

Why the Monkeys Washed Out Their Ears

by Ajahn Buddhādāsa

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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 volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhhbk@gmail.com).

Allow us to remind you that we are speaking about an introduction to the heart of the Dhamma. Yesterday we didn't finish so today we will continue.

Let us review a few things about the stream of dependent origination so that you will understand it more clearly and thoroughly.

You ought to know that the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* can be applied to things without life that is, inanimate things. It can be applied or seen also in living things, animate things. Now we are speaking specifically about dependent origination as it applies to animate things.

But it's still the same matter and the same truth. But when we examine how it manifests in the world, we can distinguish two aspects – as it applies to inanimate things and as it applies to animate things.

If we want to understand anything, even inanimate things like industry or agriculture, we need to investigate and understand them according to dependent origination. For example, if we want to be farmers, we need to see how the sunlight, the water, the minerals in the soil, and other things work in terms of dependent origination. If we understand all these dependent originating things, then we can be successful at farming, agriculture, industry, or in manufacturing. We have to know how the machines work, how their parts fit together, various laws of electricity and thermodynamics – the mechanics of all these things. If

we understand the principle of dependent origination as it applies to machines and manufacturing, then we can do very useful things with it. Even applying to the whole cosmos, if we wish to understand the whole cosmos, we have to understand the dependent origination of them – the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars, the interstellar gas, and all such things. So in short, in order to understand anything, even inanimate things well, we must understand them in terms of dependent origination. All technology just comes from dependent origination, and we will have a useful technology if we understand it in this way.

However, inanimate things, non-living things don't have any problems about *dukkha*. They don't have feelings and so they don't experience *dukkha*. So we'll speak specifically about the animate being, the sentient beings that feel pleasure and pain, that experience *dukkha* because this is where the problem lies.

So allow us some time to review dependent origination as it applies to us – human beings. So we can observe it carefully and see how it applies to our own lives.

The first point is that we have eyes, ears, nose, tongues, bodies, and minds with which to contact the things outside of us – that is the forms, sounds, odors, flavors, touches, and mental experiences. The first six are called 'the inner *āyatana*' (the inner communicators) and the later six are called 'the outer *āyatana*' (the external communicators). This is the first level of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

When the inner *āyatana* such as the eye, makes contact with the outer *āyatana* such as a form, then there arises eye consciousness, visual consciousness. Then the same thing happens with the rest of the six *āyatana*. There are six kinds of consciousness – eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so on. This is the second stage.

Then when these three things – the eye, the form, and eye consciousness – come together, meet, and work together, we call this *phassa* (contact). And the same thing happens with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

You must observe that, for it to be real contact, it involves three things, not just two. It has to be all three especially including the consciousness for there to be real contact.

There's contact going on all the time, all day long. The eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind – through one of these six doors there is always some kind of contact going on, one after the other, endlessly, but we never bother to pay attention, so we don't observe it and we don't see it. But throughout the day, there is always some kind of contact. If not the eye, the nose or the ears or the tongue, going on and on and on.

So all the time there is this contact between the inner senses and the outer sense objects with *viññāṇa* (consciousness – being the thing that knows or experiences and is aware of the contact). Now this point of contact that keeps happening over and over again is very important. It's a crossroads like a fork in the road for us every time there is contact. If in any moment of contact there is a lack of understanding of wisdom, if there is just *avijjā* (ignorance), then it's an ignorant contact that follows the path to *dukkha*. If there is ignorance, things will happen in a way that becomes *dukkha*. If however, at that moment of contact there is wisdom, there is right understanding, there is knowledge, there is mindfulness, then it will proceed in a way that doesn't end up in *dukkha*. This is the very important fork in the road for us. Every moment of contact, if it's ignorant, then it ends up in *dukkha*. But if there is mindfulness and wisdom, then it doesn't cook up into *dukkha*. This is a very important point that you need to investigate deeply.

Another point that we should make clear is that in some religions and some sects, they take that contact, whether through the eyes or whatever, is 'self.' They take the sense contact as the 'self' or the 'soul.' But in Buddhism, we don't see it that way at all. In Buddhism, contact is understood to be merely a natural mechanism, it happens naturally, there is no 'self' or 'soul' involved. So please notice the difference between Buddhism and some other religions or philosophies.

