

The Five Sections are Not-Self

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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).

Today we will speak about the matter of *dhātus* further. Please remember the point we made earlier – that there isn't anything which isn't a dhātu, that everything is dhātus, just in the same way that there isn't anything which isn't Dhamma, that there isn't anything which isn't nature. You needn't be uncertain or consider it humorous or funny that this word *dhātus* refers to everything. Even length and width, height and shortness, are dhātus – the dhātu of longness, the dhātu of shortness, and so on. If we also consider carefully, we will recognize that even negativeness and positiveness are dhātus. Positive things have an attractiveness or pullingness to them and in negative things there's repulsion or pushing away. Even this pushing and pulling are dhātus. So now let's consider especially those dhātus that are directly connected with our lives, that are connected with and make up these bodies, these personalities. There are certain dhātus that we need to study and get to know in particular, and these we will be talking about now.

In these bodies, in the physical aspect of our lives there are four main dhātus – the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the wind element. On the non-physical, non-material side, there is one dhātu called *viññāṇa-dhātu* (the consciousness element). There is one more element which can't be classified as physical or mental, and this is the *ākāsa-dhātu* (the space element). So in summary there are these six dhātus. The Buddha spoke of the human being being composed of these six elements.

So we'll consider the *rūpa-dhātus* (the material elements) first. You should notice that we are not specifying the material things themselves, we're not talking about matter itself, instead we're talking about certain properties or

qualities of matter, which leads us to speak of them in different ways, with different names. So we are not speaking so much of the matter itself, but the properties that one can recognize in matter.

So for example, the earth element, we don't mean the soil on the ground or the material earth, but we mean the property of taking up room, of taking up area or space, of having a solidity, a hardness which takes up area. Then when we speak of the water dhātu, we are focusing on the property or quality of pulling things together, holding things together as a unit, thus its essence which is cohesion or cohesiveness. This property can be seen easily if you make a separation in water, it comes back together. That is, if you have some water and you cut it with a knife, the water comes back in to fill up the space.

The fire element stresses combustion, the quality of burning up or consuming through combustion and it also focuses on temperature. If it has sufficient heat it can, not only burn up itself, it can burn up other things as well.

The wind element has the property of movement, such as you can see in a gas. So you can see that we are not stressing the material things themselves whether it's water or whatever, but we are stressing the properties symbolized or exemplified by those material things – earth, water, fire, and wind.

For example, in a chunk of meat you will notice all four of these elements. There is the element of solidity, it takes up area or volume and has a solidity to it. By cutting into it you will see blood and other liquids, one will notice the cohesiveness of the water element, it will have a certain temperature, a certain amount of heat, and lastly there will be gases arising out of it or evaporating out of it constantly, thus the wind element. Therefore, a chunk of meat has all four elements in it.

Another example, suppose you had a small cup or saucer of blood, even in that you can see all four elements: it's thick and solid, takes up space; its liquidity and cohesiveness holds it together; it has a certain amount of heat or temperature; and there is evaporation taking place all the time. So one can also find the four elements in blood. So you can see that we don't take the material things themselves as the dhātus, but rather we take properties that can be found in material things as being the dhātus.

Now modern science may not do it this way, it rather focuses on matter itself as the basic elements. In Buddhist science we focus on the properties which can be found in matter, and these are what we take to be the basic elements (*dhātus*). We take the property or quality found in matter as being the dhātu.

Then in our bodies there are these four elements – the earth dhātu, water dhātu, fire dhātu, and wind dhātu. They all can be found here in these bodies of

ours. There are other examples of these elements being in our bodies. In the bones, muscles, and flesh we can see the earth element clearly. In the blood and saliva we can see the water element very clearly. The body's temperature and heat is the fire element. From the various gases and movements of the body we see the wind element. One should examine the body until one is familiar with the four dhātus, as they manifest in our bodies. In these living bodies of ours or any living thing – whether animals, trees, what-have-you – we can see certain qualities and properties in them. There are certain characteristics which can be observed without great difficulty and these are what have been called *dhātus*. They can be readily observed in these living bodies of ours and in other living things, so together these four collectively are called *rūpa-dhātu*, because there is a certain quality to them that we consider to be the form or matter element.

