisible unit, is the element. And that meaning is suitable for our purposes. However, there is another meaning we should be aware of, which is more literally, or is the literal meaning of the word *dhātu*, the Pāli word which we translate as ‘element.’ Dhātu is something that exists naturally, a thing that exists naturally, in itself, by itself. So there are these two primary meanings of element (*dhātu*) – the smallest, indivisible unit of something and that which exists naturally in itself, by itself. Both of these meanings are important. When we talk about the six elements, this corresponds to the first meaning, the six basic units, but when we speak in terms of a separate meaning, we say everything is a dhātu, all things are dhātus and it’s impossible to count them all, or list them all.

Now, we’d like to look at the six elements and how they are *anattā* (not-self). The first is the earth element. This doesn’t mean that the earth element, we call it the earth element because it’s seen easily in the earth, but that doesn’t mean that the earth element is the earth. The earth element is the element that takes up space, the element that takes up room or space, and so we call it the earth element, and it’s seen easily in the earth. The second element is the water element, not because it is water, but because it is seen most easily in liquid. This is the element of holding together, of cohesion, the element which tries to keep things together, hold them together. The third element is the fire element, which is seen most easily in fire, but it’s the element of combustion, whenever there is combustion, a burning up of things there is transformation, change. So this element is the element of change. And then the fourth element, the wind element is not necessarily wind, but it’s the movement, which is seen easily in wind, in evaporation and so on. So these are the four physical elements. Then there are the non-physical elements, the first of which is the space element, the element of voidness, which underlies or receives all the other elements. And then, sixth, is the element of consciousness, the consciousness element, which is the source of all consciousness in all living things, in all things that are conscious, that are alive, that consciousness is derived from the consciousness element. These are the six basic elements. All six of these elements are quite marvelous. There is something marvelous and wonderful about each of them. For this reason, people in ancient times often took them to be holy or sacred. They considered them to be so sacred, that they thought there was a soul, or a self in each of them and then they were

named according to different gods, the earth god, the water god and so on. So the self was attributed to the different elements, because of their marvelous properties.

Whether the ancient Indians or the ancient Greeks, they considered the elements so important that they saw powers or spirits in them. If you put it in the most crude terms they saw these elements as being ghosts or you could say spirits or you could talk of gods and goddesses to the degree they talk about the earth god, the water goddess, the fire god and so on. And they would crave to and propitiate and worship these gods of the different elements. But what's truly interesting about these elements is that you can find all six of them within yourself, right here in this one human being, we can find all six elements. We can see that there are these six different elements coming together, they are compounded together within this one human being. And if we examine that fact, we'll see that each one of the elements is not-self (*anattā*).

The people living in the forests and jungles, they worshipped all these elements as the earth god, the fire god, the fire god, the consciousness god and so on. These became gods and goddesses and they prayed to them and worshipped them. They took these things as being even more than self. Not only were the elements taken to be, seen in terms of self, like we see me and you, but they had taken that sense of self, seen these things as self was raised up to the highest level of self, that of being a god or a goddess. This was how the elements were understood by primitive people, and then they behaved to the elements accordingly. So we, however, should learn to look at them differently, but we should understand this, this old way of looking at the elements first.

So it is then that these six elements are *anattā*. We have completed our discussion of them which brings us to the *āyatanas* (sense media). Because the different elements can perform their relative functions, because this one can take up space and because this one can hold things together and because this one brings about change and this one is movement and this one is conscious, these elements compound together and we get some new things, these things we call the *āyatanas*. The different elements compound, combine into and become the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Because the elements can combine there arises things which can communicate or the sense media which are the basis for communication, the senses, and thus arise the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Once these senses occur, then these are taken to be self, because one can see, hear, smell etc. These different senses or faculties are taken to be self. This is a higher order of self, than when the elements are regarded as self. When the *āyatanas* are taken to be selves, this is stronger and more pronounced. And so the elements combine together into the senses, the *āyatanas*, and then the senses are taken to be *attā* (self).