Now if in this moment of contact, *avijjā*, not-knowing, happens, then if *avijjā*, not-knowing, wrong-knowing, dominates the contact then we call it 'ignorant contact' and things will happen ignorantly from there. But if in the moment of contact, there is intelligence and wisdom, then we can call it 'intelligent' or 'enlightened contact.'

Contact is the basis for *vedanā*. Due to contact, *vedanā* (feeling) arises. If the contact is ignorant, then the feelings that arise from it will also be ignorant – you could even say stupid. This means that the mind will be deceived and

tricked by the feelings. The positiveness or negativeness of the vedanā will deceive the mind and the mind will indulge in and get lost in those positive & negative vedanā. But if it's an enlightened contact and if the contact is experienced through understanding, then any vedanā that arise will be enlightened vedanā – they won't be ignorant. So we won't be tricked by the positiveness or negativeness of the vedanā. So the mind won't get trapped in those vedanā. So there are these two kinds of vedanā: ignorant vedanā and enlightened vedanā.

If the vedanā are ignorant, then we get sucked into the positiveness & negativeness of them. The gladness & sadness of the vedanā take over our minds and this gives rise to all kinds of defilements such as greed, lust, anger, and hatred because of the ignorant vedanā. But if the vedanā are enlightened, this positiveness or negativeness has no power over the mind. The mind doesn't get trapped in them. All that happens is a knowing and understanding of what to do. When the vedanā arise with intelligence, one knows how to respond to them, what to do about them. And then there is no trouble due to the positiveness & negativeness of these vedanā.

When there is vedanā, there arises all kinds of wanting or desire. Desire arises due to the vedanā. If it's ignorant vedanā, then the wanting will be ignorant – it will be a blind, ignorant, foolish wanting. Depending on whether the vedanā is positive or negative, the desire will follow accordingly. Positive vedanā leads to wanting to get and negative vedanā leads to wanting to destroy. So the desires will happen according to one's personal feelings and inclinations when there is ignorant vedanā, and then ignorant want. But if it's enlightened vedanā, then there won't arise any ignorant wants but instead there will be just understanding and wisdom about the vedanā. This understanding or wisdom will know what the vedanā are like and how they can stir up the mind into different kinds of problems. So instead of wanting according to the positiveness or negativeness of the vedanā, there is just the want or desire to respond to any problems which have arisen. There is merely the want to solve any problems that have occurred. This kind of want is not ignorant. So ignorant and enlightened vedanā lead to ignorant and enlightened want.

So vedanā gives rise to want. The word 'want' for us is a neutral term – it's neither positive nor negative, good nor bad, or anything like that. But if the vedanā are ignorant, then the want which arises is also ignorant, foolish, blind, or you could even call it stupid. We call this kind of blind ignorant want *taṇhā*

which we can translate as ‘desire’ or ‘craving.’ *Taṇhā* (desire, craving) is always ignorant. But when the *vedanā* is enlightened, the wanting that arises is wise and there is nothing ignorant or blind about it. This, then we can call ‘wise want’ or ‘aspiration.’ In Pāli, the word is *saṅkappa* which is different than *taṇhā*. There is a very important and clear difference between wise aspiration or wise aim, *saṅkappa*, and *taṇhā*. This wise aspiration will lead to progress and success in solving the dilemma of *dukkha* whereas *taṇhā* will just bring on more and more *dukkha*, pain and trouble.

Now when this *taṇhā*, ignorant desire, occurs and becomes stronger and more intense, it stirs up the concept that there is a ‘desirer.’ Due to the ignorant desire, there arises the concept of the ‘desirer’ – the person who desires. So this is a concept of ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘ego,’ ‘me,’ ‘mine,’ ‘I,’ whatever concept pops into the mind, here is the conception of ‘ego,’ ‘self,’ ‘me,’ ‘mine,’ ‘I,’ as the desirer – the one who desires. But if there isn’t this *taṇhā* and there is been wisdom all along, then there is the aspiration and then there doesn’t arise any concept of self or soul. Then there is just mindfulness and understanding that continue to respond correctly to the situation. When things go wrong due to ignorance, ignorant desire brings up the ignorant concepts of ‘self.’ The concept of ‘self’ or ‘soul’ is always ignorant and leads to even more trouble. But if it’s wise want or aspiration, then this concept of ‘self’ doesn’t happen.