So in living things we can see various characteristics, for example, whiteness and darkness, tallness and shortness, different postures and movements – walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. These characteristics collectively are included within the term *rūpa-dhātu*. The nerves and the nervous system can also be observed as they function, so they can be included in the *rūpa-dhātu* (form element.) Even the conditions and characteristics of femininity and masculinity can be observed, based upon the fundamental elements and so they are included within *rūpa-dhātu*. Therefore, the basic elements themselves as well as the characteristics exhibited by them, or the things dependent upon them, are all included within the term *rūpa-dhātu*. So the main principle is that the four fundamental elements of earth, fire, water, and wind are within *rūpa-dhātu* as long as their characteristics or qualities can be observed and be based upon these elements.

Next we come to what can be called *nāma-dhātu*. This is rather difficult for most people to understand. Normally the word *nāma* is translated as ‘name,’ but that's not quite what it means. Although in some ways literally it means ‘name,’ the meaning here is that it is ‘something which it inclines towards.’ It's that which inclines towards other things, so it kind of leans or tends towards things. The *nāma-dhātu* is specifically called *viññāṇa-dhātu*, the dhātu for knowing things, for experiencing things. This is called the ‘element of consciousness.’ So the element that inclines towards other things in order to know and experience them, is called the *nāma-dhātu* or *viññāṇa-dhātu*. This term *viññāṇa-dhātu* is generally or always translated as the ‘consciousness element,’ but we feel that that doesn't capture its entire meaning. The meaning of *viññāṇa* in this instance is closer to the word ‘mind,’ because the word ‘consciousness’ has a more specific and limited meaning, so we should probably translate it as the ‘mind element’ here.

So there are the four fundamental elements, four primary elements, and the characteristics and properties associated with them. These together make up the

rūpa-dhātu. Then there is the *nāma-dhātu* (the mind element) which knows and experiences things. *Rūpa-dhātu* and this *nāma-dhātu* are the mind-body, body-mind.

Then there is one more element, the element necessary for the *rūpa* and *nāma-dhātus* to establish themselves. It's funny that we should call something like this a *dhātu*, because it refers to space, to empty space or to vacantness, vacancy. That which has nothing there – not nothingness, but an emptiness or a vacancy, space – is called the *ākāsa-dhātu*. This space element or the element of vacancy is necessary to create room for the other *dhātus* to establish themselves, to appear and manifest. All other things, all *dhātus*, can only appear and establish themselves because of *ākāsa-dhātu* (the space element). The entire solar system, the universe, can only manifest dependent upon *ākāsa-dhātu* and your life, your bodies and minds, only appear because there is *ākāsa-dhātu*. To put it very simply, you can only sit on these benches because they are empty. If they were filled up you couldn't sit on them, but because of their vacancy, because of the element of space you are free to sit on them.

So altogether there are six *dhātus* – the four physical ones, the mind element, and the element of space which is neither physical nor mental. Together these six elements make up what we call 'life.' This living body, this human being is composed of these six elements. You ought to get to know them well. One ought to know and understand these *dhātus* the way that one knows and is familiar with all the things that surround one in one's home. For example, in your kitchen you have your refrigerator and stove, there's furniture in the living room, there's the bathroom and bedroom. We all are very familiar with the things in our homes, and know them very well, but the things that are really closest to us we hardly know at all. The things around us and outside of us we know intimately, but that which is closest to us, these six elements that make up our lives, we hardly know at all. So we ought to familiarize ourselves with these six elements that make up our lives, until we know them as well as, or even better than we know the rooms of our home.

If we speak about knowing ourselves, about 'knowing thyself,' we mean simply knowing the elements of the body, the mind elements, and the space element. Knowing these elements is what it means to know oneself.