It's very easy, it's incredibly easy to take the senses as being self. Once the

inner senses, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, once they begin to function, once the eyes see a form, it's very easy to take that to be 'I' see. When the ears hear a sound, it's very easy to take that as 'I' hear. When the nose smells an odor, it's very easy to take that to be 'I' smell, and so on. In fact, there is just a little system of nerves, and thus the eyes see. There is this system of nerves concerning the ears, and so the ears hear and the part of the nervous system connected with the nose, and so the nose smells. In each case, one of the āyatana performs a function. It can do this because it's part of the nervous system, or it's subsystem of the nervous system, but it's so easy for us to take these things to be 'I' – I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch, I experience.

To understand all this we should examine the instincts, especially the instincts of self, the self instinct. Nature is very deep and mysterious. It's full of things that we don't know. And so nature provides us with the instincts, certain kinds of innate knowledge, necessary for us to survive, things we know without having to learn. These are the instincts which enable us to survive. And central amongst the instincts we're provided with at birth is the self instinct. It's a trick that nature uses for us to cherish and protect our own lives. If there wasn't this self instinct we wouldn't care about ourselves enough to survive. And so we should be very appreciative of this self instinct which nature gives us so that we could survive. If it wasn't for this, it's only because of this self instinct that we are still alive today. However, this self instinct has both benefits and dangers, advantages and disadvantages. That enables us to survive, even till today, is one of its benefits, but the disadvantage is that, it's because of this self instinct that all our problems arise. We can't just look at one side or the other, we have to see both, that because life is taken to be self, we survive. But then, many problems are created for this life. It's important to understand this self instinct, to see how it is that we take the senses to be self so easily.

Because of ignorance, because of not knowing better, even because of being stupid, we just can't help it, we take the external sense objects, the external āyatana, as being self. Because of ignorance we go and take forms, sounds, odors, flavors, touches and mental objects as being self. This is because this instinct of self is so powerful that it can trick us, to not only taking our own life as being self but seeing everything as being self. For example, if you give a nice, beautiful rose to a young child, the child will protect it and guard it, just as if it was alive, considering that that rose is alive. If you give a small child a doll and the child will talk to and cuddle and take care of that doll, just as if it were alive, as if it were a self. Or, in a negative way, if a child is walking carelessly and bumps into a chair, it would turn and kick the chair, or kick the wall as if the chair was some kind of enemy turning to attack it. And this happens not only in children, it happens even in adults. Have you ever seen a housewife in the kitchen, who is cutting the vegetables and accidentally cuts herself and she throws down the knife in anger, as if the knife was at fault? Or people would throw a glass or

something in anger. Because of our ignorance, it's very easy to take all the sense objects as being self, because we don't know any better, we take them to be selves, to be souls.

So the inner *āyatana*s (sense organs) are the first set. And then the external *āyatana*s (sense objects) are the second set. When the sense organ and sense object interact, there arises a third thing, sense consciousness. There are six kinds of sense consciousness, there is eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind consciousness, through which we are aware of, or which we know forms, sounds, odors, flavors, touches and mind objects. And this is even easier to take as being *attā* (self). Once there is this consciousness of things, it's extremely easy to consider that consciousness, that consciousness of this, consciousness of that to be self. And so we cling to different forms of consciousness as being me, as being mine. But what we need to examine, is the fact that consciousness arises just as a reaction to the interaction between sense organ and sense object. There is no consciousness without sense organs and sense objects. It's only when the sense organs and sense objects interact that consciousness occurs. So there is no way that consciousness can be self. It depends on things which are not-self. It arises momentarily and passes away. It too, is not-self.

The fourth set is called 'contact.' When there is the sense organ, the sense object and sensory consciousness, when these three meet together, there occurs what we call contact (*phassa*). When there are these three things happening together, when sense organ, sense object and sensory consciousness function together, that is contact. There are the six kinds of contact. It's not just contact. There's eye contact, ear contact, nose, tongue, body and mind contact. Now this, because of our ignorance, our foolishness, we take to be self. We take it to be 'my' contact, or 'I am contact', this experience of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and mental experience. Sensory experience is taken to be 'I', to be the ego, the self, the soul. But if we look, if we study it, with a clear, calm mind, we see that in fact, contact is just the functioning together of sense organs, sense objects and sense consciousness. That's all. It's the contact of the senses. It's not the contact of me, of ego, of self. So it's time to stop falling for this illusion, to stop getting caught or tricked by this illusion, but to see that it's not-self, that the functioning together of the sense organs, sense objects and sense consciousness is just something that happens naturally. It's time to give up attaching to it as *attā*, as me, as ego.

