

Benefits of New Life

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A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 7 January 1988

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'd like to talk about the value of new life. However, the matter of the old life hasn't been completed yet and so we'll have to talk about the old life of it first. So we'll be talking some more about *phassa* (sense contact).

Yesterday we talked about the matter of *phassa* (contact) and *vedanā* (feeling). We were speaking about the thirty *āyatanika-dhammas* – the thirty objects or matters of study which we must bring into our laboratory in order to research this matter of Dhamma. So please prepare yourselves now, for us to go into these in greater detail, in more subtlety. Please prepare yourselves to listen carefully.

In Buddhism we hold that the feelings are the originating cause of all problems. For this reason, it is taken to be the most important subject – these *vedanā[s]* which we can say are the originating cause of all problems. And when it's like this with the *vedanā*, then we also must be very interested in *phassa* (contact), in that contact is the originating cause of the feelings, of *vedanā[s]*. So please examine this subject very carefully, this very important matter of the feelings which are the original cause of all our problems, and *phassa* which is the cause of the feelings.

We need to study these feelings, the *vedanā[s]*, within the experience of daily life. And in that experience we can learn about the three kinds of *vedanā*: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling. There are these three basic kinds of feelings. Please understand these things

genuinely. Don't just learn their names. We need a deeper understanding of that. So examine these *vedanā*[s] as they're happening today in your own lives, especially examine them so you understand them in their position of being the cause of all the troubles, difficulties, and hassles that arise in our lives.

Whether these arise each day dozens or hundreds or thousands of times, it's something that you may not even know if you haven't yet examined them carefully. If we haven't been watching, then this whole matter is something which we don't know anything about. So we need to start to observe them because these *vedanā*[s] are what conjure up, concoct up, stir up all the different kinds of thoughts and ideas, and likes and preferences which are desire, aspiration. All the various actions and intentional activities of our lives are stirred up by [being] concocted by these different kinds of *vedanā*. So we need to give them a great deal of attention.

All these civilizations which have arisen on this planet have their origins in the feelings. The rise of each civilization is caused by the feelings. And the expansion, and all that, the conquering, the power seeking of all these various civilizations is also rooted in the *vedanā*. Whatever civilization it is that has arisen on this planet or anywhere in the universe, all of them are motivated by these *vedanā*[s] (the feelings).

All the progress and developments in math and science are also coming from the *vedanā*. The developments in nuclear things, and electronics, computers, space exploration, semiconductors, and all these things are spurred on by the *vedanā*. Because of the satisfaction that various scientists and researchers have in the various *vedanā*[s]; they explore, they seek, they search for these various inventions and discoveries which will supply those feelings. So all the progress in going into space, the projects going to the moon and even further, all of these are stirred up and spurred on by the feelings. All these things, all developments in human intelligence and human knowledge have been encouraged and conditioned by the seeking of the feelings.

Even the very fundamental evolution that we called 'bio-evolution,' even this is rooted in the feelings. When one level of life evolves into a higher level; this change, this mutation is stirred up by the feelings, by the *vedanā*[s] – these feelings or awareness which leads to desire, to want. And so then the organism goes through various changes to achieve its wants. This is caused by the *vedanā*[s], by the feelings. All these different actions and progress within life can be traced to the *vedanā*, the desires caused by the *vedanā*. If you go back and examine all the stages of evolution of life on this planet, you can see this

crucial role which the *vedanā[s]* (the feelings) play.

The basic principle of all these is that the feelings give rise to need or want or desire which, in turn, gives rise to activities. And from our actions and behaviors, there come certain results which lead to further feelings. So there are the feelings causing desires and wants; which further cause action, behavior, all the different activities of our life; which bring about the various results and effects which occur within our lives. It happens in all situations, even in your own case. Those of you who are traveling around the world in order to study and learn, this too is happening because of the feelings.

All the feelings, even the feelings which haven't arisen yet, those are still in the future; nonetheless, we can conceive of them, we can hope for them, we can expect them; and then this leads to desires for those feelings which haven't come yet. And that desire leads to all kinds of actions and so forth. So there're these three basic levels taking place. First, there is *phassa* (sense contact) which causes feeling. That's the first level. And then feeling conditions want and desire. And then want and desire conditions activities, actions, and behavior. And this is the third level. All the things we're doing, everything can be traced to the *vedanā[s]*, to the feelings in this way.

The feelings are the basic impulse behind all our movements and all the things we try to do in our lives. When we're sitting here and we feel uncomfortable, that is the impulse that causes us to move, to move our body in order to change the feeling that is taking place. In this way and in similar ways, the *vedanā*, the basic impulse, [is] leading to all the movements, all the desires, all the wants, all the change that occurs in our lives – always searching, always looking to get certain kinds of feelings and avoid other kinds. In this way all the different kinds of human awareness are affected and influenced by the feelings.

Even the people who believe in rebirth or reincarnation or whatever, this is also caused by the feelings. Because of certain feelings, people want to go and be reborn in a certain state or condition or heaven or place or whatever in order to get the feelings they think will be there. So rebirth is caused by the *vedanā*. Even wanting to be with God, even wanting to go to the Kingdom of God, this belief is also rooted in the feelings. This desire to be with God is the desire of the feelings – the want, the wanting of the feelings in order to get the certain feelings which we think are associated with the kingdom of God. Whatever kind of hope, want, aspiration, goal, or whatever, all of them can be traced to the feelings. If you can start to understand this, then you will be starting to understand the fundamental principle of Buddhism that said that everything

originates from the vedanā. Even the desire to die is coming from the vedanā; because we don't like, we want to get out or change from the current feelings. Then this will lead, sometimes, to the desire to die. Or even the desire to live is caused by the wanting, the kind of feelings that we're experiencing now in this life. Whatever kind of want or aspiration or goal, all of these things, everything, everything that exists can be traced to the vedanā one way or another.