Now we haven't talked about the *asaṅkhata-dhātu*, instead we've been talking about the *saṅkhata-dhātus* (the concocted elements) – the elements of body-mind and space. They are the concocted elements. We haven't yet talked about the most important element of all, the *asaṅkhata-dhātu*. We discussed them yesterday but we haven't gone into them today.

To begin with, the elements, the things that are most important for us to know and experience are the basic six elements of the body, mind, and space.

Now we come to a very important stage of our study and understanding. This is the stage where the six dhātus combine, combine to compose themselves into what we call the *khandhas*, the ‘five khandhas,’ or the ‘five aggregates.’ This is something that we must investigate further, so please listen carefully in order to hear how these six dhātus combine to form the five khandhas or the five aggregates.

This begins through the concocting (*saṅkhāra*) of the six elements to form the *āyatanas*. The *āyatanas* are the things which we experience in terms of the senses. So the six elements are concocted into what we call the *āyatanas*. This word *āyatana* is very difficult to translate. The most common English translations are really rather poor, and don't actually convey the meaning properly, so we ask that you be patient and learn the Pāli word *āyatana* instead of relying on inaccurate translations. The root of this word means ‘to connect, relate, communicate, contact.’ So to make contact with something, to communicate with something is the essential meaning of *āyatana*. However, it's not quite so simple because when we speak of ‘connecting’ or ‘communicating,’ we mean both the ‘things that communicate’ as well as the ‘things that are communicated with,’ and the ‘process, the activity of communicating or contacting.’ So there's the communicators, the communications, and the communicating; or the contactors, contacts, and contacting. These are all included in the term *āyatana*. If you reflect on this you will come to understand it and you will see that this is a more useful way of explaining *āyatana* than the rather clumsy translations that are commonly used. So don't be surprised if we say that God is just an *āyatana* because in a certain special way we can communicate with God, and traditionally the Buddha spoke of Nibbāna as an *āyatana*, meaning something that we can communicate with, something we can experience, make contact with. Specks of dust are *āyatanas*, we can make contact with them, we can communicate with them. So everything from the speck of dust to the highest thing, whether we call it ‘God’ or ‘Nibbāna,’ all of these are *āyatanas* – things through which and with which, we communicate. You can see that there are things through which we communicate, the communicators; there are things that are communicated with, the communications; then there is the activity or condition of communicating. We therefore are speaking of the ‘inner *āyatanas*,’ the internal *āyatanas* through which we communicate with things; there are also the outer or external *āyatanas* which are the things communicated with; lastly there is the process, the activity of communicating, the sense activity of communicating between the inner and the outer *āyatanas*.

So inside we have six *āyatanas* with which to communicate with the world around us. There is the eye *āyatana*, the ear *āyatana*, the nose *āyatana*, the tongue *āyatana*, the body/the skin and body *āyatana*, and the mind *āyatana*. These are the six communicators (*āyatanas*) with which to make contact with

the things out there.

Then there are the outer āyatanas, the āyatanas out there with which we communicate. There are the forms that we communicate with through the eyes, sounds communicated through the ears, the āyatanas of odors through the nose, the āyatanas of flavors which we communicate with through the tongue, the āyatanas of sensations, physical sensations with which we communicate through the skin and body, and then there are what are called *dhammārammaṇas*, the kind of mental objects, mental things, that are communicated through the mind āyatana. The mind as an āyatana communicates with mental experiences or objects which are called *dhammārammaṇas* in the Pāli language. So there are these six external āyatanas – sights, forms, sounds, odors, flavors, touches or physical sensations, and the mental *dhammārammaṇas* (mental object experiences).