This point here, where ignorant desire leads to the concept of ‘self,’ is the heart of dependent origination. You ought to study how this concept of ‘self’ happens dozens, hundreds of times each day. You can see it happening inside yourself and see how many times this concept of ‘self’ occurs – how many times there are these concepts of ‘me,’ ‘self,’ ‘ego,’ or ‘soul,’ or whatever. You should see how many times this happens because this is the heart or essence of dependent origination. Then when you see it, you will see that it is just a concept and that it’s a concept, an idea about ‘self’ or ‘soul.’ It’s not a real self or soul but just an idea concept, a concept which is stirred up in the mind by ignorance and desire.

Now some groups or teachings think that this self, this idea of ‘self’ is permanent, that this self or soul lasts forever, and that it just continues, that it’s just going on steadily, that it doesn’t fade away, disappear or change or anything like that. But in Buddhism, it’s very clear that this self or soul or ego is just a concept. It’s just an idea that arises temporarily. It’s a temporary momentary impermanent thing. It just happens and it goes away. But if the

conditions reoccur then it happens again. But each time, it's a different concept, it's not the same concept, it's a new one. But these keep happening over and over again and so sometimes through ignorance we blur them together and think that it's continuous and that there is really some kind of self. Please don't be deceived by the teaching of traditions that teach that there is some permanent, continuous, and lasting self. Observe that it's just a concept that arises, that's stirred up in the mind by ignorant desire. It's just a delusive concept (*māyā*) that will trick us and get us into trouble. It doesn't have any real substance or meaning or any reality of its own.

So in short ignorance creates desire and desire creates the desirer – the self, the one who desires. Examine things clearly; that means watch how this happens inside the mind. Examine it clearly till you see how ignorance creates desire which creates the desirer and then the delusive concept of 'self.'

The kind of ignorance which creates the self is called *upādāna* (attachment, clinging). Clinging to desire as the desirer, as self, is called *upādāna*. And then this is the heart of dependent origination. If you understand dependent origination you'll see that this is just ignorant and that it's not true or real. But because we don't understand dependent origination, we don't pay any attention to this. We don't even know that it's going on. We ignore this fact that this attachment that is happening all the time in our lives. So this attachment creates all kinds of problems of positiveness & negativeness, optimism & pessimism, sadness & gladness. So it's time we begin to observe this to see how this attachment keeps happening in our lives.

Through attachment, the self is established and the self is started so we say that the self now exists. This beginning to exist of the self is called 'existence' (*bhava*). This is, the self has begun to exist. It doesn't really exist but it exists ignorantly in the mind. This is called *bhava*, 'ignorant existence.'

When we talk materially, through conception, the fertilization of the egg by the sperm, then the embryo is said 'to exist.' Due to conception we say that the embryo 'exists.' That's on the material physical level. In the spiritual level, it's through the conception of self which we call attachment that the self begins to exist. So there is the conception of self and then the existence of self. And then just like the embryo grows and develops as a fetus, in the same way the self grows, develops, and matures until it's fully mature or ripe. And then it's born – so there is conception of self, existence of self or development of self, and then

birth (*jāti*) which is the birth of self, the ignorant birth of self in the mind. The birth of self means that this fully matured self, fully developed self will then perform some role or play some game according to the circumstances.

Although it's not so difficult to see, we never see this because we never bother to look. It's not that hard, it's pretty obvious if you pay attention how this self is born into the mind and then plays some little game, works out some little personality or thing, but we don't bother to watch. The only kind of birth that we see, that we pay attention to is physical birth when we are physically born from our mother's womb. This is the only kind of birth we understand although it only happens once in a lifetime. But this mental or spiritual birth of the ego happens over and over again every day. The physical kind of birth isn't very important – it's a thing of the past. The birth that really matters is this birth of ego that's going on right now. But this we don't bother to pay attention to so we don't understand it. Then there is nothing we can do about it and so the ego is getting born and playing its games all the time.

When you hear the word in Buddhism that 'birth is dukkha,' they mean the mental or spiritual birth of ego. When we say that birth is dukkha we don't mean physical birth. Physical birth happens once and then the problem is done with – it happened a long time ago. When we say that 'birth is dukkha,' we mean this birth of ego in the mind. This is the kind of birth that causes all our problems, this is the kind of birth which is so much dukkha. Every time that the ego is born there will be *dukkha*, there will be trouble.