All the different sentient beings – whether all the beings that have the ability to sense – all of them – whether on the very low level, or the animal level, or the human level, or the so called 'divine' and 'angelic' heavenly levels – whatever level of sentient being it is; all have fallen under, have been enslaved, are trapped within the feelings.

If we look at this from the negative or pessimistic view, we'll say that the vedanā[s] are the things to which we are enslaved. If we take an optimistic or positive view, we'll say that the vedanā[s] are the things that motivate, that push us to do all the things, that push us to progress and develop in life.

Let's us stress once again that all of you who have saved up your money, have worked to save up money in order to travel and wander around the world; this is motivated. What is pushing you? If you look, you'll see that the desire for feelings, for a change of feelings, you want to get some new feelings; all these traveling can be traced to this. Those of you who are traveling around, traveling as part of your studies, even the studies are rooted in, are being pushed and motivated by the feelings – wanting to get some new feelings, wanting to change the feelings. Everything is motivated by these feelings. So please study them very carefully because these vedanā[s] are actually more powerful even than God. Excuse us for saying so, but God doesn't have nearly as much power and control over us as the feelings do. These feelings have much more ability to force us to do this and that than even God does. So we need to study them most carefully.

Therefore, if we want the old life, then we'll continue to be slaves to the vedanā. However, if we want new life, then we need to become masters of the vedanā. Which one do you want? What choice will you make? If you're interested in new life, then we have to learn how to be the masters of the feelings. So we must come and study them, examine them very closely. If you're interested in the new life, then please join us as we examine this matter further.

Don't forget now that we've all eaten that fruit that makes us know good and evil. We're all the descendants of Adam and Eve, so we've eaten this fruit

long long ago. Remember that from eating this fruit, now we've gotten trapped under the power of good and evil. This good and evil is really nothing, but the feelings. Feelings give rise to good and evil. Feeling good and evil are just the ones – and like and dislike of the feelings. Since we've eaten this fruit already, now it's time to vomit up this fruit which is causing us all that trouble. So it's time to study the *vedanā* in order to learn, to find, to discover the knowledge that will enable us to vomit up that fruit. So we come to study Buddhism with the Dhamma, which will provide us with that knowledge, which contains that knowledge.

There are a few more things about the feelings which we need to look into. For example, when we say 'talk about good and evil' that's only two things which isn't really enough. In Buddhism, we don't say that there are just two kinds of feelings, just good feelings and bad feelings. But we hold that there are three. So there are good feeling and then bad feeling which everybody can recognize. But there's also a third kind of feeling where we can't classify it, we're unable to classify it as good or bad. So when we do this classification, don't say that there're just two categories. We ought to be aware of three. We can classify them as good feelings, bad feelings, and the one where we can't say whether it's good or bad. We need to understand this third kind of feeling if we are going to have a complete understanding of the feelings.

When people are classifying things as good and evil, or positive and negative; that isn't enough. It doesn't encompass entire situations. There's a third thing which is in the middle, which is in-between good and evil, or positive and negative. So we need to understand this thing. When the feeling is good or pleasant or positive, whatever you want to call it; that draws the mind toward it, that it pulls the mind, that it attracts the mind. When the feeling is evil, bad, or negative; that repels the mind. The mind either wants to destroy that feeling or run away from it. But there's the third feeling which makes the mind wonder and doubt. It doesn't know whether this is good or bad. So instead of moving towards it as it does with pleasant good feelings; or moving away, running away as with the bad feelings; it runs in circle. The mind spins around and around this feeling because it doesn't know what to do. We're not sure exactly what to call this third kind of feeling. We can call it 'unclassifiable' or 'not yet classifiable' or 'uncertain' or whatever. But the point is to understand the effect or the influence it has on the mind.

The good pleasant feelings give rise to what we call *rāga* (lust). The bad feelings cause *dosa* (anger, hatred). And then that third kind of feeling, that unclassifiable kind, gives rise to what is called *moha*. *Moha* is delusion,

confusion. Rāga, dosa, moha – these are the three defilements, the three things that dirty up and pollute the mind. These three impurities are caused by the different kinds of feelings. The good feelings, the happy feelings, the nice ones condition *rāga* (lust) or *lobha* (greed) – that’s one kind of defilement. The second kind of defilement is conditioned by the bad feelings, and that’s where anger and hatred come from; and then the third kind of feeling which we should call ‘not yet positive or negative.’ This is a better way to say it than to say ‘between positive and negative.’ The feeling that is ‘not yet positive, not yet negative,’ this conditions the defilement of delusion, confusion (*moha*). All three defilements, the three kinds of defilements can be traced to the three kinds of feelings. So we should study these defilements also because if we don’t understand these three defilements, we won’t understand the feelings sufficiently.

We should be very careful about using the word ‘between’ or ‘in the middle.’ When we said before that the third kind of feeling is ‘between’ the good ones and the bad ones, that’s dangerous, that can lead to misunderstanding. Because usually when we say ‘in the middle’ – be in the middle or between good and evil – it’s safe. But this third kind of feeling isn’t safe, it’s not really in the middle. So instead, we use the words ‘not yet classifiable’ or ‘unclassifiable.’ We’re not exactly sure. We’re not that good in English, so we’re not sure what English word to use. But we know the Pāli word and we’re very expert at the Pāli language. The Pāli word is *avyākata* which means unable to categorize, classify, so forth. So we use this explanation for that third kind of feeling. Don’t think that it’s in between the good and the bad because that won’t be a proper way to look at it and will lead to misunderstanding. Now if we begin to understand these three kinds of feelings correctly, then it will be very simple to understand the defilements (the *kilesa[s]*). We can now understand all the things that defile and pollute the mind if we understand these three kinds of feelings. The first kind of defilement pulls the mind, attracts the mind. The second kind of defilement is pushing-away, and the third kind of defilement is running in circle. These three kinds of defilement are another thing that we need to consider and understand, and this is included in our study of the feelings.