Another way of speaking about this communicating is to use a term from *paṭiccasamuppāda* or ‘dependent origination.’ This is the word ‘depending upon.’ The āyatanas are communicating and depending upon each other. For example, the eye depends on the form and the form equally depends upon the eye. This in Pāli is called *paṭicca* (to depend upon or co-dependence). In one day this activity of communicating between inner and outer āyatanas, this co-dependence, happens so many times between them that we can't even count them – thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousand times. This communicating of eyes with forms, ears with sounds, and so on happens so much in each day of our lives that we can't even count them. Our lives are filled up with this communicating activity of the āyatanas. Now when we ask where these āyatanas come from, we can only say that they come from the dhātus: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body are made of the four physical dhātus; the mind āyatana comes from the mind elements; the external forms – sounds, odors, flavors, etc. – come from the material elements; the mental objects, the mind elements communicate only through the space element – for example, for the eye to communicate with the form, it will only happen because of the space element.

So the six pairs of āyatanas can only happen through the six elements. The six elements combine to make the āyatanas. The only difference is that each āyatana forms, although it's composed of the same element, performs a somewhat specific function, different from the other. The eye āyatana is there to receive light waves, it's sensitive to light waves; the ear āyatana is sensitive to sound waves; the nose āyatana is sensitive to the strength or quantity of volatile gases that enter through it; the tongue āyatana is sensitive to various oils, minerals, and things on the tongue; the body āyatana is sensitive to physical touches and sensations; the mind āyatana is sensitive to mental thoughts, feelings, experiences, and so on. This is our ordinary life – these six pairs of

āyatanas formed out of the six dhātus.

Now once the āyatanas begin to function, once they perform their respective duties, they lead to the appearance or arising of the *khandhas*. The five *khandhas* occur due to the activity and co-dependence of the different āyatanas. So there are three stages: the level or stage of the dhātus which then combine to form the āyatanas, and then through the activity of the āyatanas there are the *khandhas* (aggregates).

This word *khandha* is another word which is hard to translate into English. The basic meaning of ‘*khandha*’ in an ordinary sense simply means ‘part,’ ‘portion,’ or ‘composition,’ the things that go into something. However, when we are talking about Dhamma, to use the word *khandha* means to speak of the ‘parts of life.’ The very important primary parts or aspects of life are called *khandhas*. So when we use the word *khandhas* we mean the five most important parts of life that absolutely must be understood. One of the most popular translations of this into English, is the ‘aggregates.’ We are not quite sure if this is the right word but it is the common translation. The Tibetans like to translate this as the ‘heaps’ because the word *khandha* is *skhandha* in Sanskrit, and they will often translate it as ‘heaps.’ However, the basic meaning is just the parts, the parts of life which are most important.

We can know the *khandhas* when the āyatanas function. The eye āyatana has the duty or function of making contact with forms. The ear āyatana has the function of making contact with sounds. [??] The inner āyatanas of eyes, ears, tongue, body, and mind have duties and functions of making contact with forms, sounds, odors, tastes, touches, and mental objects respectively.

When the inner āyatana interacts with the outer āyatana there is total co-dependence between them, for example co-dependence between eye and form or ear and sounds. When this happens we say the āyatanas are born. The āyatana arrives, it's born. Now in Dhamma language when we say ‘something is born,’ that ‘something happens,’ we mean that ‘it performs its function.’ The thing has a name, when it performs its function properly. When named we say ‘it is born,’ ‘it arises,’ or ‘it happens.’ So when the eye āyatana, depending upon the form, performs its function of communicating with that form, we say the eye āyatana is born, and it's in this way we can know the five *khandhas*. When the āyatanas perform their functions, when they're activated and perform their respective duties, then we say the *rūpa-khandha* (the aggregate of form, the physical aggregate, the body) is born, the *rūpa-khandha* happens. When the āyatanas are functioning and performing their respective duties, then there arises something new, something we call ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa-khandha*). This *viññāṇa-khandha* is the aggregate of consciousness. There are six kinds of *viññāṇa* (consciousness) – they are the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind

consciousness. For example, when the eye interacts with the form, there is this co-dependence and the eye āyatana is performing its function. Then eye consciousness is born. This happens the same way with the other āyatanas and the other kinds of consciousness. Through the interacting and functioning of the āyatanas, consciousness (*viññāṇa-khandha*) is born.

