

The Things Called ‘The Five Khandhas’ [continued]

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa 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 Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we must continue to speak about the five *khandhas* (the five aggregates). We need to look at this – or we will continue looking at this – from some angles and in different aspects which we haven’t looked at yet.

In order to understand the burden of life we need to understand the five *khandhas* completely. So please bear with us. Be patient and determined to follow with us as we continue talking about the five *khandhas*.

We must know these *khandhas* as clearly as we know the different objects and furniture within our house. In our house we can see everything there very clearly. We know where everything is and we know exactly what it is. We must have this same sort of clarity about the five *khandhas*.

Just talking about them or listening about them is not enough. Writing notes in a notebook is not sufficient. We have to clearly see these five *khandhas*. To see the body aggregate when it is functioning. See the *vedanā* [*khandha*] (feeling aggregate) when it is performing its function of partaking of a feeling – of liking, disliking, whatever. There is the *saññā* aggregate (perception aggregate) when there is the activity or function of remembering – of discriminating, of perceiving – the marks and signs of an object. The *saṅkhāra* aggregate (*saṅkhāra khandha*) – the thinking. And then the last aggregate – *viññāṇa khandha*.

We must know these five khandhas the way we can know the fingers on our hand. And see them clearly the way we see each of the fingers on our hand. They're distinct. Each of the five is distinct. And we need to see these khandhas this clearly if we are to understand the burden of life.

Sometimes in our awareness there is only one khandha. Sometimes we are only aware of the body. There are times we are only interested in the body. And in that moment there is only one khandha [the *rūpa-khandha*].

At other times in the awareness there are only the four *nāma-khandhas* (the four mental khandhas) – *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. Sometimes there is only interest in – and awareness of – these four mental khandhas.

Then at other times in awareness there are all five khandhas – there is interest in the complete set of all five of the khandhas. This we can examine and observe within our own awareness. We can pay attention to this. You see sometimes we are only interested in the body – the *rūpa-khandha*. Sometimes there is only interest in the mind – the four mental khandhas. And sometimes in all five khandhas.

In some of the commentaries on the scriptures – on the words of the Buddha – there are interpretations of this teaching of the Buddha that there are different worlds or realms and in one realm the beings there have only one khandha. So there is this explanation of what the Buddha said . . . starts talking about some other world somewhere where the beings only have one khandha. And this has been accepted and is now very firmly believed by many devout, traditional Buddhists who believe in all kinds of heavens and all kinds of hells and different worlds all over the place.

There's another world these people think where the beings have only four khandhas, the four mental khandhas. And so this is some world or realm or sphere or something where the beings have only mind and no body.

And then there is this world with which we are all very familiar or we at least ought to be familiar with it. And that is the world or realm of the five khandhas. We generally are possessed of five khandhas but sometimes we're only aware of one, the *rūpa-khandha*. And there are times when we're aware of four, only four – *vedanā-khandha*, *saññā-khandha*, *saṅkhāra-khandha*, and *viññāṇa-khandha*. And then there is also times when we are aware of all five – the complete set – of the khandhas.

Whether we're aware of and interested in one khandha, four khandhas or five khandhas is completely dependent upon the conditioning of the mind. However the mind is conditioned in that moment, that conditioning will determine the awareness of one, four or five khandhas.

We've heard already how these five khandhas are the thing we call 'life.' We've discussed this adequately and so we already understand that life and the five khandhas are the same thing. Now I'd like to talk about three different kinds of five khandhas. There are three different kinds of khandhas. Each kind is made up of five khandhas.

There are the five *khandhas* (groups) when attachment has not arisen. There are moments when no idea of 'I' or 'mine' arises in the mind. And so the five khandhas in that moment are free of attachment. There is no clinging to them. There is no movement in the mind that is saying 'I am body,' 'I am feeling,' or 'the feelings are mine,' 'the thinking is mine,' 'the perceptions are mine.' This attachment has not arisen. This is the first kind of khandhas – the khandhas where there is no attachment. We can call them the 'mere khandhas,' the mere khandhas. There's just these khandhas without any additions, without the extra addition of attachment.

The second set of khandhas are [is] the groups of clinging. And this is when the mind is conditioned in a certain way so that there arises the thought of 'I' – 'I am' thinking, 'I am' the thinking, 'I am' the body, 'I am' the awareness or the thinking is 'mine,' the feelings are 'mine.' When this attachment of 'I' or 'mine' arises towards the khandhas, we call these the groups of clinging or the *upādāna-khandhas*. *Upādāna* means 'attachment.' So the *upādāna-khandhas* are the 'aggregates of attachment.'

When this happens then there is this weight and burden is placed upon the five khandhas. And so the khandhas become very very heavy through this attachment to them as 'I' or 'mine.'

The Buddha said in his first sermon when he was explaining what *dukkha* was, he summarized all *dukkha* by saying the five *upādāna-khandhas* are *dukkha*. So the five . . . the second set of khandhas is what *dukkha* is all about – attachment to body, feelings, perceptions, thinking, and bare awareness. This is the meaning of *dukkha*.

So there's the first set when attachment is not arisen. We can call these the 'mere khandhas.' Then the second set – when there is attachment – is the upādāna-khandhas or 'groups of clinging.'