Next, the fifth set. When there is contact, feeling arises. Feeling (*vedanā*) is just the reaction* of contact. When there is contact there is this natural reaction, which we call feeling. It can be agreeable feeling or disagreeable feeling, or more simply, there is positive and there is negative feeling. This is just the natural reaction, when there is contact, the reaction of contact, and that's all. But because

of our foolishness, because we are ignorant, that is taken to be me or mine. The feeling is taken to be me, 'I' feel. Or the feeling is taken to be mine, 'I feel positive, I feel negative, 'my' feeling. We turn feeling into ego, into self, because of ignorance. When in fact, it's just the product or reaction of contact. Contact is not-self, and its result, its product is also not self. But because of ignorance we don't see this. And so we take it to be me, to be mine. We make an ego out of feeling. This point is very important, because the world makes all sorts of problems out of feeling. The world is full up with problems caused by positive and negative feelings. And all these problems can only occur because we ignorantly take feeling to be me and mine. The fifth set then is feeling, positive and negative feelings, which are the reaction to contact. All feelings are not-self.

And now, we're not finished, we have some more to go, in the sixth set, once there is feeling, then the mind performs a further function. Notice we say 'the mind.' It's the mind that does this, not any self or soul. But when there is feeling, the natural function of the mind is to perceive it or to recognize it. When there is feeling the mind will recognize it, classify it and regard it as being this or that. For example, some feelings are recognized as being happy feelings (*sukha vedanā*), and some are recognized as being painful feelings or unpleasant feelings (*dukkha vedanā*). And then the ones that are the lowest and most dangerous as this feeling comes from a woman, this feeling comes from a man. And so the feelings are perceived, are recognized in all kinds of different ways. This is just a natural function of the mind and nothing more. But because of our stupidity we go and take that function, that recognition as being self. 'I' recognize, 'I' perceive, or this is 'my' perception, 'my' recognition, and so on. So the sixth set is *saññā* (perception or recognition), which is just a natural function. One should avoid the error of taking this to be self.

The seventh set is just the reaction of *saññā*, or the reaction to perception, recognition. It's just a natural reaction of mind that when something is perceived and recognized, then there will arise some intention, what to do with it, what to do about it. As soon as there is recognition, intention or volition occurs naturally, immediately, as how to respond to this thing that is recognized. If we don't recognize it, there will be no intention or volition. But as soon as it's recognized, 'we're gonna do this' about it. And then this volition, this willing is taken to be the self or the soul – 'I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that.' But in fact, volition is just a reaction to perception. So it's called *saññā cetanā* (intention towards *saññā*) which is recognition, perception. That's the seventh set.

Once there is volition, there occurs the eighth set. When there is the intention to do something then there arises the want, to want to do it. First there is the intention to do something in response to feeling and recognition and then the mind wants to do it. This is called *taṇhā* (want). But let us take a moment to point out something special here. Usually the word 'taṇhā' means desire or craving, which

implies ignorance. It means an unwholesome, unskillful, even evil, definitely harmful state of mind, *taṇhā* usually is translated desire or craving, which is unwholesome and harmful. But in this case, in this series that we're speaking of, it's neutral. Here *taṇhā* just means 'want,' the Pāli words in different contexts are used somewhat differently. So one can't cling to just one meaning. It has to have the meaning that's correct for the context. And in this context, *taṇhā* is neutral. It's neither good nor bad, wholesome or unwholesome, beneficial or harmful. It's just straightforward want according to the volition. It's neither wholesome, such as we would call aspiration (*sankappa*) which is one of the links of the noble eightfold path, nor is it the low and harmful desire or craving that is the cause of all *dukkha*. So, here *taṇhā* is just want. It's merely a reaction of the mind. When there is volition, the next set is to want according to that volition. If we are foolish we will take this want to be self, to be 'I' want, this is what 'I' want. So we ought to have wisdom to see that it's merely a natural reaction of the mind, want is *anattā* (not-self).

Now we come to the last two sets. When there is want, it's natural that the mind will think, so the ninth set is thought. Whenever there is want the mind will think accordingly. There will be thought according to that want, which is just totally natural.