So now we've got three things: inner āyatanas, outer āyatanas, and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Now when these three work together, then there arises something new called *phassa* (contact). So the inner and outer āyatanas are co-dependent in the rūpa-khandha, and consciousness arises resulting in *phassa* (contact). For this contact to occur, those three have to be working or functioning together.

Now you may be wondering what khandha this *phassa* (contact) is. You will see that it's made up of two khandhas – the rūpa-khandha and consciousness khandha.

Going further, when *phassa* (contact) arises there is another reaction called *vedanā*, which is usually translated as ‘feeling.’

When the *vedanā-khandha* arises and it feels either pleasure, displeasure, or something in between, there arises the next khandha which is called *saññā-khandha*. This is another word that's being translated in different ways which has led to unnecessary complications and confusions. The main or essential activity of *saññā* is that of classifying. So *saññā* depends on *vedanā*. When something has been felt, either pleasant or unpleasant, or neither of the two, *saññā* classifies it – what is it? what is it called? what properties does it have? For example, tall, short, long, fat, thin, green, red, purple, whatever. This is the activity of *saññā*, to classify what is felt. The feeling may be agreeable, disagreeable, or uncertain whether it's agreeable or not, and it will be classified according to what it is, what it's called, and what its properties are. This classification depends upon memory, but it's not the same as memory. In Thailand *saññā-khandha* is ordinarily translated as ‘khandha of memory,’ but this translation is far too crude. The central activity of *saññā* is not memory, it's the classification based on memory. The distinction is important, very important. The common English translation of *saññā* is ‘perception’ and if perception means this classification according to what it is, what it's called, what properties it has, thus classifying it in all ways, then ‘perception’ is a suitable translation. However, the way ‘perception’ is often used, say in modern psychological literature, the meaning is much more ambiguous and covers a whole range of things. So ‘perception’ probably isn't a very accurate translation, although it is the popular one. Perhaps ‘recognition’ might be closer, but it's difficult finding the right English term here. Just remember it's the activity of classification – what it is, what it's called, its qualities, properties, and characteristics.

To make this very clear, in the moment of saññā-khandha, the clarity of the feeling as being positive or negative is made. When there's a clear sense of life, experience being positive or negative, that is saññā-khandha. One feels or regards it as being good, evil, right, wrong, male, female, up or down, and it's at that moment when saññā-khandha happens.

Once there is this dualistic discrimination or classification in regarding something to be this or that, saññā-khandha happens, but then there arises thoughts, ideas, opinions, and thinking resulting in what's called *saṅkhāra-khandha*. Once there is some kind of saññā, then the mind will think, have ideas, and it will form opinions according to that saññā. If something is classified this way then the thinking will go accordingly. If the classification is another way, then the thinking will go that way, according to the saññā. This thinking, making opinions, and idea making is called *saṅkhāra-khandha*. Thinking, thoughts, and ideas happen under the influence of saññā-khandha. One thinks according to how something is perceived. The power of perception determines how we think about something, and so *saṅkhāra-khandha* happens according to the power of saññā-khandha.

The activity of *saṅkhāra-khandha* is that of concocting. This is what the word *saṅkhāra* means, 'concocting,' or often it's translated as 'mental formations' because *saṅkhāra* means to 'be fabricating,' 'producing,' 'making,' 'putting together.' We prefer the translation 'concocting.' The word 'formations' is a noun and *saṅkhāra* is an activity – concocting.