Then there is a third set of five khandhas. This is the set of khandhas that arises¹ after one has practiced meditation and developed and trained the mind. Once the mind has been developed high enough so that attachment no longer arises – once this conditioning of attachment has been cut off – then there remain five khandhas. And these are khandhas where there is no more – and never again will be – any attachment to them as 'I' or 'mine.'

These are the five khandhas of the Arahant. These five khandhas, these pure khandhas, are found in the Arahant – the enlightened being, the perfected being. This is the meaning of perfection – to remove the attachment so that there are only pure khandhas remaining.

So we have these three kinds of khandhas.

The mere khandhas. And these are happening in our experience. There will be moments when we will be truly at ease when there are no weights or burdens on the mind. These are moments when the mind is free of all attachment. That's when there are the mere khandhas.

And then there are the moments that are conditioned where there are the upādāna-khandhas because of attachment to the five khandhas and to each of the khandhas.

Then last of all is the third set when attachment has ended – when dukkha has been ended – and there only remain the pure khandhas of the perfected one, the Arahant.

So these are the three different sets of khandhas which you ought to know about.

Through the practice of *vipassanā* the mind is developed to a degree where there is no more upādāna towards the five khandhas. Through this development of the mind there is no more attachment to the five khandhas. This is the result of the practice – the correct practice – of *vipassanā*.

¹"Maybe I should say 'remains'" [added by the translator]

When we say *vipassanā*, we're not talking about a certain way of sitting, a certain way of walking, going to the toilet, or a way of playing with your breath. We're not talking about any physical activity. Vipassanā is the clear seeing of the way things are – the clear seeing of the nature of reality. When there is this seeing, then there is vipassanā. Through vipassanā the mind is developed and developed to the degree where the attachments cease and then what remains are the pure khandhas of the enlightened mind of the Arahant.

The minds of most beings have moments of cleanness – of lightness, of calmness – when there is no attachment to the five khandhas. But then there will arise attachment to one of the khandhas, to this khandha or to that khandha. And then the mind is clouded and darkened and burdened through this attachment.

A mind that is still has the potential for attachment is a mind that is not yet pure. It has not been developed fully. The practice of vipassanā has not been completed. It may be occurring and so the mind is being cleaned up. But until the practice of vipassanā is complete, attachment will continue to arise and the second group of five khandhas will still happen – there will still be the groups of clinging.

But if vipassanā is carried to completion – if this is done properly and fully – then there will be the pure khandhas where there can never be any more attachment again. And then the mind is truly at peace – truly calm and undisturbed – whether it is walking, sitting, talking, listening or whatever. These activities can go on, but there is no attachment to any of the khandhas and no attachment to the activity of the khandhas.

This is the result – this is fruit – of the practice of vipassanā. So we want you to understand this so you know why you are practicing meditation. You're practicing meditation so that there will be vipassanā and through vipassanā this fruit of the ending of the burdens of the aggregates of clinging – so that there are only the pure aggregates remaining.

This is what vipassanā is about and we point this out to you so that you will have the motivation and desire to practice. If you have the strong determination and desire to get rid of this burden of the five aggregates of clinging . . . If you truly are tired of this burden and want to put it down, then you will put sufficient energy into vipassanā. So we want you to understand the fruits of vipassanā so that you will be able to give it the energy and determination that is required.

It all comes down to the question of attachment or non-attachment. This is the issue – whether there is attachment to the khandhas or there is non-attachment to any of the khandhas. This is the central point.

What’s interesting here is that when attachment arises, the thing that attaches is the same thing as what is attached to. We usually talk about the five khandhas as the things attached to. These are the objects or bases of clinging. But when we ask what is it that attaches – what clings? – it’s the same thing.

Specifically it’s the fourth khandha – *saṅkhāra-khandha* (the thinking aggregate) – which clings. When there is misunderstanding and a wrong kind of thinking arises, this is attachment. Attachment is just a form of wrong thinking – confused, misunderstood . . . thinking that is conditioned by misunderstanding or ignorance. This is what attachment is.

Sometimes this fourth khandha – this attachment – will go and attach to itself. It will attach to thinking. Thinking attaches to thinking. Or sometimes it will attach to one of the other khandhas. This wrong kind of thinking will attach to the feelings or the body, the perceptions or the bare sense awareness.

Or sometimes this *saṅkhāra* will go and attach to something external. It will attach to the khandhas of some other being. So it will attach to external khandhas as well. So it’s just the khandhas attaching to khandhas. This is what it comes down to. And then there are khandhas where nothing is attaching to them.

When there is attachment *dukkha* arises. When there is no attachment no *dukkha* arises. And so the question of attachment is central to our problems and to this thing we call ‘*dukkha*.’ But all that exists are the khandhas. But sometimes they are ignorant khandhas that are attaching to themselves.

We’ve talked about what is attached to and what attaches, which is the same thing. Now we’d like to talk about the forms attachment takes. Generally we can speak about two kinds of attachment. There are two different forms of attachment.

The first is the attachment to something as ‘I’ or the Pāli word is *attā*. To attach to something as the ‘self’ – as ‘I,’ as ‘me.’ ‘I am this.’ This is the first form of attachment – the ‘I am this,’ the ‘I,’ the *attā* attachment.

The second kind of attachment is attachment to things associated with the ‘I.’ And in English we usually call this the ‘mine (m-i-n-e) attachment.’ ‘I am’ this. That is ‘mine.’ That is mine. This is the second kind of attachment.