So why don’t you all get together, have a meeting, and try to figure out what English term to use for this third kind of feeling – this kind of feeling that is not good and it’s not evil, but it’s not in-between. Some people are using the word ‘neutral’ feeling which is to completely miss the point. That one won’t do at all. We need some word, and maybe you can help to find the word that expresses

the inability to classify that kind of feeling as good or evil. It's like not being quite up to the mark. To be good or evil, it has to have a certain amount of, it has to be clear enough, this way or that way. But when it's not quite up to that mark, then we're unable to classify it one way or the other. So please get together and find the correct term to use and then make this term known within academic circles, within the people who are talking about such thing. Because to talk in terms of just positive and negative, or good and evil; it's too shallow, it's too limited in understanding. So you can all help to correct this limitation.

The thing which we need, which we require, is not between these feelings or caught up in them; but it's above them, it's beyond them. We can say that it's 'ultra mundane.' To be between these feelings is still to be trapped under their influence. So look carefully until you can realize that what human life requires and needs is to be above these feelings, beyond them, to reach a level that we could call 'ultra mundane.'

All these feelings give rise to desire. The positive good feelings give rise to the desire to be, to have, to get, to own. It draws in the mind, it pulls in the mind. There's an attachment that draws in the mind so that the mind wants to get or have or be that feeling. If it's the unpleasant, negative, bad feelings; then it pushes the mind away. And then the mind doesn't want to be, doesn't want to have, wants to get rid of, wants to destroy that thing. So there're these two kinds of feeling. With the third kind of feeling, the one that is neither good nor bad, the kind that is unclassifiable; then the mind wants to know. It wants to know what it is. It's confused. It's uncertain. So there's an equally powerful desire – the desire to find out what it is, to know what it is. This is the doubt that is always troubling us. This kind of desire is just as powerful and dangerous as the other kinds. So all of these feelings are giving rise to desire.

This third kind of feeling can cause all kinds of problems just like the other kinds of feeling. When there is this unclassifiable feeling, then there arises fear. Sometimes we don't know whether we want it or don't want it, and this can cause fear and leads to uncertainty and doubt. Uncertainty and doubt are also defilements. These disturb and trouble the mind just like all the other defilements such as anger and greed. When the mind is troubled by this defilement of uncertainty, then that is the old life. In the new life, the mind is completely free from it. It's spotless, completely unsoiled by uncertainty and all the other defilements. This is the state of mind that we all require, and to achieve it we must understand these feelings.

Another way to look at this that will help you to understand is to take

different opposing pairs and compare them – for example, optimistic and pessimistic. There was a very very well-known German scholar who went around saying that Buddhism was pessimistic. This statement is very unfair. It doesn't do justice to Buddhism at all. Buddhism is beyond both pessimism and optimism. It's neither of them, nor is it between them. It's above and beyond them. Buddhism is a third thing which is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. We can call it *tathatā*. Buddhism, instead of being one of these extremes, is 'just like that' or 'thusness,' 'suchness.' This is probably a new word for most of you and you may have trouble in understanding it right after that. But thusness is neither this nor that. It's neither good nor bad. It's just 'that.' It's just 'thus' – thusness or suchness. This is the third kind of thing which you should understand, which you should try to understand.

This thing that you maybe never heard about in Pāli it's called *tathatā* or *tathātā*. We can use either of these pronunciations. It means in Thai *chen nan eng* or 'just thus-like' or 'just like thus, like that.' It's neither here nor there. It's just like this, just like that, or thusness, suchness. It's neither pessimistic nor optimistic but it's beyond both pessimism and optimism. It's not caught up in any either extreme of duality but it transcends all of the duality, all of those pairs. It's not trapped within any of these dualistic limitations. *Tathatā* is what Buddhism is about. The person who fully realizes, fully penetrates the truth, the reality of *tathatā* is called an 'Arahant' – one who has completely gone beyond all defilement, one who is completely free of all defilement. In other words, this is the perfectly enlightened being or a perfected human being. This is the Arahant – the one who has fully realized the state of thusness, the condition of being just thus. This is what Buddhism is about.

There's one more thing we'd like you to know and that this point is that when we come to study, to examine very profound Dhamma, the real deep and subtle truth; we don't have the language to express it. When we want to come to talking about this Dhamma, this very profound thing; all the normal vocabularies that people are using don't have words for this thing because ordinary people aren't interested in profound truth. So in all the vocabularies and languages that people are using, we don't have the words to talk about this thing, *tathatā*. *Tathatā* is the most profound truth but we don't know how to express it. When we say in Thai *chen nan eng* – *chen* means 'like,' *nan* is 'that,' *eng* is 'just' or 'merely.' So we could say that *tathatā* means 'just like that.' But this isn't right because we're using 'that' and 'that' is the opposite of 'this.' And *tathatā* is neither this nor that. It's neither in nor out, here nor there. *Tathatā* has nothing to do with any duality. It has nothing to do with this or that but we don't

know what words to use. We're trapped because language doesn't have the ability to express such a profound thing as *tathatā*. So we say 'just like that.' Maybe we can try the word 'thus.' 'Thus' is neither this nor that. But don't put it between this and that. Put it above, transcending, beyond, above, completely unrelated to, and separate from this and that. You should understand 'thus' in the proper way. Maybe we can try this word but it's still just words. So we're always trapped this way. *Tathatā* is the heart of Buddhism if we're to understand these feelings we need to penetrate through the reality of *tathatā*. But this *tathatā* is not this or that. It's not in or out. It's not up or down, above or below. It has nothing to do with any of these dualisms, with any extreme position. As soon as we think it's this or that, we haven't seen *tathatā*. If we think 'I' do something or someone else does it to 'me'; this is wrong and this is not realizing *tathatā*. To think that something is good or bad is to overlook *tathatā*. *Tathatā* has nothing to do with this or that, in or out, up or down, good or bad, me or you. *Tathatā* is just thus – the state that is purely thus or such, completely above, beyond all duality. This is the heart of Buddhism but we're stuck. We don't quite know what words to use. But if we can understand this reality of *tathatā*, of thusness, of suchness; then we can get to the bottom of the feelings.