Once they're under the power of *saṅkhāra-khandha* the mind concocts, it thinks, proliferates, leading onto actions, intentions, commitments, actions, and all that goes on and on. So *saṅkhāra-khandha* is the *khandha* of the mind that is concocting – the *khandha* of the concocting mind. Literally *khāra* means to 'make' or 'do.' *San* means 'together' and so it's kind of making or putting together, which is very close to the word 'concoct' which means to 'cook together.' The Thai translation of *saṅkhāra* is *prungtaeng*. *Prung* is like to 'cook' or to 'mix,' like when you mix food or cook it. *Deng* is to 'decorate' or make it look nice. So *prungtaeng* is to cook it and season it. If you *taeng* food it means you season it with spices and things. So this kind of cooking/seasoning is *prungtaeng*. In English 'concocting' describes this activity of mind.

This word *saṅkhāra* here has a very broad meaning, for it means the 'one who concocts,' the 'one who is doing the concocting' or the 'concocter;' it also means the 'product, the results of the concocting' – which are the concoctions; finally it means the 'activity, process of concocting.' So *saṅkhāra* includes the concocter, the concoctions, and the activity of concocting. All of our problems come through this concocting, this *saṅkhāra*. If there wasn't this concocting of the mind, there wouldn't be any problems. Whether it's concocting in a positive or negative way, it's still concocting, it's still a problem for the mind. However,

once the concocting stops there is peace. Then there is peace and calmness. If we take a look at the universe we will see that it is just filled up with the concocters, the concoctions, and the concocting, so therefore the universe is filled up with *saṅkhāra-khandha*. So please remember these three simple words ‘concocter,’ ‘concoctions,’ and ‘concocting.’ You will then know everything in the universe.

Sometimes this word *saṅkhāra* is used in a very narrow way. For example in Thailand *saṅkhāra* most often means the ‘body.’ When Thai people speak of *saṅkhāra* – or *sangkhan* in the Thai pronunciation – it means the ‘body.’ We must be careful not to end up with the wrong understanding of this word. So in the ordinary Thai meaning, when *saṅkhāra* ceases or quenches that means death because they take *saṅkhāra* to mean ‘body.’ This understanding is only slightly correct, the real meaning of when *saṅkhāra* ceases is Nibbāna, not death.

So now we know the *rūpa-khandha*, the *vedanā-khandha*, *saññā-khandha*, *saṅkhāra-khandha*, and *viññāṇa-khandha*. Please remember them and study them, because if we know these things well, then we'll know the most important thing in our lives.

If we list these five *khandhas* according to the way they occur naturally, in the natural process of life, then we list them as – first, *rūpa-khandha*; second, *viññāṇa-khandha*; third, *vedanā-khandha*; fourth, *saññā-khandha*; fifth, *saṅkhāra-khandha*. In the scriptures they're usually arranged in a different order – *rūpa*, then *vedanā*, followed by *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa-khandhas*. This a list that's arranged for teaching in the classroom, so we have the classroom list and the practical list. In terms of practice and the way it happens in nature we ought to remember it in order of *rūpa*, *viññāṇa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, and *saṅkhāra*. This will be more useful.

There are certain reasons why there are the two lists. One reason why *viññāṇa* comes last as number five is because it's the most obvious and operates many times, whereas the others just occur one after the other. *Viññāṇa* works after each one or we wouldn't be conscious of the other *khandhas*. This is the most obvious reason. There may be some other reason, some special meaning that they were giving to the word *viññāṇa* which is no longer known.

So we're going to study life carefully in order to understand these five *khandhas*. In other words we use the five *khandhas* to understand life. We separate life into five sections.

The first section is the section for touching or depending upon the *āyatanas*. This is called the *rūpa-khandha*. The second section is the one of knowing. Knowing here doesn't mean knowing on the level of wisdom. It doesn't even

mean knowing intellectually or knowing through thought. It just means knowing something as a distinct object of experience. That basic knowing of something is *viññāṇa-khandha* (the section of knowing). The third section is the section of feeling (*vedanā-khandha*). The fourth section is the one of classification (*saññā-khandha*). The fifth is the section of conditioning and concocting (*saṅkhāra-khandha*).