And then once there is thought there arises the tenth set, which is consideration, to ponder. First there is want and then thought and then one ponders, one analyzes, so critical, investigative pondering, consideration of things. Thought in Pāli is called *vitakka* (thought). And then consideration is called *vicāra*. These are the ninth and tenth sets. Usually people take thought to be 'I' think, thought is taken as self. Or consideration, 'I' consider, 'I' ponder. Don't do that anymore. Don't waste your time. See that thought and consideration are merely reactions, natural processes and functions of this mind and nothing more. See them as *anattā*. There is no need to take them to be self, soul, me or mine in any way. So these are the last two groups, thought and consideration.

So this is all about the *āyatana*s (sense media). There are the senses themselves and all the things connected with the senses. These are all just natural processes. They are neither good nor bad, wholesome or unwholesome. They are just natural functions of the mind. There are sixty of them. There are the six sense organs (inner *āyatana*s), the six kinds of sense objects (external *āyatana*s). There are the six kinds of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the six kinds of contact (*phassa*), the six kinds of feeling (*vedanā*), the six kinds of perception, recognition (*saññā*), the six kinds of intention or volition (*saññā cetanā*), the six kinds of want (*taṇhā*), the six kinds of thought (*vitakka*) and the six kinds of pondering (*vicāra*). Altogether there are sixty of them. Aren't these minds of ours marvelous, that in them there are these sixty different functions, all of them which occur naturally, without requiring any self or soul to run the show? It's just the way our minds

are. Now it may seem that it's more complicated than a computer and there is no way we could ever deal with these sixty different functions, but in fact, we can control, we can supervise all sixty of these functions with just one thing, *sati* (mindfulness). With one thing, just mindfulness, we can deal with all sixty of these functions. Not we, the mind, the mindfulness of the mind can oversee all of these functions. And then there won't be any problem. This is why we practice mindfulness with breathing, to develop the necessary mindfulness to deal with all sixty of these functions. So all these sixty may seem like quite a lot, but it only takes one thing to control it all, and this is *sati*. With mindfulness, with genuine mindfulness, there is no need to take any of these sixty as being self or soul. With mindfulness, we can live totally aware that all of these sixty things are *anattā* (not-self).

So this is the second group – that of all the things related to the *āyatanas*. The first group were the *dhātus* (elements) all of which are not-self. And then the second group, the senses and all the sense functions, which we have seen are not-self. This brings us to the third group, the *khandhas* (the five aggregates). The five aggregates are not so difficult to understand after hearing about the *āyatanas*, because the five aggregates are included in what we've been discussing in terms of the senses. So it's not so difficult to look at the five *khandhas*. And so we'll do so in order to see that none of the aggregates is self, that there is no need of clinging to any of them as being me or mine.

The things which come together to make up a life, the components that make up a life, can be distinguished into two areas – the mind and the body. And then the components that make up the mind can be distinguished into four. So there are four mental components or aggregates and one physical component or aggregate. Altogether these five components or aggregates of a human being, the five things that make up a human being, altogether are called the five *khandhas* (aggregates).

The first *khandha* is *rūpa khandha* (the form aggregate). *Rūpa* means 'form' or we could say 'body.' This is the first four elements, the four physical elements of earth, water, fire and wind. These four physical elements and the things associated with them is what makes up *rūpa* (form). This is the first aggregate.

The earth, water, fire and wind element compounded together is 'the body.' And then based on the body are all kinds of states or conditions, such as femininity or masculinity, stillness or the ability to move, beauty and so on. So there are the four physical elements and the states or conditions which depend on them, which include the nervous system, and the senses, which are part of the nervous system, as well as the sense objects. This is all included in *rūpa khandha* (the form aggregate). All of these elements and the things based upon these elements are in no way a self or a soul. We need to see that *rūpa khandha* – form, the form aggregate, the body aggregate – is not-self.

So as we know when there are the āyatanas and they interact, there arises sense consciousness and then there is contact, and the reaction to contact is feeling (*vedanā*). *Vedanā* (feeling) is considered the second aggregate. It's the first of the four mental aggregates. There is the physical aggregate and the four mental. And the first of these is considered to be *vedanā khandha* (the feeling aggregate). When there is the sense activity and then contact, then there is feeling. There will be satisfied feeling, dissatisfied, or we can just say, positive feeling, negative feeling. But sometimes the feeling is neither positive nor negative. Then we call it kind of indiscriminate or indeterminate feeling – not neutral, but it's kind of in the middle, where you can't say it's positive but you can't say it's negative. These are the three kinds of feeling. These occur naturally whenever there is contact. Feeling happens over and over again throughout the day. Visual feelings towards the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Whenever the first five senses interact there is physical contact and then feeling arises. These feelings occur naturally. There is nothing about them which deserves to be taken as a self or a soul, as me or mine. The feeling aggregate is not-self.