The true meaning of the word 'birth' is that something performs its function. When something functions properly according to the meaning of its name we call that 'birth.' If it's not functioning we say that it 'ceases.' For example, the eyes are born when they perform the function of seeing, but when they are not seeing anything then they are said 'to cease' – the same with the ears, the nose, the tongue, and so on. When they function performing their activity of hearing or whatever, they are born, and when they stop doing that function, when they stop functioning they are said to cease. So it's the same with the self – the self is said to be born when it functions, when it plays the role according to the full meaning of the word 'self' – this is what is meant by 'birth.' Then when it doesn't function like that anymore, it's said 'to cease' or 'quench.'

You might find this amusing, you might even laugh or think we're crazy, but when the hand picks something up, we say that the hand is born. Whenever the hand does some work we say that it is born, and when it stops doing that work we say that it ceases or ends. So the hand is born and then it ceases. When we walk or take a step, the foot is born. But when we no longer use our feet to walk or to do something, we say that they cease. So our hands, our feet, and all the other aspects of our bodies are born whenever they perform some function like this and then they cease. The hands can be born many times in a day and after each birth they cease then they can be later born again. This is a spiritual way of speaking but if you look at it materially, you may think we are crazy.

So spiritually, when the self is born, when there is this kind of birth in terms of functioning, when the self functions then there is dukkha. If the self isn't born then there is no dukkha, there is no problem. It's only when the self functions according to the meaning of the word 'self' – that's the only time that there is dukkha.

Because the self, soul (*attā*) is born from ignorance, this self functions ignorantly. That means that it thinks 'I am,' 'I exist, here I am.' And then anything that it comes in contact with, it takes to be 'mine.' This is the ignorant thinking and functioning of self. So for example, this ignorant self thinks that physical birth is 'my' birth, it takes just physical birth which is just the natural biological process and attaches to it as being 'my' birth. So it makes a complicated problem out of birth. Or aging – this ignorant self takes the natural aging of the body and thinks of it as '*I am getting old*' or '*I am old.*' So it makes a big problem out of getting old out of aging. Or illness, which is just another natural thing, it just happens naturally. But this ignorant self thinks '*I am sick*' and '*I am ill*' and creates all kinds of problems and complications. And even death which is just the natural consequence of physical birth – this ignorant self thinks about it as '*I will die,*' '*I am going to die,*' or '*I am dying,*' and creates dukkha out of this. So when the self functions ignorantly, there is *attā*, the ignorant self, and then anything that it comes into contact with becomes *attaniya* (things associated to self, belonging to self). So first, there is *attā* – 'self' is born and then *attaniya* – 'of-self' is born. So everything becomes a mess. Things are positive, things are negative. They become complicated, dizzy and dukkha because the self functions in this ignorant way.

So the self is in the middle and then all kinds of things which are of-self or belonging to self are surrounding it. There is '*my family*' or '*the family of self*'

becomes a problem – ‘my’ possessions, ‘my’ wealth, ‘my’ fame, ‘my’ honor, ‘my’... Then there are the political problems of ‘mine,’ the economic problems of self, and the social problems of self. So first there is this self is in the middle and then all these problems are collected and gathered at the self as ‘of-self.’ There is the self and then there are all these things are the problems of self or the burdens of self. All this self and of-self is called the ‘burden.’ Because of this burden life becomes heavy so we can call it ‘the burden of life’ – self and of-self, *attā* and *attaniya*.

Think for yourself how it would be if this concept of ‘self’ never happened. If there wasn’t this concept of ‘self’ and ‘of self,’ of ‘me’ and of ‘mine,’ then there wouldn’t be any problem. You can see it for yourself quite easily that if there isn’t any concept of ‘self’ or ‘of-self,’ nothing is wrong – there is no problem, there is no hassle, there is no *dukkha*. But as soon as this ignorant concept of ‘self,’ of *attā*, of ‘of-self,’ of ‘mine,’ as soon as these are born, then life is full of trouble, full of problems, conflicts, stress, heaviness, sorrow, and *dukkha*. The difference between the life of self and the life without self is a tremendous one. You ought to think very carefully about this life where there isn’t any concept of ‘self’ or ‘of-self.’