So the two forms of attachment are I & mine. This is how we translate it in English. The Buddha used the word *attā*. *Attā* is that feeling or thought of some separate individuality which ‘I am.’ That’s *attā*. *Attaniya* is the second form and we want to explain this a little bit so you don’t misunderstand what is meant by ‘mine.’

Attaniya means dependent on the ‘I’ or dependent on the *attā*. Or we could say related to – associated with – the *attā*. This is *attaniya* – the second form of attachment. For example, there is the *attā* (‘I’). And then the children – the wife and children – of the *attā* is *attaniya*. The wife and children are dependent on the *attā*. So that is the ‘my children, ‘my wife’ or ‘my possessions’ – my car, my house, my clothes. This is *attaniya*.

Sometimes it goes so far as . . . that there is . . . the *attā* attaches to itself as ‘my self.’ So there is the *attaniya* attachment – which is dependent on the *attā* (‘I’) – can attach to itself. So the ‘I’ attaches to itself as ‘myself.’

So there are these two basic kinds of attachment – *attā* & *attaniya*. For example, life. Generally there is the attachment of *attā* towards life. ‘I am life. I am this *khandha*, that *khandha*. I am the *khandhas*.’ But often we attach to it as ‘my’ life, as well. The ignorance is confusing us so much that we can’t even make up our minds about attachments. And so we attach to it as ‘my’ life. Or the life . . . ‘I am’ ‘my’ life is how complicated it can get within our confused minds. But basically there are the two forms of attachment, the I & mine attachments – attachment to *attā* & attachment to *attaniya* (things which are dependent on the *attā*, the ‘self’).

When the . . . There is this naturally occurring level of attachment which we call *attā* & *attaniya* (I & mine). This is kind of an instinctual attachment that happens within all sentient beings. But when this basic instinctual level of attachment is conditioned by *kilesa* (defilement) – when the defilements come into play – then this attachment is much stronger.

There can be a much stronger degree of attachment and the Buddha had a separate set of words for this cruder, courser, more strong and fierce level of attachment. These words are *ahaṅkāra* & *mamaṅkāra*.

In Thai there is a convenient word to express this. There is the word *goo* which is a crude personal pronoun. In English we just have the one pronoun ‘I.’ But in Thai they have many different pronouns that mean ‘I.’ Some of them are

very refined such as *chan*, very polite, and others are very crude, the way G.I.s talk or something. And so *goo* is a very crude level of attachment, very strong and defiled attachment. And then there is *konggoo* or what is possessed by the *goo*. So this is a stronger level of attachment.

In English we can't think of words to really translate *ahaṅkāra* & *mamaṅkāra* like we can translate into Thai. All we can think of is I & mine. So there's the I & mine attachment that is on the naturally occurring instinctual level. But it also has . . . this attachment has levels and degrees. It can get stronger and stronger and stronger. And so if we had different kinds of 'I' – a more subtle 'I,' and then stronger and bigger and cruder forms of 'I' – we could express this easily. But we only have the one pronoun 'I.' But the attachment has degrees and levels depending on the amount of ignorance that is conditioning the mind – depending on how much *kilesa* (defilement) is involved.

So there's basically the two kinds of attachment. But there is also a matter of degree and strength within that attachment. If you can think of some words in English to express this . . . We can have I & mine as the basic level but if you can think of words for the stronger levels of attachment please let us know.

So the manner of degree is of interest and importance. There's the normal level or the ordinary, natural instinctual level of I & mine (*attā* & *attaniya*). It's attachment and it causes dukkha but it's not a particularly powerful form.

But then through . . . if this instinctual 'I' is let out of control – if it's not kept within control – it will get bigger, fatter. It will become proud and arrogant. And so then we can maybe for now say that there is the 'arrogant I' and the 'arrogant mine,' the 'proud I.' Such as Lucifer when he was shaking his fist at God and trying to take over the show. We can have this much stronger, prouder, arrogant level of attachment of the 'arrogant I' and the 'arrogant mine.' These are much hotter, much heavier and stir up a lot more dukkha.

So we have these two pairs of words in Pāli – *attā* & *attaniya* (I & mine) – and then *ahaṅkāra* & *mamaṅkāra* (the arrogant I & the arrogant mine).²

But don't get caught up just in the level of words in this discussion we have going here about the levels of attachment. Because the real place to study these is not in the lecture hall or in your notebook, but is in experience. The real place to

² "Ajahn Buddhadasa left it up to me to find out the best words to translate it into English. He already did it for translating it into Thai. And anybody who wants to help me is welcome to." [added by the translator]

note these is in the awareness within one's own mind. There is where the attachment is taking place. It's not taking place theoretically. It's taking place in actuality.

And so to observe that . . . be aware that sometimes there is a kind of ordinary, regular kind of I & mine. It's not very strong and it doesn't disturb the mind a whole lot. It's not completely peaceful but it doesn't drive the mind crazy. Ordinary sane people are able to function fairly well with this level of attachment. It brings dukkha but not usually real horrible terrible dukkha.

But usually also there are times where this natural I & mine – this ordinary level – gets out of control. It becomes proud and arrogant. It gets caught up in defilement. And then it's much hotter and heavier and fiercer, and much more dukkha arises out of this. And this is the dukkha that can really mess up our lives. This is the kind of dukkha – this is the 'arrogant I' – that can go insane and really has problems in life.