However, there's maybe one word that can help us here. *Tathatā*, what we're talking about is neither positive nor negative. It has nothing to do with all the dualities. We've got one word that can help us to understand what we mean here and that word is *suññatā*. *Suññatā* means 'void' or 'voidness.' This word can help us to understand if we can understand what voidness means. Unfortunately now most people take void to be a negative or pessimistic thing. They get carried away and jump on this word right way, and start judging it as pessimistic. But void has nothing to do with optimism or pessimism, good or bad, negative or positive. It's neither this nor that. It's void, completely void, and empty of all these dualities. It has no dimension. *Suññatā* has no dimension, so it cannot be this or that, in or out, up or down. It's completely dimensionless. It's void. So this word 'suññatā,' if we try to understand it with an open mind, it can help us to understand.

If we can keep ourselves directed toward the ultimate goal of human life, then we will realize void (*suññatā*). But it's very very difficult to convince people that this is what we need, and this is what we require, very very difficult to get people interested in *suññatā*, especially children. Children, they are not interested in void. They want things that are happy and nice and fun and all that. Even adults are not very interested in *suññatā*. All they want are the positive, the

good, and all that. But *suññatā* is what we really need. It's above and beyond all that negative and positive, the good and bad, the up and the down, the wrong and the right, all those dualisms, all those pairs that are keeping us trapped and in suffering. All the feelings, the *vedanā[s]*, are drawing us into these conditions of good and bad, whether it's the happy feelings, or the unhappy feelings, or those uncertain unclassifiable feelings. They're always pulling us into duality, getting us confused and caught up in, and thereby tormented by duality. So the goal of life is to transcend all that, to be above it, beyond it, free of it, to be void of all that duality. This is *suññatā*. This is the goal of our lives. If we can realize, if we can understand and realize this goal; then we will be able to completely control all the feelings. When the mind is void of all that, the feelings have no power and influence over that mind.

All of you now who are world travelers, students travelling around the world, what are you looking for? Are you looking for voidness or for utmost positivism? Are you looking for the highest kind of the positive, of the highest good, the supreme good? Or are you looking for voidness? What is it you want? What is the object of all your travels and searches? Can you see the difference between these two things? If what we're after is void, voidness, then we'll be looking for something that is neither utmost positive nor negative in anyway, something that's neither right nor wrong, good nor bad, desirable nor undesirable, all these likable and unlikable, and all these dualistic things. Voidness is not trapped within any of that. If we use the word '*tathatā*' which includes 'just like that,' then we're still limited by this word 'that' because it's neither that nor this. It's neither this [n]or other. It's not other than that or other than this. It's just you can't use any of these words. It's very difficult. But if we can realize what we mean by *suññatā* (voidness) – void of all those dualisms – this is the supreme freedom. This is the highest, the most perfect independence. It's *suññatā*. If we can understand and realize, penetrate through this feeling of *suññatā*; then all the other kinds of feelings – the positive, negative, and who knows what kind of feelings – will not be a problem anymore.

Freedom and independence are within voidness.

When we understand this freedom of voidness, then we can understand *Nibbāna* – the goal of Buddhist practice. But now we're all stuck, we're all stuck on positivism. So when we hear *tathatā*, we attach to 'that.' And then when we hear 'not that,' then we attach to 'other.' And when we hear 'not other,' then we attach to 'this' because we're so stuck in positivism. But with *suññatā*, *suññatā* is neither this nor that, neither 'self' nor other, up nor down, right nor left, good nor bad, positive nor negative. *Suññatā* is nothing dualistic.

Suññatā is free, is void, is independent. This is the highest state that the mind can realize. This suññatā, this freedom, this independence, when it is perfect, when there's no attaching to this or that, positive or negative, or any of that; then the mind is void, and then the mind is realizing Nibbāna. Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of Dhamma in Buddhism.

The Buddha said that

“*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ.*”

– Nibbāna is the supreme void, Nibbāna is the utmost voidness. This is the ultimate goal of the study and practice of Dhamma within Buddhism.

You need to be very careful that you don't confuse voidness with nihilism. Some people say that this teaching is nihilistic which is a completely wrong understanding. Voidness has nothing to do with nihilism because although things are void, there are still things there, there are still something taking place. It's not nothingness, it's not emptiness, which are some of the wrong interpretations of suññatā. Suññatā is not nihilism. It's not nothingness. It's not saying that there is nothing there, just a vacuum of complete emptiness. 'Voidness' means that there are things; there are things that need to be done; there are relationships, there are interactions, connections. There're all these things but its void. It's void of good and bad, right and wrong, up and down, left and right, this and that, in and out. But there're still things there. It has nothing to do with nothingness. It doesn't have anything to do with emptiness. So please don't misunderstand suññatā as some have done. It has nothing to do with nihilism at all.

Now that we understand voidness, *suññatā*. Let's go back and take another look at the feelings. These feelings, when they arise, are void. They're neither 'I,' nor 'mine,' 'self' nor 'soul.' They're not *attā* or *atto* [44.20 ??] or *ātman* or 'spirit' or 'self' or any of those things. They are not individual or personal. They're just feelings. They're not 'I' or 'mine.' Excuse us for saying so but we're all ignorant. We're very foolish, sometimes even stupid; and we don't understand things correctly. So when there is contact (*phassa*) in the presence, if there is ignorance at contact, then there will be ignorant feeling. And then we get caught up in the positiveness or negativeness or the uncertain whether it's positive or negative. And then that quality leads to a desire, desire for more, desire to get rid of, desire to know. That desire leads to attachment. The mind follows through on this tendency of the ignorant feelings, gets caught up in the feelings, becomes trapped with all that. And this leads to attachment. We take things to be 'I & mine.' We attach to them. We regard them as I & mine. When

this happens; phassa, feelings, all these desires become heavy burdens. When attachment, when the egoistic attitude towards things arises; all these things become heavy burdens upon the mind. And this weighs down life and makes it heavy. When we realize it, we have to ask ourselves: 'How are we going to get rid of this burden? How are we going to drop them?' The answer is this: not being ignorant about the feelings anymore; to see them as they are, as void, to see the voidness of the feelings instead of clinging to them as 'I' and 'mine,' as positive and negative, or unclassifiable but we still want to try and classify. If we see the feeling is void, then that ignorance won't take place and life won't become a burden. If we're tired of carrying this heavy weight around with us, this is how to let it go.