Now we have these five khandhas. First we have the khandha of touching, contacting, communicating, depending on the āyatana. The second is the khandha of knowing – to know the object. Then third the khandha of feeling – once it is known then it's felt. In Thai it's *rujak* and then *ruseuk*. Once it's known, felt, and experienced, we have the khandha of classification regarding it, considering it to be this or that. Then there's the khandha of concocting.

In review there's contacting, knowing, feeling, classifying, and concocting. So when we talk about the five khandhas, the thing is to grasp their duties, know the five basic functions or duties that are performed. So when you observe these functions you'll understand the five khandhas.

We'd like to show off Thai a little bit because all of these can be expressed in simple terms. We'll do our best to put them into simple English. They are the khandhas of touching, knowing, feeling, calling – calling it this, calling it that – and the khandha of thinking. So if you observe these five basic functions of life, you'll know the five khandhas.

Now we come to the most important part. The five khandhas come from the six āyatanas, the six āyatanas come from the six dhātus, and so where is the self? Where is the self if the khandhas function usually in their way arising from the āyatanas which in turn come from the dhātus? Where is the self? If we really go into the khandhas, āyatanas, and dhātus, then one will see that life is 'not-self,' that everything in life is 'not-self.' So ask yourself, where is the ego, where is the egoism when there are just the khandhas, āyatanas, and dhātus?

Before the Buddha's time they took these khandhas to be 'me.' There's the 'me' that contacts the world – the rūpa-khandha was taken to be ego or self; there's the 'me' that knows the objects of experience – viññāṇa-khandha, which was taken to be ego, *atman*, *puruṣa* or whatever; then it's 'me,' 'my' ego that feels these things, that feels pleasant or unpleasant about them; or it's 'me' that classifies them, it's ego that classifies; and it's 'me' that thinks. [??] So before the Buddha's time each of the khandhas was taken as being 'me,' as being ego. When the Buddha came along he looked at these khandhas more carefully and he couldn't see that any of them could be self. So instead of teaching there is a self or ego, he taught that the khandhas were not-self. Genuine true Buddhism alone teaches that the five khandhas are not-self. However, this is taught on different levels – to people who are not very intelligent, people of medium

intelligence, and people of highly developed intelligence. So it's taught in more direct and indirect ways suiting the intelligence of the audience. When you understand this principle you'll see how the distinctions are made between Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism, and all the other *yānas* – there's these and those *yānas*. Whatever *yāna* it may be, if it's really truly Buddhism, then it teaches that the five khandhas are not-self. This is in essence all that Buddhism teaches – the five khandhas are *anattā*.

So in short, once you know that the five khandhas are not-self, then you know every school and sect of Buddhism. You don't have to go and waste time and money buying all the shelves full of books about all the different kinds of Buddhism. To understand them all, just know that the five khandhas are *anattā*, that these five sections of life are merely not-self. If we misunderstand and take one khandha or another as being *attā* as being 'self,' then something has gone wrong and there will be *dukkha* because of it. If we really understand *anattā*, the truth of not-self, then it's not possible – we won't make such a mistake, we won't think, speak, act, or anything incorrectly, and then there won't be any *dukkha*. This type of understanding is not taught in the universities of the world except as some strange theory in obscure departments. It's not taught in the universities, but it is taught in the forests. However don't think it's the understanding of primitive people, this is the understanding which will end, will quench all *dukkha*. This is what is called Buddhism. If you know the five khandhas are *anattā*, then positiveness and negativeness will have no more influence over your mind and then you will be free.

Thank you once again for listening, we've gone a little over two hours, a bit overtime today. We hope that you will strive to understand what we've been talking about and that you will understand Buddhism and be able to have Buddhism help you get free of suffering. So thank you.

Please practice this understanding of anattā by walking without a walker – just the five khandhas walking. There's no 'me' no 'I' walking, just the khandhas, āyatanas, and dhātus. So please keep your khandhas in a nice orderly single file, with no need to hurry. Have a calm and quiet walk back to the center. Enjoy walking without a walker.

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Transcribed by Anonymous (3408-3.kkk). Reformatted in 2014
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