Watch these levels of attachment. See the many different levels that attachment can happen on. Basically we can talk about the ordinary level and the really strong, fierce arrogant level. But there are many gradations, many degrees. And you can observe these as they happen within your own awareness. That's the place to study – within the mind, not within the talking.

So be aware of these. Because . . . If, for a beginning, you can at least keep this I & mine under control – keep it from getting too fat and too arrogant – that will eliminate a lot of useless dukkha, by just keeping this under control.

Now keeping it under control means there is still this illusion of I & mine (*attā & attaniya*). But the dukkha conditioned by that attachment won't be so terrible. But still there is dukkha. And so we need to eliminate this *attā & attaniya* as well.

Once the attachment to I & mine is eliminated then there will be no more problem with the arrogant I & the arrogant mine. So essentially the practice of Dhamma is eliminating this illusion – this misunderstanding – that leads to attachment to things as I & mine. And then there will not be the cruder and fiercer levels of attachment which we call *ahaṅkāra & mamaṅkāra*.

So we have these two kinds of attachment – the I-attachment (*attā*) & the mine-attachment (*attaniya*). If we examine both of these, we will see that each kind of attachment has a result or a fruit. The result of the I-attachment is selfishness.

And the result of the mine-attachment is also selfishness. The result of both kinds of attachment are selfishness.

When we have the I-attachment with this feeling of ‘I’ – this attachment to ‘I’ – has it leads to a kind of selfishness where one is unwilling to give in in any way. One cannot be humble. One cannot accept anything.

So if we’re discussing something with someone, no matter what, we cannot accept what we’re saying. Our own pride and arrogance is so strong that we only stick to ‘I,’ I, I, I, I and we’re unwilling to accept or listen with an open mind. The ‘I’ leads to an arrogant kind of selfishness which is very prejudiced and biased.

This is the kind of selfishness that makes it impossible for us to agree – to have conversations where we are truly open and listening to each other. It’s this kind of selfishness that prevents communication, honesty, friendship between human beings because of this kind of attachment leading to this selfishness.

And even the highest levels on this planet – at the United Nations – where there is supposed to be occurring agreements between nations, where nations are supposedly working together for peace . . . because this selfishness is so strong – this arrogant selfish attachment is so strong – that they’re often unable to make any agreements. Or the agreements that are passed are so wishy-washy as to have very little meaning. They’re always passing resolutions that mean almost nothing because nobody can give up this attachment. There’s so much selfishness that everybody is too much sticking to their own position.

And so there is this kind of selfishness interfering on all levels of life – in our personal lives and in the larger scales of world politics – where this selfish attachment, where this arrogant selfishness interferes.

With the mine-attachment (*attaniya*) where we attach to some thing as ‘mine,’ then it is the kind of selfishness where we’re unable to give. ‘It’s mine. I can’t give it to you.’ There is this kind of selfishness where attaching to things as ‘mine.’ We cannot give them to others. And so this is another destructive kind of selfishness.

So much of us is trying to possess things and accumulate things and keep them and we’re unable to give things to others. And this also causes much harm and damage, not only in our own lives but in the world around us as well.

So we can see that both kinds of attachment lead to selfishness. There are these two kinds of selfishness – the ‘arrogant I’ kind of selfishness and the stingy selfishness that comes from the mine-attachment. In fact both kinds of these attachments . . . It’s really just attachment – it’s just one kind of attachment – but to understand it better we can talk about the different forms it takes.

So we’re speaking about this to make it most clear to you. This selfishness – this arrogant selfishness and this stingy, greedy, miserly selfishness – are things that we can see very clearly in our own lives, in our own minds. And so we talk about it in this way to help you study it in your own lives where these things ought to be most clear. If you don’t see them clearly, then make it clear. Do what you have to do to see these things clearly so that you understand and will be willing to do something about the situation.

Actually these two forms of attachment work together. Or we could just say it’s the same attachment. We can say it’s the same or that these two kinds of attachment are so closely associated that they’re inseparable. We talk about it often in terms of two forms of attachment, but we can just as well talk about it as the same attachment.

To explain this – when the ‘I’ arises then there arises the ‘mine.’ There’s no ‘mine’ without the ‘I.’ But almost always the ‘mine’ will arise with the ‘I’ or right afterwards. For example when the ‘I’ is born in the mind, when the ‘I’ comes into the mind, then there will begin . . . there will be ‘my’ illness, ‘my’ aging, ‘my’ death. Because of the birth of the ‘I,’ then there is also ‘my’ . . . ‘my’ this, ‘my’ that.

Actually illness, growing old, and death are just natural processes. They don’t belong to anyone or anything. They’re just natural occurrences. But when the ‘I’ is born in the mind, then there is also the ‘mine.’ And the ‘mine’ is attaching to illness as ‘my illness,’ growing old as ‘my growing old,’ and death as ‘my death.’

So this is how . . . when the ‘I’ arises it starts accumulating things. So the I-attachment is almost always associated with the mine-attachment. Attā and attaniya are really inseparable like this. We can’t really take them apart. We can’t make a clear separation between them. It’s basically the same attachment.

So sometimes if we only use the word ‘self’ (*attā*), you can assume that within that we’re also talking about the mine-attachment (*attaniya*). So when we say ‘not-self’ we’re also saying ‘not-mine’ – ‘not-I,’ ‘not-mine.’ Sometimes, since

we don't have a lot of time, we don't always go into complete detail when speaking. So sometimes if we say just *attā* we're also meaning *attaniya* – I & mine.