If we want something but don’t get it that is *dukkha*. But if we want something and get it, that isn’t *dukkha*. But if we go and grasp at it and cling to it, then it becomes *dukkha*. If you get what you wanted, first it’s not *dukkha* but as soon as you attach to it as ‘mine’ then it becomes *dukkha*. So the essence of *dukkha* is this grasping and clinging. As soon as we attach to anything then it becomes *dukkha*. This is the real heart or essence of *dukkha* – this grasping and clinging to things as being ‘self’ or being ‘of-self’ as being ‘me’ or ‘mine.’

In practical terms, if we look at this in order to see how to practice, we see that the moment of choice or the moment of truth is at contact because it’s at contact where things can go one way or the other. First there are the *āyatana*, the inner communicators and the outer communicators, then arises the sense consciousness and then there is contact. Contact is the all-important moment – if it’s ignorant contact, it conditions ignorant *vedanā*, ignorant desire, attachment to self, existence of self, and birth of self which is all *dukkha*. But if at that moment of contact there is true mindfulness and wisdom, then that mindfulness and wisdom just carries on knowing what’s happening and responding appropriately without any attachment, without any concept of ‘self,’ and without any *dukkha*. So this moment of contact is the thing we have to be

very careful about. We have to be very mindful and attentive to the moment of contact so that it is wise and doesn't get into the ignorant path of things. So please be very careful about this moment of contact, this moment of choice.

This matter of dependent origination is just the subject of life. You can see if you look at this that this issue of dependent origination is nothing other than life itself. All we are talking about is life – what happens in life. So it's something of importance to all of us.

Paṭiccasamuppāda is the heart of Dhamma – it's the essence of Buddhism. Other religions such as Christianity or Hinduism cannot be found to teach dependent origination. You won't find the teaching of dependent origination in the Bible or the Hindu scriptures or in the other religions. This is an understanding and teaching found only in Buddhism in order that we can get rid of all dukkha, so that we can eliminate dukkha from our lives according to the method of Buddhism.

Something else you ought to know about has to do with the fact that dependent origination, as we've been investigating it today, is rather long – the āyatana, consciousness, contact, and so on (it's like nine or ten things). But you should also be aware that the Buddha spoke of it in a more condensed form. Very common thing that the Buddha spoke about is the five *khandhas* (the five aggregates). These five aggregates are nothing other than a condensed version of paṭiccasamuppāda. So this is also something you should know about.

This subject of the five khandhas separates life into five parts or sections. One section is the physical material aspect of life which is called *rūpa* ('form' or more simply 'body'). Then there are four aspects or sections which are *nāma* which means 'name' but in principle it's the mind. So life is categorized into five areas – one physical and four mental. These are the five *khandhas* (sections) of life.

The first section is called *rūpa-khandha* (the form khandha). This is made up of the body and all the things connected to the body and it also includes the nervous system which means *rūpa-khandha* also includes the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body sense – the skin, and all the nerves including the brain connected to that – this is the *rūpa khandha*. If you look into it in more detail, we speak of it as the earth element, the water element, wind element, fire element, and space element. Earth element is solidity. Water element is what pulls things together – cohesion. Wind element is movement. Then the fire

element is the temperature or energy. Space element is where all the rest of the elements can happen. This is what makes up *rūpa-khandha*, the physical of the body aggregate or the body section.

When the *rūpa-khandha*, the form-aggregate, the body, functions that means there is sense activity, then there are results or reactions on the mental side of life. First of all, when the body aggregate functions, there arises *vedanā* – there’s a feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness or you can just say positive or negative feelings, and then this gives rise to *saññā-khandha* which is to regard and classify things as being this or being that. To regard them and classify them. Then there is *saṅkhāra-khandha* which is to conceive and think about all these things – so *saṅkhāra-khandha* is ‘thinking.’ Then there is *viññāṇa-khandha* which is consciousness of all these different things – consciousness of the body through which we can experience the world, then consciousness of the *vedanā*, and consciousness of the *saññā* (the recognition and classification), and consciousness of thinking and thoughts. These are all of the five *khandhas*, sections of life. When the first one, the physical one functions, then there will be results leading to the four mental *khandhas* – *vedanā*, *saññā* (recognition regarding classifying), and then *saṅkhāra* (thought conception and thinking), and *viññāṇa* (consciousness).