In this case we take contact and consider it to be part of the feeling aggregate. Now we're not talking about ten but five, and so here, *vedanā khandha* includes contact. In one day, how many contacts are there? How many visual, oral, how many nose, tongue, body and mind contacts are there? And how many kinds of feeling? How many different feelings are arising with all these contacts, just in one day? See how many there are in the variety, in the constant change of all the contacts and all the feelings. And in spite of that we go and take it to be 'my' contact, 'I' contact, 'I' feel, 'my' feeling, 'I am' happy, 'I am' painful, over and over again, 'I am' positive, 'I am' negative, when in fact, all the contacts and all the feelings are not-self.

There is not anything you can do about it. As long as there are the senses there will be contact and feeling. You can't stop it, you can't live without it. As long as we are alive and there are the six senses, there will be contact and feeling. And you can't help it, as long as there is feeling, there will be recognition. There will be *saññā*. Once there is feeling, this perception, recognition occurs naturally, automatically. We perceive things, we recognize them, classify them according to the feeling. This happens, but we see it as self, although all the perceptions and recognitions are dependent upon things which are not-self, and all the recognitions are not-self themselves. We see them as being 'I', 'I' recognize, 'my' perception, and so on. We see them as being self, we attach to them as being self.

Once there is the third aggregate of recognition, then there naturally arises the fourth aggregate, or thought. We already discussed thought, the different forms of thought. Once there is *saññā khandha* (the recognition aggregate) then there arises *saṅkhāra khandha* (the thinking aggregate). And then that is taken to be self – 'I' think, 'my' thought.

So now we come to the fifth aggregate, which you've already heard of, the consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇa khandha*). You already heard that *viññāṇa* (consciousness) comes in when the sense organ and sense object interact, and then consciousness arises. But we put consciousness at the end as the fifth aggregate, and the reason for this is because it arises so often and at so many places. It wouldn't be correct to put it at just the second position. When we follow the sequence or the order, we begin with form, which includes the senses. And then consciousness arises and there is contact and feeling, and then recognition, or perception and then conception, thought. These follow a natural sequence. But consciousness doesn't just go in at the beginning. When feeling arises there is consciousness and feeling, when recognition occurs, there is consciousness and recognition, when thought occurs, there is consciousness and thought. So for this reason we put consciousness at the end as the fifth *khandha*, because it's arising with everything. When anything occurs, there is consciousness in that, and so *viññāṇa khandha* (consciousness) is the fifth aggregate. Consciousness can be towards physical objects, the first five kinds of *āyatana*s. But consciousness can also be towards mind objects which is the sixth *āyatana* – and mind objects include feeling, recognition and thought. So then because it's happening all over the place, we say – because it doesn't follow the order, we can't put it anywhere specific in this order – we put *viññāṇa khandha* as fifth.

So these are the five aggregates that make up a human life. These five things together are the human being and each of them is not-self. Together they are not-self.

So these five *khandhas* are our lives, our lives are just these five *khandhas*. Or we could say our lives are the sixty things connected with the senses. But sixty is quite a big number, it's hard to keep track of. So it's easier to just talk about the five *khandhas*. To know yourself, to know oneself is to know the five *khandhas*. If you don't yet know these five *khandhas*, then you don't know yourself. And so we need to study these five *khandhas* in order to know what our life is, to know what's going on in our lives. So we study the five *khandhas* to see that they're arising naturally. They are made up of the elements, they are just a coming together of natural essences, things happen according to the law of nature. They arise, they perform some function and they pass away. These things arise, they perform their function and pass away and then another thing arises, functions and passes away. There is this endless flow of change and transformation of the five *khandhas*. This is what we call life. This is what we are. None of it is a self or a soul in any way. These are just illusions created by our own ignorance. And then, because of this stupidity we go and cling to these illusions more and more. But with mindfulness we can investigate and study these five *khandhas* to see that they are always changing, to see their instability, the insecurity of their constant concocting and to see that they are not-self, they are *anattā*. When we have this understanding of the five *khandhas* with mindfulness and wisdom, we master our

lives. We have mastered life, we truly know how to live life only when we have a thorough and complete understanding of these five khandhas. Then once we really know life, there will be no more problems in life.