So this is how the attachment is basically one attachment. Attachment is always the same. But we can also talk about it having the form of 'I' & the form of 'mine.'

Now we come back to the khandhas or *rūpa-khandha*, the first of the five khandhas. *Rūpa-khandha* – the corporeality aggregate or materiality aggregate. Sometimes we just say 'body aggregate.' This is *rūpa-khandha*.

So here we are with this body, this physical material thing we call a 'body.' And then the I-attachment arises and clings to the body as 'I.' 'I am the body. I am this body.' There is the I-attachment on *rūpa-khandha*.

And then the 'I' wants to use the body for something it wants. It has something it wants to get from the body. And then we have the 'mine' attachment arising. 'It's my body.' So we have these two kinds of attachment arising towards the body – the body as I & the body as mine. They arise almost together or together. So with the *rūpa-khandha* we can attach to it in these two ways – as I & as mine. There is the 'I' that thinks . . . there is the kind of thinking that identifies with the body and then the kind of thinking that wants something out of the body. And so it has a 'mine' – 'my' body – for me to do with as I want.

Also there can be attachment to external bodies – things associated with the body. These can be attached to as well.

So this is attachment to the body. In this way the body – or corporeality/materiality – is made into something heavy. The attachment is a burden and it turns the body into a burden. And this is how the body becomes a burden of life – a burden upon life – through the attachment to it. On the other hand when there is no attachment the body is not a burden in any way.

This is the thing that you need to observe within yourself. Observe the arising of this attachment. Look carefully and see when there is attachment to the body as 'I,' when there is attachment to the body as 'mine,' or when there is attachment to external objects as 'mine.' Be aware of this – the working and activity of attachment – so that you see it clearly and then you'll understand how terrible and heavy the burden of life is.

So whenever the attachment of ‘I’ arises – whenever the ‘I’ is born – there automatically comes with it the attachment of ‘mine.’ There is this double attachment – or double illusion – taking place. For example with the body – there is attachment to ‘I,’ the body, and then also the body becomes ‘mine.’ Because the ‘I’ is arising through . . . with the ‘I’ there is some kind of craving involved and it wants something out of the body. So the body is ‘mine’ for me to use to get what ‘I’ want. So the I & the mine – this double attachment – is taking place.

Or with the feelings . . . There is some feeling about a sense-object – liking, disliking or uncertainty. There is feeling taking place. And then there is attachment to the feeling as ‘I.’ Because of ignorance . . . Ignorance is attaching, ignorance is conditioning attachment. The ignorant mind cannot just feel. It must have an ‘I’ who feels. The mind that doesn’t understand the way things are is always looking for the ‘I.’ It’s always asking ‘who feels?’ It’s always trying to find the ‘I’ and is always asking ‘who?’ So it takes the feeling and makes it into ‘I.’ ‘I am feeling’ or ‘I am the feeling.’ And then this ignorance also leads to the attachment to ‘my feelings.’ Feelings, instead of there just being feeling, there arises the attachment of ‘I who am’ feeling and the ‘my’ feelings. And so in this way there is this double attachment arising.

Or with perceiving – with *saññā*. When there is perception of male or female, or tall/short, or some kind of memory/some remembrance . . . When the *saññā-khandha* is functioning . . . Instead of there just being perceiving there must be the ‘I the perceiver.’ Ignorance is conditioning this attachment again to perception. And so there is ‘I the perceiver.’ And this ‘I’ has ‘my perceptions.’ And so what is just an activity is personalized through this attachment and we get this double illusion of I & mine – ‘I the perceiver’ and ‘my perceptions.’

The same thing happens with the thinking – with *saṅkhāra-khandha*. The activity of thought is taking place and then – ‘who is thinking? Oh, I’m thinking. I think my thoughts.’ This is what is exemplified by the famous quote by Descartes “*Cogito ergo sum*”: “I think, therefore I am.” This very clearly shows this attachment where – because of misunderstanding – this thinking is assumed to be an ‘I,’ the thinker. And the thinker has ‘my thoughts.’ So I & mine are attaching to thinking.

A double attachment happens with each of the khandhas. And with the *viññāṇa-khandha*, the bare awareness of sense objects through one of the six sense doors – through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind – there is this *viññāṇa* (this

knowing) of the sense-object, the sense-stimuli. And this is attached to as ‘I who know, the knower,’ and ‘my awareness, my knowing, the things I know.’

And in this way with each of the five khandhas there is this double . . . this two-level or two-tiered or double-story attachment taking place of I & mine. Maybe if there is just the I-attachment it wouldn’t be so heavy. But there’s the ‘I’ and then the ‘mine’ comes in on top of it and really weighs things down. We’re really putting a lot of weight on these five khandhas through attaching to them as both I & mine – always this double attachment.

Please don’t believe what we’re telling you or memorize things in books as if you were going to have to go and take a test somewhere. What we’re telling you here isn’t for you to pass any examination which you would do on paper. This is all about passing the examination of life which means eliminating *dukkha*. To pass this examination of eliminating *dukkha* book knowledge is of no use. And what we’re talking about is of no use.