The difficulty, the problem, the trouble with all these is that at the moment of contact we are ignorant. So there arises – there's ignorant contact, ignorant feeling which leads to foolish desires and all this stupidity of that. The reason why this happens is because there is no wisdom. When there's no wisdom at contact, then the feelings are not wise and the wanting is not wise. If the wanting isn't wise, it becomes defiled under the influence of positivism and negativism. So what can we do about this? What we have to do is train, develop the correct wisdom to be there at the moment of phassa. And then there will be wise phassa, wise contact, wise feelings, and wise want. The reason we lack the wisdom we need at contact is because we haven't studied this matter. Ignorance means 'not knowing.' We don't understand it because we've never taken the time to study it properly. So we lack this knowledge and wisdom that we need to manage the situation. So we have to, then, turn to study these things properly. We need what is called 'meditation' or we prefer 'mental development.' If we develop the mind correctly through using the power of concentration, then it is possible to develop the necessary wisdom that needs to be there at the moment of contact. So through correct Buddhist meditation, there will arise the wisdom that allows us to govern the contact, so that only wise feeling and wise want arise. Another part of the problem is that even if there is some wisdom, often the wisdom isn't there where it's needed. It's not right there at the moment of contact; it's too late; it misses the mark. This is because *sati* (mindfulness) is missing. So this is why we practice mindfulness of breathing. If we practice mindfulness of breathing as the Buddha taught; then *sati* (mindfulness) will be quick enough, fast enough, agile enough, expert enough to transport wisdom to the contact. So through mental development, we train wisdom and mindfulness. And then there's enough wisdom, and mindfulness is quick enough to bring wisdom right there at the moment of contact. That will prevent, and then there's no ignorance. If there's no wisdom, then there must be ignorance. But if there's

enough wisdom ḥ [in] time, then the contact will be wise and it won't get caught up in positivism, in negativism. It won't become a basis for attachment. So there are at least four things then that we need to have. We've already mentioned *sati* (mindfulness) and wisdom (*paññā*). These are two, but there are two others that make up a set of four things that are needed to make sure that phassa never turns into any problems or hassles. So first, there must be *sati* (mindfulness) to transport wisdom to the contact. And then wisdom becomes attentiveness that oversees, that guards over the situation, and doesn't allow anything to go wrong; and then *samādhi* – the power and energy of a mind that has been collected and focused. These four factors – mindfulness, wisdom, attentiveness, and concentration – work together to oversee, to guard over the contact; and then the feelings and then the wanting that arises from the feelings and all of these will be correct. They won't fall under the influence of good and evil, or uncertainty of whether it's good or evil. Those problems won't occur. The mind can remain void and free. And so phassa will not turn into suffering, and the old life will not trouble us anymore.

We'll do this in a very easy way, a very simple way, so that it's easy to remember. It's like we have four friends. There are four people who are very very best friends. The first friend is mindfulness. The second friend is intuitive wisdom (*paññā*). The third friend is attentiveness (*sampajañña*) and the fourth friend is concentration (*samādhi*). These are our four best friends: *sati*, *paññā*, *sampajañña*, *samādhi* – mindfulness, wisdom, attentiveness, and concentration. Whenever any situation arises – and by this we mean the very moment of contact, very specific moment, at that moment of contact – when it arises, then mindfulness runs and gets our second friend, wisdom. Mindfulness runs and gets wisdom and brings wisdom here; and then once wisdom gets to the contact, wisdom changes and transforms into attentiveness. Attentiveness guards over, watches over, and oversees the contact. If attentiveness doesn't have enough strength and power, then the fourth friend, concentration, helps give enough power and energy to do the work that needs to be done. So when these four best friends of ours – mindfulness, wisdom, attentiveness, and concentration – come together and help us like this, there's no way that phassa can be a problem because our four friends are watching over it and taking care of this situation for us. So we need to have these four friends. Without these four friends we'll be lost, but with these four friends phassa will never be a problem for us again.

We have to try our best to have these four friends. We have to put forward great effort to do what is necessary to obtain these four friends. And then these four friends must train themselves, must be exquisitely trained and shaped in

order to deal with, in order to manage *phassa* – that sense-contact, the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and all the mental things. When these four friends are expert in doing their jobs and performing their functions, then *phassa* is no problem. As soon as a contact occurs, *sati* – the first friend, mindfulness – brings wisdom, the second friend. And then wisdom, the friend that is called ‘wisdom,’ just drives away any value that feelings might have. Once there is sense contact, there must arise feeling. Feeling will automatically arise in response to contact, but the value of that feeling – positive or negative or the uncertain kind – that is just driven away. Our friend, wisdom, just says, ‘Get out of here. Leave us alone. Don’t bother us.’ And these things then can stir up into all the problems, good or evil or we’re not certain whether it is good or evil. This friend, we call ‘wisdom,’ ‘intuitive wisdom,’ ‘ultimate wisdom’ has the mantra ‘suchness, thusness, voidness; get out of here, leave us alone.’ And then there’s no problem. In this way *phassa* is kept from being ignorant and the feelings don’t have this deluded value of positive or negative or undistinguishable; and then that can’t get concocted up into all the foolish desires and attachment and suffering. And if it is like this, then those feelings with the value, those feelings driven away; then there’s just feeling. And the feeling is free, it’s independent. And this is the kind of feeling that a human being needs – the feelings that are free. With adequately trained, when these our four friends are expert; then the result will be that feeling is free, is independent, is void.