It’s interesting that *viññāṇa-khandha*, the consciousness aggregate, comes last because it actually functions everywhere. When *rūpa-khandha* functions that is when the body functions, then consciousness comes in to play in order to see, hear, smell, etc. When the *vedanā* arises, it’s through *viññāṇa-khandha* that we are conscious of the pleasant/positive or unpleasant/negative feelings. Then when there is the classification of things such as blue, red, white, yellow, or sweet, salty, sour – *viññāṇa* is what knows that classifying and all the thoughts and thinking. So *viññāṇa-khandha* is listed fifth but it works everywhere. So these five *khandhas* then are a condensed version of dependent origination because as you can see they depend on each other. Each of them arises dependent upon others. So there is this mutual or interdependent conditioning of these five *khandhas*. So we’re talking about the same thing as dependent origination, we’re talking about life. But when we speak of the five *khandhas*, it’s a more condensed version – but it’s still dependent origination.

Before the Buddha’s time the Indians already knew about these five *khandhas*. The Buddha didn’t discover them or make them up or anything. They were already known by the Indians. However, they were known in terms of

medicine or in terms of psychology and then some even went so far as to take the five khandhas as being self. In their philosophical or religious system, they would speak of ‘self’ in terms of the five khandhas that the body is self or the vedanā is self or the recognition and classification is self, or thought is self, or the consciousness is self. This was a misunderstanding but this is the way they understood the khandhas. But when the Buddha came along, he denied all that. The Buddha said, “No! None of these *khandhas* are self. They are impermanent, changing, and temporary. None of them can be taken as self. All of the five khandhas are not-self.” So what’s called ‘Buddhism’ is a denial of the belief or the theories that the five khandhas are self. Buddhism is the teaching of not-self. All of these khandhas, all of dependent origination, all of life, is not-self. When we realize this, then the ego is not concocted anymore. And so there is no problems and there is no dukkha in life. This is the purpose of Buddhism.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism they speak more about the five *khandhas*, the aggregates, than then they talk about dependent origination. They also talk about *paṭiccasamuppāda* but not as much as they talk about the five khandhas. If you look at the most important sutras of Mahāyāna Buddhism, you will see that they all end with the five khandhas. The Mahāyāna sutras are much longer than in Theravāda Buddhism. They may start by talking about all kinds of Bodhisattvas and some so called ‘pure lands’ and ‘heavens’ and all kinds of very elaborate things. Sometimes they spend a lot of time on abstract philosophical questions. But at the end, they always get around to the five khandhas and making the point clear that the five khandhas are not-self or that the five khandhas are void of self. So the five khandhas are central teaching in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It’s a little easier to understand the five khandhas for those whose intelligence is not fully ripe or fully mature. It’s a little easier to understand than dependent origination. So it’s more appropriate when you’re trying to reach a large number of people to speak in terms of the five khandhas. But don’t think that it’s something different than dependent origination. It’s still the same thing but in a more condensed easier form, easier to understand, easier to practice, easier to manage and regulate.

Whether we speak in terms of five khandhas or in terms of dependent origination, the essence or heart of the matter is not-self. This is what Buddhism is all about. The body is not-self, the vedanā-khandha is not-self, the regarding and classifying are not-self, the thoughts and thinking are not-self, and consciousness is not-self. All of the five khandhas are not-self. Individually or

all together they are not-self. Or the inner āyatana – the eyes and ears and so forth are not-self, the outer āyatanas are not-self – the eye consciousness, ear consciousness and so on are not-self, contact is not-self, vedanā is not-self, taṇhā is not-self, attachment is not-self, and the rest is not-self. Either way of speaking, the essence of it is that all these things are not-self. This is the heart of Buddhism. This is what Buddhism is all about – the teaching of not-self. Sometimes we put it even more strongly – we say that Buddhism is the teaching of ‘no-man,’ or you can say ‘no-woman’ as well. Buddhism is the teaching of ‘no one’ because the central teaching is *anattā* (not-self). There isn’t anything which is self – everything whatsoever, you won’t find any exception anywhere in the universe, is not-self.