To eliminate *dukkha* you have to see this as it’s happening in your own life. So we talk about it here to aid you in studying the attachments that are really happening. The attachments we talk about is [are] just the words about it. But see the real thing within the mind. Study these and see them clearly. See how each of the five khandhas is burdened by this double-barreled attachment of I & mine. And see all the *dukkha* that is conditioned because of that.

Now don’t think that there are just these five things to attach to and so it must be easy . . . Since there’s only five things it must be quite easy to control this problem of attachment. When we usually talk about the five khandhas, we talk about these five things we’ve been talking about so far.

But we can also talk about a group of thirty things which go by a different name but are still basically the five khandhas. So we have a group of thirty things which are called the ‘*āyatana* and things associated with the *āyatana*.’ The *āyatana* are the sense-spheres. So these are the sense-spheres and their associated things. So we have a group of thirty things which are still basically the five khandhas.

So to explain this, we have six . . . These thirty things are made up of five groups of six.

The first group of six are the sense-organs – the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When the eye sees something, there’s often attachment to the eye – to the eye, this eye. The letter ‘I’ attaches to the sense-organ ‘eye.’ Or maybe

we're interested in what the ear is listening to. And then there is attachment to the ear. Or there's some interesting odors coming to the nose and we attach to the nose. 'I am the nose.' Or there can be attachment to the body, the skin. Somebody hits us and we say 'don't hit me!' We attach to the body sense-organ. Or there can be attachment to the mind – the sense-organ – when it has a thought or emotion or something. We can attach to the mind as 'I.' So the first of these groups are the sense-organs.

The second group is the sense-objects which we can also attach to as *attā* ('self'). The sights or forms and shapes that are seen. These can be attached to as 'I.' Or the sounds are attached to. Smells that come in through the nose. Tastes/flavors that are sensed with the tongue and mouth. Touches. And lastly ideas and emotions. These six things can also be attached to. The six sense-objects can be attached to as 'I.'

The third group is what we call *phassa* (contact). When the eye sees a form or a shape, there is contact between the two and this can be attached to. This contact between sense-organ and sense-object can be attached to. Whether it's between eye and form, ear and sound, nose and smell, tongue and flavor, body and touch, or mind and thought or emotion – these contacts between sense-organ and sense-object can be attached to.

The fourth group of six is the awareness of the sensing – the sensory awareness which is the basic knowing of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or thinking. Then the last group of six . . . or with that fourth group this is *viññāna*, this awareness of each of the six kinds of sense activity.

And then lastly the fifth group of six things are *vedanā*. There is *vedanā*. There's eye *vedanā* – a feeling towards the eye experience, the visual experience. Feeling towards the hearing experience – the activity of hearing. Or towards the object of the hearing. This all can be attached to feelings about the smelling can be attached to. Feelings about tasting, touching, and about thinking or feelings about the emotions going on in the mind.

These are all things that can be attached to. We have these five groups – sense-organs, sense-objects, sense-contact, sense-awareness, and then feelings. And these five groups are divided according to the six *āyatana* (sense-spheres). So now we have thirty things to attach to. Really these thirty are no different than the five *khandhas*.

But when we realize that there are these thirty things, then you see how easy it is to attach to all these different things. There are all these things happening and it's so easy for the mind that is conditioned by ignorance – by the mind that lacks correct knowledge – to attach to one of these thirty things. So this attachment is going on all the time.

We often talk about attachment to the five khandhas. Or we can give it a different name and talk about attachment to the thirty spheres – the thirty sense-spheres and things associated with them, the thirty āyatana. We use different names but it's still basically . . . it's still attachment to the five khandhas but there are different ways of describing it.

So don't let the different names confuse you. What's being talked about is essentially the same thing. Actually there are more than thirty, if we want to look at it this way. Sixty, hundred, two hundred, however many we want to see it.

We talked about these thirty things. After the feelings there is *saññā* (perception) and we can talk about perceptions regarding the eyes, ears, etc. – so six kinds of perception. And after perceptions there's intention – an intention arising in the mind, intention to do this or that. There are six kinds of intention. And then desires and thinking and all kinds of stuff.

So there are many many different sets and groups that are arising in this whole thing. And so we can talk in terms of sixty or hundred or two hundred or how many ever we wanted to. We could go on and on with this but we're afraid that you would fall asleep. So we're not going to go into all these tens and hundreds and thirties and everything.

The point is that we can talk in terms of dozens or hundreds or whatever, but no matter how detailed and how much we cut everything up into little groups and categories and lists and all this, it all comes back to the five khandhas. We can go into incredibly exquisite detail on all these things and you might all fall asleep or at least not be able to follow what we're talking about. But the essential beginning point of it all are [is] just the five khandhas.

So we're not going to go into all these details. And those of you who have been and will be reading books about Buddhism – if you read something by some professor somewhere who's all caught up in the detail – don't let it confuse you. Just bring it back to the five khandhas because that's where it's all happening.

So from now on we're going to be talking in terms of the khandhas. This will keep things fairly simple. We can talk in great detail if we wish. But it's still talking about the same thing – the khandhas and attachment or non-attachment regarding the khandhas.

We'd like to summarize everything that needs to be said about the khandhas with a very very special quote from the Buddha.³ This is a very meaningful passage and it's put in verse. And here at Suan Mokkh every morning the monks chant this within the chanting service. It's one of the most meaningful of the small chants we do. And in fact it's been translated and the translations for it are around here some place. I don't know if anybody has seen them but it's been translated into English as well.