In some sects of Mahāyāna, in some of the Mahāyāna sects, they have a mantra. They utter the mantra; they utter the words ‘suchness, voidness,’ or ‘only such, only void.’ They use this mantra to drive away, to drive off, to chase away the value of the feelings. In this way the feelings are intelligent, are wise. And when the feelings are intelligent, then the mind is intelligent. When the feelings are ignorant, then the mind is ignorant as well. But when that ignorance is dispelled, is got rid of; then the mind is not ignorant. So by using this mantra, ‘thusness, suchness, voidness,’ right at the moment of contact, the feelings are free. They’re free of positive, negative, and who knows what, and that unable to distinguish ones. And then they don’t lead into all the other problems we’ve been talking about. So you will all do well to practice to become very proficient in this mantra ‘thusness, suchness, voidness; thusness, suchness, voidness.’ Say it over and over again until you’re so skillful and fluent with this mantra that at every contact this mantra arises automatically and drives away any value that *vedanā* might have. And then those feelings are wise and intelligent. The mind remains wise and free.

This friend of ours, wisdom, comes and says ‘thusness, voidness; voidness, suchness.’ And every time it comes in, it brings in these words and keeps vedanā from being ignorant. Whenever there’s experience, then mindfulness brings our friend, wisdom. And then wisdom prevents the feelings from being ignorant. Without wisdom we have the tendency to turn feelings into good and bad and who knows what – positive and negative, likable and dislikable, lovable and hateful, and all that. But when there’s wisdom, that wisdom just says ‘suchness, thusness, voidness.’ It doesn’t give any opportunity for foolish feeling to occur. And then when the foolish feeling doesn’t happen, then there isn’t foolish want. When there is no foolish want, then there is no desire, or in Pāli we use the word *taṇhā*. I prefer the word ‘craving.’ Craving is always foolish and ignorant. It’s blind desire, blind want. And so when there’s no foolish desire, there’s none of this craving. And the craving doesn’t drag the mind along after that desire and get into all kinds of troubles. So when wisdom, our friend – paññā, comes in and says ‘suchness, voidness’ there is no opportunity for the value of positivism and negativism and uncertainty to arise. And then there’s no *taṇhā*. Whenever there’re foolish feelings, then there arises *taṇhā* in some form or another – one needs to get, one needs to get rid of, or running around in circles and confusion. But through wisdom there’s no *taṇhā*. Instead there can be wise feeling and then wise want. There’s a very important distinction which many people fail to realize between craving (blind desire) and wise want. When want is wise, it’s not selfish, it’s just wanting what is we need, wanting to be free of the defilements, wanting to be free of foolish want, wanting to end suffering. This is wise want and it doesn’t cause any problems. But when wanting is foolish, is ignorant, is blind; then we call it ‘craving.’ And that leads to attachment and drag the mind into all kinds of suffering. So we need to do what is necessary to have wisdom at the moment of experience of sense contact. But nowadays we don’t have any mindfulness, we don’t have any wisdom, we don’t have any attentiveness, we don’t have any concentration. So contact is foolish, the feeling is stupid, and there’re all kinds of blind craving and desire. And the result is – we suffer. So let’s train ourselves, train these four friends, so that there will be wisdom strong enough, quick enough, right there where it’s needed, to keep everything wise and clean and pure and cool.

When we have these four best friends that a human being can have, when we have these four very best friends that are strong enough, quick enough, proficient enough, fast enough, expert enough; then we can control, we can regulate, we can manage phassa; and then we can manage the feelings. When we can manage the feelings, when we can control the feelings; we can manage everything. Earlier we said that everything has its source, its origin in the

feelings –everything with no exception. All the things that happen in our lives, these are grounded, are rooted in the feelings. When we can manage, when we can control these feelings; then we can control everything, and nothing will be a problem for us. Excuse us when we speak directly like we've been doing. Please don't feel or take it as an insult as if we were putting you down. When we said that we want to tell you that if we can regulate and control the feelings, then we can control God. God is able to make all kinds of things happened that we don't want. But when we can manage the feelings, we can manage everything. And then we can manage God. God won't be able to cause anything that we don't want. This is possible when we can manage the feelings. So please find these four best friends that a human being can have, in order that you can control the feelings and control everything, even God.

Please understand these words that we've just said very very carefully. Don't allow yourself to misunderstand them. Be very careful to understand what we mean when we say that when we can manage the feelings, we can manage everything, even God. When we can control, regulate the feelings, we can regulate everything, including God. When we say this we mean that we can control the 'personal' God. All of us, the only God we know is this 'personal' anthropomorphic kind of God that creates things and destroys things. This God that we all have is itself is nothing, but the feelings. The feelings that create everything, the feelings that destroy everything. This is the meaning that you need to grasp when we say that by controlling the feelings we can control everything. We're not talking about the 'impersonal' God. But we're saying that the 'impersonal' God which is all that everybody knows, then that is nothing but the feelings. So by controlling the feelings, we can control this God. When we talk like this, it may sound as if we were just making fun or just teasing, or maybe that we're being ignorant. But in reality this is a very profound fact and we're doing our best to make it clear to you. By controlling the feelings, we can control even God.

We're not speaking in an arrogant way at all. This God that you know is merely the influence of the feelings. The God that everyone is talking about is nothing, but the power of the vedanā to makes us do this and do that. That's all that people mean when they say 'God.' And so when we say we can control this God, we're just saying we can control the feelings. There's nothing arrogant about this statement at all. It's a fact which you can realize for yourself. Please do what you need to do to realize this important truth.