As long as there are the senses (*āyatanas*), there will be the five khandhas. We take the sixty items of the senses and we condense it, or summarize it into five, and call it the five khandhas. Life is the five khandhas. There is nothing more to life or beyond the five khandhas. But because of our foolishness, these five khandhas are all just natural functions, natural processes, occur and exist through and because of the law of nature. That's all, they are just natural. But because we are stupid, we go and take them to be 'me' and 'mine.' This means we are thieves, we are robbers, crooks, we go and steal these khandhas and claim them to be our own. We classify them, we regard them, we claim them to be 'me' and 'mine,' which is to fight against nature. In fact these things are natural, they belong to nature. But because of ignorance we claim them to be 'me' and 'mine.' But the problem is when the thief steals, the thief gets punished. The thief is punished, because its life which is the thief. When there is ignorance life is clinging to itself as 'me and mine.' And then the punishment is that the five khandhas get heavy. When we latch onto these khandhas as 'me' and 'mine' they become a burden, which means life becomes a burden. The burden of life is created by stealing the khandhas, claiming them to be 'me' and 'mine.' They get heavy, burdensome, all kinds of troubles are made out of the khandhas, out of life. This is the punishment, the suffering. This is our big problem in life. This punishment that occurs from stealing the khandhas. And so the response is to let go, to see that all five khandhas, to see that life is not-self, to see the naturalness of life, and stop stealing life, stop claiming it to be 'me and mine.' When we don't steal anything, then there is nothing heavy to carry, there is no burden. Life is no problem and there is no *dukkha*. This, right here, is the benefit, the wonder, the marvelousness of anattā. The beauty of anattā is that it frees us from all problems, from all *dukkha*. We stop stealing life, life is no longer a burden, it's free. This is the advantage of anattā. You'll do well to be very interested in it, in not-self.

Now, in India, before the Buddha's time, they knew of the five khandhas. It wasn't like they didn't know about these things. They knew about the five khandhas, but they only knew them in terms of being self. Some people said "Form is self," others said "Feeling is self, recognition is self, thought is self, consciousness is self, and so on." So they knew the five khandhas as being self. But when the Buddha appeared, he said, "No, it's not like that. There are the five khandhas, there is life, but they are not self," that "knowing the khandhas as self, as being self, is misunderstanding." To understand the khandhas correctly, is to know that form is not-self, feeling is not-self, recognition is not-self, thought is not-self and consciousness is not-self. This is the correct understanding. When one misunderstands the khandhas and takes them to be self, they become heavy and burdensome, which creates suffering. But when they are understood correctly

then there is no problem life is not a problem at all there is nothing burdensome or painful about it. And so the Buddha appeared to teach that the five khandhas are not-self so that we can live, so that the khandhas can live free of suffering, without any dukkha. If you practice *ānāpānasati* successfully then you will develop a complete and thorough understanding of these five khandhas, that none of them is self. You will be able to let go of any misunderstanding about the khandhas and then there won't be any more dukkha.

Now all of you live in a scientific era, this isn't India of 2,600 or 3,000 years ago and modern science can help us a great deal in understanding that the five khandhas are not-self. If we had the time we could bring up all kinds of different examples from science to help to show that the five khandhas are not-self. So since you live in a scientific era, please study these things correctly, study them scientifically, study them inwardly, how these five khandhas – which is your daily life – these five khandhas are life from moment to moment; there is nothing but these five khandhas, study them, examine them until seeing that they are not-self. If you do this, if you practice *ānāpānasati* correctly, then you will be able to say without believing anyone else:

'We are the we which is not really we, or not really us; I am the I which is not really I.'

This concludes the business of the five khandhas.

So may we end today's session. Thank you for being very good listeners, you have been listening patiently for more than two hours, thank you and that's all for today. In a few days we will discuss dependent origination, which will help you to understand these things even better. Thank you.

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