

Link: https://youtu.be/U_juLOKgymQ

FOREWORD

At a time when Buddhism is spreading fast across the globe, it is our intention to make the general public acquainted with the great teachings of the Lord Buddha.

Whilst listening to a sermon is the ideal way of going forward in the path of Dhamma, some may prefer to read it at their leisure and comprehend the teachings at their own pace and time. Then there may be those who are weak in their faculty of listening, so the only way they can understand it is by reading a text or a Dhamma book.

These transliterations are available for all those who wish to have an understanding of the Lord Buddha's teachings in order to find true salvation.

****This work is a transcription of a sermon held in 2017-11-05. There may be the odd omission or inclusion inadvertently due to quality issues of the audio or deliberate editing to make the text more readable.**

Firstly, this sermon revolves on a few questions posed by a listener from America. The questions were, 'what evidence is there for the existence of rebirth?' 'Compared to core Buddhist teachings how important is the doctrine of rebirth?' and 'How do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and anatta?'

Secondly, the Ven. Thero talks about something that he has been contemplating on, reflecting during his meditation sessions, and that is 'What do people value the most?' and 'How to relate expectations to the Four Noble Truths.'

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KEY WORDS

Questions

Listener

America

Re-birth

Pubbènivàsànussati gnànaya

Dependent origination

Watching

Movie

Anicca

Anatta

Impermanence, anitya

Human being

Tanhà, attachment

Personal experience

Contemplation

2017 - 11 - 05

Expectation is the biggest culprit

Last week we discussed rebirth to some extent, and we continued the discussion of dependent origination that is *patichha samuppàda*, and we took it one step further from the previous week. I know there have been a few questions since we had those discussions, and we will revisit them at a suitable point. There was particularly a request even to explain the deep meaning of the five precepts, and we will be doing that very shortly, not necessarily today. I think it will be in a future program because today I want to revisit something that we talked about last week, and that is the concept of rebirth, because there I have received a couple of questions around that and also secondly, talk to you about something that I have been reflecting on, over the last week and during my meditation sessions, and hopefully something that will help you to understand, how to relate expectations to the Four Noble Truths. So, we will come back to that, but let's go to the questions we received initially.

Questions received from a listener

This was about rebirth, so I'll read out the question that I have received. It says, I'm an American who is learning about Buddhism. My family and I have listened to some of these sermons for several weeks, and we appreciate the effort. Question one is,

compared to core Buddhist teachings like the Four Noble Truth and the Noble Eightfold Path, how important is the doctrine of rebirth?

This person goes on to say, I tend to view it as a cultural holdover from ancient India and of very little value to modern Buddhist practice. The second question related to that is,

how do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and *anatta*?

and thirdly,

what evidence is there for the existence of rebirth?

I'll start with the third question.

What evidence is there for the existence of rebirth?

When we look at evidence or when we look for evidence for rebirth, I think it's important to say, and I said this last week as well is, what evidence is there for the existence of rebirth?

Not something that I can provide you as material evidence, certainly not yet. I'm not able to, you know get you to sit in front of me and then kind of hypnotize you, or get you to transcend into a previous birth and do some magic, some kind of wizardry, or even cast a spell. I don't know to get you to be able to give your previous births, and then we recall what you may or may not have done, and therefore prove to you without any doubt that there is the existence of rebirth. Now quite frankly I am not able to do that on myself, either. Again, as I say, not yet. There is a faculty or a *gnànaya*, wisdom it's called the *pubbènivàsànussati gnànaya*, or the skill to be able to view, to be able to recall previous births. *Pubbè* means previous, *nivàsa* being your home, where you've been, *sati* to be able to reflect. So ***pubbènivàsànussati gnànaya*** means, **the skill or the talent to be able to reflect on your previous births**. So, one who is able to develop that skill, that talent through meditation, usually comes after you've attained the fourth *jhàna*, you've trained your mind to a great deal, to retain the fourth *jhàna* and once you've attained that you are then able to direct your mind in certain ways to be able to acquire these skills. So, *pubbènivàsànussati gnànaya* is certainly a skill that one can obtain but it's not one that I have obtained as yet therefore I can't give you material evidence. For example, I can't tell you exactly what my previous birth was, and then say, go and speak to such and such person, and they'll be able to confirm this when I might not have spoken to that person or had any connection with that person.