When there's no wisdom at contact, then the feelings are ignorant. And the ignorant feelings stir up ignorant want, desire, craving, blind want – and this is

God. This ignorant want leads to all the actions and behaviors that we do as what ignorant want, craving forces us to do all these things. So that desire, that craving is the meaning of God. God is what makes us, that forces us, makes us do things – that is God. When we can control feelings, that we can control God. Because by keeping the feelings wise; then there's no craving or blind want to force us to do this and that, to chase after things, to run away, and so forth. When we can control the feelings, then there is, instead, what we can call 'right aspiration.' When the feelings are wise, then they lead to wise or right aspiration. This is completely different than foolish want, blind want, ignorant want, and all that. Right aspiration is to know what needs to be done, and just to do what needs to be done. And there's no foolishness or blindness involved in that. This is how we can control God, the God of *taṇhā* (craving) that makes us do this and that. We can control it by being wise at the feelings, and then there will be only wise aspiration. If we can do this, if we have studied and understood the *vedanā[s]* (the feelings) sufficiently on this very profound level; then we will be able to practice in this way; and then we will receive the benefits of truth, the advantage of having only right aspiration and not being under the control of blind craving.

We have to be very careful about this word 'want' because there are two very very different kinds of want. On one hand is the blind ignorant want that we call 'craving' (*taṇhā*). But there can also be wise want, want that is right aspiration. These two kinds of want are more different than black and white. So be very careful to know that there's a difference. When there's ignorant feeling, the mind gets caught up in the values of those ignorant feelings, and there arises blind want. And then that ignorant God goes berserk, tries to make us do all kinds of things, which we really don't need to do; because they always brings us suffering. But when it's wise feelings, where there's wisdom, when these four very good friends are there to make sure that there is wisdom at the moment of contact; wise feeling is no longer caught up in positive and negative. The mind doesn't get trapped in that. So we can control the feelings, and control that want, that craving. So instead of blind want, we have wise want, right aspiration. Right aspiration is something that we ought to have, we ought to have it, maintain it, and use it. Because if we can use, if we have used right aspiration, then we would do the things that are necessary within our lives and there won't be any suffering. We should be very interested in this point, in having right aspiration rather than blind want. Then we will have the correct God instead of having some insane ignorant God that causes us these problems. With right aspiration we have a wise and benevolent God, a wise God that does not force us into suffering. So learn this distinction, you ought to be very

interested in this distinction between right want and foolish want.

Now we'd like to look back over this succession of events that make up the old life. The old life begins with old phassa or ignorant phassa. When we're ignorant at sense contact – whether it's the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – then there arises ignorant feeling. The mind's getting caught up in the values of ignorant feelings leads to blind want. Blind want is desiring all kinds of unhealthy crazy things which will get us into more and more trouble. Once there is *taṇhā* – craving, blind want, ignorant want – it starts to solidify. If it hangs around enough, if it coagulates enough, then it becomes what we call *upādāna* (attachment). This is when the feeling of desire turns into the concept: 'I' desire, or the 'desirer,' the 'wanter,' the 'craver.' First, there's just wanting, desiring, craving; but then this develops into the concept that if there's craving there must be a craver. If there's want there must be a wanter, a desirer. So an ignorant want becomes ignorant foolish concept of wanter, desirer, craver. And this is what we call 'upādāna' or attachment. This may not sound logical to some of you. Some people think that to want there has to be someone who wants first. Some people's logic said that you have to have the 'I' who craves, the craver, before you can have craving. This is how some people think. But we don't take logic as our standard; we take experience, reality as our standard. And if we examine the truth of this situation, we'll see that in reality, want, ignorant want, craving comes first; then the concept, the thought that there must be a craver or wanter. Once there is this craver or wanter, this concept; then this develops further. The mind goes further and it's more caught up in this ignorant illusion. And it's the ego, the 'I' is growing, or the 'self' begins to exist. In Pāli we call this *bhava*– the Thai pronunciation *phawa*. It's this ignorant illusion of 'self.' Now for many of us, we still believe in this 'self' but if we have been understanding how this ignorant feeling turns into ignorant desire, into the ignorant craver; we'll see that this is all a series of illusion, of mistaken identity. So when the 'self' begins to exist, this is just a further misconception or misunderstanding. But it's what's going through the mind, and we take it to be real; because we haven't compared the thought in the mind with the reality of what's taking place. Once this 'self' exists, then that 'self' is ready to enter the playing field, to run out onto the field. And when it's ready, it's on deck like a baseball player. And then it's born, it comes up to the bat to bat, goes out onto the field and gets beat up in some nasty football game[s], and gets caught up in all kinds of suffering. This is what happens. This is how the old life works. This series of events, ignorant contact, ignorant feelings, ignorant desires, attachment, existence, and then the birth of the 'self' – not the birth of the body, the birth of the ego within the mind. And then it runs out on the playing field, as

it is born it runs out on the playing field and gets caught up in all that chaos and suffering. This is how it works. You can see the progression of events as the mind gets further lost in this illusion. You can see how that ignorance, there's that ignorant craving, ignorant desire. This is like breeding, or mating between two animals – that ignorant desire, the desire, that sexual desire. And then this leads to the thought of the craver, the concept of the desirer. This is like conception when the sperm fertilizes the ovum, then you have conception. And then the fertilized egg gestates and existence (*bhava, phawa*) which comes out of that attachment. Bhava is just like gestation, the embryo is growing in the womb. And then as this embryo grows in the womb, it's full-blown or it's fully developed to be born onto the playing field of life. This is all happening in the mind. It's the 'self' that's developing. It's the 'self' that is born, and it all began with ignorant contact leading to ignorant feeling. This is what the old life is like. If we've seen this suffering involved in this old life and we'd like to be free of it; then we have to understand this succession of events that give rise to the birth of the ego, of the great 'I' am. We can understand this, then we will have the knowledge we need to get free of that old life.