There isn’t a real self anywhere. What people call ‘self,’ ‘soul,’ ‘ego,’ *ātman*, *attā*, or whatever is just a concept created by ignorance – it’s just an ignorant concept. So you may laugh, you may ‘ha-ha!’ and ‘ho-ho!’ when we say this, but *we are the ‘we’ which is not really ‘we.’ We are a ‘we which is not really ‘we.’* This may sound funny to you and you may laugh, or think we are crazy but this is the truth and this is what Buddhism is all about. *We are the ‘we’ that isn’t really a ‘we.’*

Next we come to the question then, ‘What are we going to do about this? How are we going to practice according to things?’ The problem is that we lack *paññā* (intuitive wisdom). We lack the intuitive wisdom that all things are not-self. So it’s very difficult for us to practice. Further we lack the thing which will bring that wisdom and apply it to all the different things in life – that is we lack *sati* (mindfulness), which is kind of the vehicle or the delivery system, the delivery mechanism for wisdom. This is our problem – we lack wisdom and we lack mindfulness. So how are we going to deal with the fact that all these things are not-self?

Why is it that this concept of ‘self’ is born over and over again all day long? Why is our life full of these concepts of ‘self’ or these ideas about ‘self’? The reason is because we lack mindfulness and the intuitive wisdom that knows that all things are not-self. Because we lack mindfulness and true understanding, the concept of ‘self’ keeps getting born throughout our lives. We lack the understanding of dependent origination. If we really understood dependent origination, then we would not go and conceive of things as being ‘self,’ as being ‘me.’

There is a religious parable or fable which is useful to bring up at this time. There was a monkey he was king of a local group of monkeys. This was a special monkey such as he was called a ‘Bodhisattva’ or ‘Buddha-to-be.’ This monkey was captured and taken into the city where he was kept by the king. He lived in the palace and the city for a while until the king got bored, and then the monkey was released. So when the monkey came back from the city where it had viewed the life of court, market, and everything, then all the monkeys gathered around and asked, “What was it like? What did you see? What was it like in the human city?” And the monkey said, “There isn’t anything there, they haven’t got anything except *my* money, *my* position, *my* husband, *my* wife, *my* children, *my* work, *my* job, *my* car, *my* this, *my* that. Nothing but *me*, *me* and *mine*, *mine* all day long and all day night. That’s all they talk about *me*, *me* and *mine*, *mine*.” When all the monkeys heard this, they ran to the nearest river and started washing out their ears because they had heard such filthy and disgusting words – they had never heard such filthy things before so they washed out their ears. This is the parable of the monkeys washing their ears. It can be found in part of old texts that collect such fables and stories.

So in short, we need sufficient *paññā*, intuitive wisdom. We need sufficient *sati* (attentiveness, mindfulness). We need sufficient *sampajañña* (applied wisdom). When we’ve developed intuitive wisdom, it’s kind of stored up and then we need the ability to apply it to every situation – this is called *sampajañña*, it’s ready, active, applied wisdom in action. And we need *samādhi* which is the strength and power of mind. In fact all of these four things – wisdom, mindfulness, wisdom in action, and *samādhi* exist naturally. We all have these from birth but they are not enough, they are too little. So they need to be developed and trained until they are adequate to do the job. So this is why we ask you to study and practice mindfulness with breathing. If you will learn how to practice this and then practice it completely in all four areas as you’re being taught at the meditation center. If you practice it successfully, then you will have these four things sufficiently – you’ll have enough wisdom, mindfulness, wisdom in action, and concentration in order to prevent yourself from being tricked by things. You’ll have enough mindfulness so that nothing will deceive you into cooking up ‘self’ and ‘things that belong to self.’ You won’t fall for any more *attā* or *attaniya*, and then there won’t be anything that can cause you trouble ever again.

The meditation system which is called *ānāpānasati* will enable us to study and understand all the important secrets of life. We'll investigate until we thoroughly understand the hidden secrets of the body (the *kāya*), and then to investigate the secrets of *vedanā* (the feelings). Then there are the very subtle secrets of the *citta* (the mind). Lastly, the secrets of the natures – of all the natural things that trick us into attaching to them as 'me' and 'mine' which we call *dhammas*. The system of practice we're teaching here will investigate these four kinds of secrets – those of the body, of the feelings, of the mind, and of all the dhammas we cling to as 'me' and 'mine.' Your instructor at the meditation center will explain this to you fully. Please listen carefully, think things through, and ask any necessary questions so that you understand how to practice. Then do your best to train according to this system of practice so that you will discover these different secrets of life.