However, when you look at evidence for rebirth on the Internet, there have been plenty of case studies, there have been lots of books written on this. 'The likes of Edgar Cayce' who was a Westerner, I think she's a doctor, a philosopher who has done a lot of research on this subject. When you look at how people relate their previous births and relate previous incidents that have happened many years ago, you know sometimes with young children who have not yet been able to interact with a part of the world, who are able to relate stories from a part of the world that they have not yet had any kind of relationship to, not in this birth any way. You begin to wonder how is it that they are able to do that or sometimes you have people whom you know again, young children who have some extraordinary skills they're able to do extraordinary things like compose music or play an instrument and however they have not had any training whatsoever in this birth in doing that in playing such an instrument, it makes you think, surely this person, this child should have had some kind of training or some kind of skill, some kind of talent in the previous existence; and the way that I see evidence for rebirth, if you're looking for evidence outside of Buddhist teachings, I think it was Einstein that once said, when you look at all of the facts and you've removed everything that doesn't make sense or you've removed everything that does not add up, that is not logical whatever remains no matter how difficult to believe, you've got to accept that as to being the truth. Now when it comes to the philosophy of or the concept of rebirth this is something that I view in that context. Again, I say, if you're looking at it from outside the Buddhist perspective, when you consider all of the evidence that's in front of you and you don't start making sense of it you know how is it that this child relates a story something that has happened sometimes many centuries ago. There's no way that they could have had any connection to anyone who

is from that era, from that time period. However, the facts that they are relating are factually accurate when you go and examine books; you know history and so forth then you rule out anything that is impossible and then whatever remains no matter how hard it is to accept, it's the truth and with evidence for rebirth, that is very much the case.

When you look at these stories and you try and remove all the other pieces of information, when you remove the other possibilities as being improbable, and you use the hypothesis that you know rebirth exists then it just happens to be that rebirth is the only way to describe, is the only way to explain, how such and such a thing has happened or how a child is relating that kind of history. Now that is outside of Buddhist teaching, but when you reflect on Buddhist teaching, we have the process, that is Dependent Origination, *paticca samuppàda*.

Describing how rebirth takes place, using Dependent Origination, *paticca samuppàda*

Dependent Origination, *paticca samuppàda* is all about giving rise to existence and therefore to birth. Now at this point I like to bring in the first question, which is compared to core Buddhist teachings like the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, how important is the doctrine of rebirth and as I said they're going to say I tend to view it as a cultural holdover from ancient India and of very little value to modern Buddhist practice.

Paticca samuppàda or Dependent Origination is often actually used to describe how rebirth takes place. If you speak to 90% of Buddhist scholars, they immediately tell you, if you ask the question, what do we use *paticca samuppàda* for, the response that you get almost immediately is well that's the philosophy, that's the doctrine that teaches us how rebirth takes place, and they're talking about rebirth, you know life after death. If you study, *paticca samuppàda* you see clearly that it's a process. So, you layout the process you have the inputs, whatever happens in the middle and then you have the outputs, the outputs being existence, *bhava* and *jàti*, birth. So, if that's the output, then you look at what are the inputs, which is *avidyà paccayà*. So *avidyà* being conditional, that's ignorance being a condition and then it's *bhava paccayà jàti*, so as long as you continue to produce the seeds that are the foundations to *bhava*, existence, that gives rise to birth. '*Bhava paccayà jàti*'. Then you work your way back, *upàdàna paccayà bhava*, *upàdàna* being close association, *tanhà paccayà upàdàna*, *tanhà* being attachment, so attachment gives rise to close association, close association gives rise to existence, existence results in birth. So, when you study that process then you accept that this is the process that the Lord Buddha gave us to understand the concept of rebirth. Then quite frankly you're not left with a lot of choice than to accept that; you know this is what the Lord Buddha says is how rebirth takes place. I mean remember, the Lord Buddha says,

“Yò dhamman passati, sò man passati, yò paticcha samuppàdan passati, sò dhamman passati”

if you want to see me, you've got to see the *dhamma*, and then if you want to see the *dhamma* you've got to understand *paticcha samuppàda* or dependent origination.