So when it's the old life, there is ignorant feeling, ignorant want, ignorant attachment. Attachment is always ignorant. And then exists this birth – the ego is born, there's the 'I,' ego and selfishness is born – and it's always leads to suffering, to dukkha. But in the new life it doesn't happen that way. There feeling is kept under control. Feeling remains wise. So feeling only leads to wise aspiration. And wise aspiration doesn't turn into attachment. Wise aspiration, it just stops there, stops as wise aspiration. That's enough. We don't need any more than that. We don't need the attachment. We don't need that egoism, and selfishness, and the birth of the ego where it runs out on the playing field to get beat up. We don't need any of that. It just stops there as wise feeling and wise aspiration. This is the new life. When there's sufficient knowledge to control vedanā, to oversee the contact, the sense experience; then the feelings don't get lost in the values of positive, negative, and uncertainty. And then it's free. In the old life this ignorant feeling always leads to the birth of ego, to the birth of the 'self,' to 'I,' to 'me,' to 'mine,' and all of that. And every time that this egoistic birth takes place, there will be suffering. It can happen tens, hundreds, and thousands of times in a day; and every time it happens it's suffering. That's the old life, the old life of ego birth, of pain, of sorrow, of suffering. But in the new life, it just starts with wise feeling and wise aspiration. There's no ego, 'self,' and all that illusion isn't conjured up, isn't stirred up. There's no ego birth, there's no selfishness. There's none of these crazy thoughts about 'I' and 'me' and 'mine' and all the selfishness that comes from

that. So that life is free, is peaceful, is wise. There's no problems. The old life is always leading to ego and to suffering. But the new life, because of wisdom, is free. It's calm, it's peaceful, it's cool, it's free of all that birth. The old life, when there's all that birth, when there's birth, anything that is born has to get old, get sick, and eventually dies. But in the new life, there's no birth; so there's no getting old, there's no getting sick, and there's no death. The new life is free of birth, aging, illness, and death. The old life is trapped within this world, this condition; but the new life is free of all that. This is the meaning of Nibbāna – the supreme thing, the highest goal in Buddhism. In the new life, we can realize Nibbāna and there is total freedom from birth, aging, illness, and death. We hope that you are interested in this, in this new life that is not trapped under birth, aging, illness, and death, and all the suffering that they bring.

Physical birth, the birth of this body out of the womb of our mothers, is no big deal. It happens once in a life time and so in itself there's no problem. Being born physically is no problem; it's just an event that happens to all of us. But there's another kind of birth which is the birth we've been talking about. This is spiritual birth. When we talk about spiritual birth, we mean the birth of the ego, the 'self,' the concept, the thoughts of 'I am,' of egoism, self-centeredness, selfishness. This birth of the 'I,' the ego, the 'self,' the 'soul' is within the mind. It's what we mean by spiritual birth. It has nothing to do with the body. It's birth in the mind that happens over and over again throughout our lives many many times, hundreds, thousands of times each day. This is the spiritual birth that is stirred up by the ignorant feelings, the ignorant desire and attachment. This is the spiritual birth that always leads to dukkha, to suffering. Whenever there're some ignorant wants in this direction or that, wanting for this and that; then it leads to being born in some form or another form, in some condition or state or another, being born as 'this' as 'that,' as 'him,' as 'her,' being born in all kinds of different ways. And whatever the kind of birth – whether it's animal or human or celestial – whatever the kind of birth, and you're going through many of them in each day as the mind keeps changing under the influence of the feelings. Whatever the birth it will always bring suffering; it will always bring pain, conflict, unsatisfaction, discontent, friction in one form or another. That's the old life, the old life that is trapped within that spiritual birth. In the new life, there is none of this birth. There's no 'I' and 'mine' and ego and 'self' and 'soul' taking place in the mind; and so that mind is free. This is the mind that realizes Nibbāna – Nibbāna: the utmost voidness, coolness, perfect freedom. This is something that we won't have time to go into today. We save it for our later lectures. We save the discussion of Nibbāna for another time since this is such an important issue or thing to talk about. But the point to know now is that

by studying and controlling the vedanā, spiritual birth won't take place; and then there won't be any suffering. And that we have this thing we call the 'new life' – the new life that is free of birth, aging, illness, and death. Birth, aging, illness, and death as physical processes are not important. They're just natural things. But birth, aging, illness, and death in the mind, the deluded mind that attaches to these things as I & mine; that brings great suffering. Physical death is no problem but attaching to death as I & mine brings great suffering. So we have to get to know all these things. And so in order to control the vedanā we must know ourselves, we have to study ourselves. It's kind of funny – you need to study 'yourself' but there's no 'self.' You have to figure out this one too. You yourself must study and practice the Dhamma. But that 'self' that has to study and practice is not a 'self.' Can you understand the meaning of this? The 'self' that is not a 'self' must study and practice the Dhamma. You have to know what our life is, where it comes from, where it's going, what this process of life is, what makes it up. We've been talking about these things in order to help you to know yourself, to understand yourself, in order to have sufficient wisdom, to keep the feelings under control, to prevent attachment and spiritual birth and all that –that suffering. This self knowledge, this self understanding is not something that you can get from books; and listening to a lecture like this will not do it either. Just reading and listening or even just thinking logically will not bring you the knowledge of yourself that you need. This self knowledge must be found by studying our own lives, by being very aware and mindful of the process of events of our own lives. And in only this way – not by listening, not by reading, but by studying our own lives, the reality of them –can we have the true self knowledge that is genuine wisdom that can keep the feelings under control. So they don't get caught within the power of the positivism, negativism. So we can see it all as just thus and voidness. And then the mind is free and realizes Nibbāna. The highest truth, the highest benefit that life can bring, the only thing that is really worth having, the only thing that's really worth aspiring toward is this Nibbāna.

So we request that you allow us to end the lecture at this point and we save the discussion of 'Nibbāna' for another time.

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Transcribed and lightly edited by Pranee in September 2015.

Audio files: 5125310107021.mp3 & 5125310107022.mp3 & 1988-01(2) Benefits of new life.mp3

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