Here at Suan Mokkh, when we chant, we chant in Pāli first – one line of Pāli and then the Thai translation. But we've also got some chants where it's Pāli and English. So we will go through this chant in Pāli and explain it to you. Actually it's not a chant. It's a short poem which the Buddha recited⁴ which is now chanted by many monks.

The first line of this:

“*Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā,*”

means

“The five khandhas are burdens. *Have.*”

Have means something like ‘for sure,’ Maybe in English it's better to just use an explanation point. But it's “The five khandhas are heavy burdens for sure.”

The Buddha in this line, because it's a verse, had to make things fit. So he only said ‘the khandhas.’ Don't misunderstand this. What he's talking about in this case is the five *upādāna-khandhas* – the second set of khandhas where there is attachment, the groups of clinging. These are the burdens.

The khandhas where there is no attachment are not a burden. But the full meaning of the word *khandha* – especially as we sentient beings are concerned – is the *upādāna-khandhas* (the aggregates or groups of clinging). Without any clinging these things are no problem. But they become these burdens once there is attachment.

³ “And Ajahn Buddhadasa just recited it in the Buddha's language for you” [added by the translator]

⁴ See Bhārasutta (SN 22.22) <https://suttacentral.net/pi/sn22.22>

So the first line is ‘The five groups of clinging are heavy burdens *have!*’ Have. He said this interjection *have*. *Have* is being used when speaking to foolish or stupid people.

The next line is:

“*bhārahāro ca puggalo;*”

– this means the person, the individual – and the carrying . . . or

“The person and the carrying of the heavy burden.”

So when we talk about “this person and the carrying of the heavy burden,” this word ‘person’ should be put in inverted commas or quotation marks because there’s no real thing. There’s no real ‘person.’ This is that *attā* again, that ‘I.’ The ‘person’ is another illusion. It’s another figment of the attached mind. Through attachment there arises this ‘person.’ Without attachment there is no ‘person.’ So we ought to put this word ‘person’ in quotation marks so that we realize that it’s just an illusion. It’s this illusion of a ‘person’ – of a ‘self,’ of the *attā* – that carries this heavy burden of the five upādāna-khandhas.

So through the . . . With the second line – *bhārahāro ca puggalo* – “The heavy burden and the one who carries it, the person who carries it” . . . It’s only through attachment that this person arises and so there can only be the carrying of the burden with this . . . when there is a person. And there is only a person when there is attachment. So it’s very clear and obvious that all the weight and burden that we carry around with us in the mind – that the mind carries – is being carried by this idea of ‘self.’ This idea or illusion of ‘self’ is what carries the burden around.

The next line is:

“*Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke,*”

which means

“The carrying of burdens is dukkha in this world.” Or we can also say “The carrying of burdens in this world is dukkha.” We can translate it either way.

To look at this more carefully, this means that dukkha comes into the world – we bring dukkha into the world – through the carrying of these burdens. And so dukkha takes place in the world. And the carrying of these burdens is worldly, is a worldly thing.

For the mind that transcends the world – that is no longer caught up in or attached to the world – there are no more burdens. And so dukkha takes place in the world through the carrying of burdens in that world. When the mind is free of the world and no longer trapped within worldly conditions – then we say ‘the mind is beyond or above the world’ – and then there is no burden. The burdens take place in the world and that’s where the dukkha is as well.

We can summarize that by saying that dukkha is only in the world of fools. Dukkha is only in the world of fools.

The next line is:

“bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ.”

“To toss away – to throw away – the burdens is bliss or is happiness. To throw away all the burdens is happiness.”

And the meaning of this line is that ‘when there are only intelligent people, then there is no dukkha in the world.’ But fools take upon themselves all these burdens. When there are wise intelligent beings, then there are no burdens taken up and there is only bliss.

The throwing away of burdens only happens in the world of intelligent ones or intelligent beings. And when we say the world of intelligent people or wise people, the name we usually use for this is ‘above the world.’ We can call it the ‘super-mundane realm’ or the ‘ultra-mundane realm’ or whatever. So when we say ‘the world of intelligent people,’ we’re talking about transcendence of the world of fools – transcendence of the world of duality. This is the world of intelligent wise people where the burdens are thrown away.

“Nikkhipitvā garuṃ bhāraṃ,

aññaṃ bhāraṃ anādiya;”

The meaning of this is

“Once the burdens have been thrown away, don’t go and pick up any new ones.” “Once these burdens have been thrown away, don’t pick up any new burdens.”

You laughed but when we say ‘Don’t pick up any new ones,’ this is what we’re constantly doing. We’re always picking up this one. We put it down. We pick up another one. Put it down. Pick up another one. So even when we manage to

put down one of these burdens, the mind goes and attaches to something else and picks up another burden. So this is why we have to be reminded. Once we let go of something – once a burden is tossed away – be careful not to replace it with a new burden. Toss away the old burdens and don't pick up any new ones.

The final two lines are:

Samūlaṃ taṇhamabbuyha,

nicchāto parinibbuto.

Pulling up craving. Craving is ignorant desire – desire conditioned by misunderstanding. Pulling up craving by the roots – complete with its roots – is the end of all fires and is tranquil coolness. So, “The pulling up of craving by its roots is the end of fire and heat, and is great peace and coolness.”