The secret of the body is that there are two bodies. Here the word *kāya*, 'body,' means 'group.' So there are two groups. There is the flesh body – that means in this body there are all the physical things that make up our flesh-and-blood body. Then there is the second body called the 'breath body' or you could call it the '*prāṇa* body' or the '*pāṇa* body.' Then using this breath body which just means your breathing, one can control the flesh and blood body. This is the secret of the body that we discover through *ānāpānasati*. We discover the secret and then learn how to exploit it for our benefit.

So we train the breathing to be very calm, quiet, and peaceful. Then the flesh body also becomes calm and peaceful. You don't have to directly try and calm down the body – just make the breathing calm and peaceful and then the [flesh] body will also be calm and peaceful. This is the key lesson regarding the bodies.

The next stage of practice is about the *vedanā*, feelings, which means the exact same thing as the *vedanā* we talked about in dependent origination. So you understand that the *vedanā* stir up or concoct all kinds of concepts and thoughts. This is the secret of the *vedanā*, how they concoct concepts, thoughts, and ideas. So we need to train with the *vedanā* so that they don't create any harmful or evil thoughts and concepts so that the *vedanā* only bring up thoughts that are useful, peaceful, and healthy. The essence of the second stage of practice is to be able to master the *vedanā* so that they don't stir up any thoughts or concepts which create *dukkha*.

The third group of lessons or area is about the *citta*, the mind. Usually we just translate it as ‘mind’ but we could also translate it as ‘consciousness.’ But it’s easier to just translate it as ‘mind’ – it includes all the things meant by ‘mind,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘heart.’ In this, we first investigate all the different kinds of mind and all the different possibilities the mind can assume. Then once we have seen all these different kinds of mind, we choose those kinds of mind which are the best, which are the most useful and beneficial for our spiritual life. First of all, we make the mind happy. We give it a delight and joy, we make it joyful. Then we make it stable, we make it very stable so it has a very strong certain *samādhi*. Then we make it release and we make it let go – we make the mind free itself from everything. We learn to control and train the mind in these different ways – this is the third lesson or third group of lessons of *ānāpānasati*.

The last group of lessons – the final stage of practice is about nature or Dhamma. Here we mean all the natures that trick us into attaching to them as positives sometimes, or as negatives other times. They are all the natural things that we keep clinging to as being positive & negative. So we need to study what their real nature is, what the facts of these things are. So we look deeply in order to see that in fact all of these things are not-self. Although they have tricked us into attaching to them as positive & negative and this has stirred up the concept of ‘self,’ we see that in fact all of these natures, all of these dhammas are not-self. This is the very important lesson that we must give a lot of attention and effort to – that makes up the fourth group of lessons of *ānāpānasati*.

In a short period of just ten days you probably won’t be able to complete this training in all four areas. But in ten days you might be able to understand how to practice. You probably won’t be able to finish the training but you might be able to understand how to do it. And so just do your best to understand how to practice *ānāpānasati* and keep working on it and keep trying continually until you are successful in all four stages of practice. Then you will thoroughly understand dependent origination. You will have mindfulness whenever you need it. You will have wisdom – all the intuitive wisdom you need. You will have all the *sampajañña* – the ability to apply wisdom to every possible situation. You will have all the *samādhi* – all the stability, strength, and concentration of mind you need so that you understand dependent origination. So that you understand all five khandhas and know that none of them are self. You realize that all the modes and linkages of dependent origination are not-self

and that each of the khandhas is not-self. You will have the ability to manage these things. You can manage the flow of dependent origination. You can manage the khandhas so they don't give rise to the concept of 'self' anymore. And then you are finished, you will have solved all your problems.

So we can summarize all that has been said in these talks that there is really just two things that you need to do. First to study dependent origination – investigate and train with *paṭiccasamuppāda* until you thoroughly realize it. Then train yourself with the system of practice called 'mindfulness with breathing' until you have the ability to manage the stream of dependent origination so that it doesn't create any dukkha anymore. That's all that we need to do – study dependent origination and practice *ānāpānasati*. If we do this correctly and completely, then there won't be any more dukkha. This is the heart of the Dhamma.

So thank you for listening and being with us once again. We hope that your effort in listening will be very useful for you, that you will now have an overview, an introduction in what you need to do, that you will continue to study dependent origination and practice *ānāpānasati*, and that you will have the confidence and the appetite to do this seriously, continuously, and with commitment. So please carry on with your study and practice. We wish you great success in them and hope that you can free yourself from the *dukkha* of 'me' and 'mine.'

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