When craving is completely pulled up, then there is no attachment. Attachment is conditioned by craving. And when we say pull up craving by the roots, that means pulling up the causes of craving as well which is ignorance (*avijjā*). So by pulling out the roots of craving, then there is no more attachment. When there is no attachment, then the fires of the defilements go out.

The defilements are very very hot. They're constantly burning and scorching the mind. But when craving is uprooted then the fires go out. And what remains is Nibbāna. Nibbāna is coolness. It is spiritual tranquility. This is what remains with the end of these fires and when the mind is no longer carrying these burdens.

We'd like to emphasize that the lines – or the words – ‘the end of fires and complete coolness’ does not mean death. When we say ‘total coolness,’ this is full Nibbāna. But Nibbāna is not death. We're not saying ‘coldness’ – coldness is death. But ‘coolness’ is not death. Coolness is between the extremes of fire and ice or hot and cold. Coolness is what remains. This is not death.

There are still the five khandhas but these are the pure khandhas without any attachment. There's no more ignorance to condition any attachment to the khandhas. So the khandhas are cool. Life is cool. The khandhas are still there and they still function. They can carry on all the functions of what we call a sentient being. But now that is done without any attachment, so it is the functioning of an enlightened being. And this is coolness.

So there are the cool pure khandhas. This life is only the pure cool khandhas. There are no more of those heavy burdensome khandhas that come about through ignorant attachment.

The defilements – greed, hatred, and confusion – are hot. Attachment is hot. Being a slave to the defilements is hot. Carrying the burdens of the groups of clinging is hot. Being a slave to the vedanā is hot. All these things are hot. They are fires which burn the mind.

When all these fires go out – when these fires are extinguished – this is coolness. Coolness is the going out of all the fires. This coolness is the meaning of Nibbāna.

We'll go through it one last time without explanations – just the basic meaning.

‘Hey stupid, the five *khandhas* are heavy burdens.

The ‘person’ is the one who carries these heavy burdens.

The carrying of these burdens is *dukkha* in the world.

Throwing away those burdens is bliss.

Once you've thrown away these burdens, don't pick up any new ones.

Pulling up desire completely by its roots is the end of the fires and is total coolness.’

Would you like to all say that once? We'll do a chorus of it.

All of you recite it with me.⁵

*Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā,
bhārahāro ca puggalo;
Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke,
bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ.
[Nikkhipitvā garuṃ bhāraṃ,
aññaṃ bhāraṃ anādiya;]*

⁵ [spoken in English by Ajahn Buddhadasa]

*Samūlaṃ taṇhamabbuyha,
nicchāto parinibbuto.*

So this verse can be used like a mantra as is used like in the Tibetan Buddhism. So you can use this as a mantra because it has a lot of meaning. If you are going to use a mantra you should use one that has meaning. So you can use this as a mantra.

Or if you like to sing songs, you can sing this. Specially every time there is attachment arising, you can start to *Bhārahāro* . . . And so the attachment will fade away.⁶

So this is a summary of the situation we're in with the khandhas. All this attachment and this burdens is occurring in the mind. When we talk about the khandhas, there is the body and the mind. Or in Pāli we have the word *citta* – which is usually translated 'mind' – or *mana*. There's some different words for this.

When we talk about the khandhas we have four khandhas which make up the *citta* (mind). And this is *vedanā* (feelings), *saññā* (perceptions), *sankhāra* (thinking), and *viññāṇa* (sense-awareness). So we have these four khandhas. This is the mind.

The reason there is only one body khandha and four mind khandhas is because the mind is much more complex. And as we've been discussing, that's where the problems are happening.

When we talk about this relationship between body and mind, we can compare it to a company or a business. Life is a business and there's the body which is the activity of the business. The mind is the manager of the business. If there's a good manager the business will turn a profit. If the manager is stupid, the business will go into debt.

So the thing for you to do is to look at your personal little company and see if the manager is wise or stupid. Are you going into debt? Are you picking up all these burdens? Or are you turning a profit? Is life free, cool, and useful?

⁶ "I'll type this up and put it on the bulletin board for anybody who would like it with the Pāli and an English translation." [added by the translator]

If you find out that the manager is stupid, then fire him. Kick him out and find a wise one. Find an intelligent manager to take over the business. The business is to be a human being, not just an everyday common fool. The business is to be a human being and to do that we need a wise manager to run the business.

If you can't find a wise manager then you're just going to have to take the stupid one and train it. Train the stupid manager to be a wise one. Train it to learn from its mistakes. Every time it makes a mistake, it learns the lesson and doesn't repeat the mistake. Teach it to let go of the debts – to let go of the burdens – and to only do what is profitable. So if you fire the stupid manager and get a new one who is wise – or else train the stupid manager – so that the business will function properly and will turn a profit which means it will be a human life and not just ordinary sentient bubbling around and running into *dukkha*.

So this ends today's talk and we will close our meeting here with a song.

*Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā,
bhārahāro ca puggalo;
Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke,
bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ.
Nikkhipitvā garuṃ bhāraṃ,
aññaṃ bhāraṃ anādiya;
Samūlaṃ taṇhamabbuyha,
nicchāto parinibbuto.*

So that's it for today. Make sure you learn the words by tomorrow because every time we begin, we're going to begin with this song and then we'll close with it as well.

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Transcribed by Arthur Brown in June-July 2015
Audio file: 1986-12 (4) The thing called 'The five khandha' continued.mp3

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