Therefore, it's quite clear that dependent origination is, I would say the core teaching in Buddhism. It's the most fundamental piece of the Buddhist doctrine. Without *paticcha samuppàda* you have no Buddhism. Buddhism in the way that, we need to understand, to achieve the result that the Buddha wanted us to, which is to end this rebirth cycle which is putting us into suffering and seek liberation. What I would say in response to this question, compared to core Buddhist teachings how important this doctrine of rebirth is, rebirth is actually fundamental to Buddhist teaching. It is a core principle, core doctrine in Buddhism and if you think about it, I have said this before,

How do we experience pleasure in life?

What do we do in life? We often define life as a mechanism to seek happiness, to seek pleasure and we seek pleasure and happiness by finding ourselves in situations where we suffer and then relieve ourselves from that situation. As a quick reminder of some examples, if you believe or if you have experienced that food or the process of eating brings you happiness, then it only brings you happiness when you are hungry. You have to be suffering first, to then relieve yourself from that suffering and for that moment when you are relieved from that suffering you enjoy pleasure you enjoy happiness, satisfaction. Again, if you are thirsty, then a glass of water can relieve you from thirst and that experience is joyful, brings you happiness, brings you pleasure. But, if you are not hungry then food does not give you much happiness, does not give you as much pleasure. If you're not feeling hot then a fan or an air-conditioner does not give you much pleasure. But if you are feeling really hot and sweaty and you're feeling tired then on a hot day you want to switch the air-conditioning on, some cool air brushing on your body feels good because, you are then relieved of that discomfort, you are relieved from that experience of displeasure. What the Lord Buddha comes into this world and questions us is,

“Do you not realize that the only time you can experience pleasure is when you experience discomfort, agony, pain and suffering, and when you are relieved from that discomfort, painful experience or agony.”

Then He asks us,

“Well, if this is the case, how can you believe that true satisfaction, true pleasure lies in that process.”

Because to be able to experience that again, this is a reminder because we've discussed this plenty of times before, but I'm going to come to the point, I'm trying to make, but I need to set this background first, so in case you haven't listened to this bit before, this might be a good reminder. So, He asked us a question, how can it be a meaningful process if, to experience that pleasure, to experience that happiness and satisfaction you have to subject yourself to discomfort in the first place. I'll remind you of one example which I find is very popular, but particularly among the young audience or certainly for people who like watching movies. I've described this before where I've asked you the question;

How does one enjoy watching a movie?

How does one enjoy watching a movie or how does one take pleasure in watching a movie? Think for yourself for a second, is it not when you look at the process of how someone goes to the cinema, sits down, watches a movie, goes through the process and walks out of the cinema thinking, that was a good movie I enjoyed that. You know we never take time to reflect on this, which is why we find ourselves stuck in this fruitless, futile process suffering time and time again. So, as I've said in the past, in the movie you are introduced to some characters. Some of these characters you like a lot, others you don't like. So, you have the hero, you have perhaps a nice family that's introduced in the story and you're thinking that's a lovely family. I really hope that nothing bad happens to them and they're able to live a happy life forever. So that's where we're starting and then slowly, you're introduced to this villain and the villain has characteristics you don't like. Sometimes it could be portrayed by the way that they've been dressed up, it could be the makeup, it could be how they speak, could be the things they do, you know things that people in society generally don't like to associate themselves with, perhaps they speak foul language, maybe they are addicted to certain things, and for some people immediately they want to distance themselves from those characters, and you're thinking that's the good guy, here's the bad guy.

What happens then in the story is the villain in this story somehow gets involved with these characters that you think are good and then there is either a fight, there could be some kind of a brawl, there could be some kind of argument between them, or perhaps someone gets kidnapped, or someone has their money stolen from them, or someone is shot and put in hospital. Now you've got to remind yourselves at this point that none of those characters in the movie are actually put into any kind of hurt, discomfort or anything like that. They are not wounded, they don't suffer any kind of physical discomfort, physical injury whatsoever and remember they're being paid, so they're living the good life. But guess *who's suffering?* You and I are suffering why, because at the beginning of the story we've got this liking, liking we've created for these characters in our minds, and we've got this dislike, the villain, so we don't like the villain but really like the good guys and so when something bad happens to the good guys, now *who's feeling uncomfortable? who's feeling sad? who's feeling disappointed?* It's not the person that's acting, remember they're getting paid to do this and not a single hair on

their body is being hurt or harmed. It's you and I because we are watching this and this is where *aniccha* comes in. You don't want something bad to happen to that person, but that's what they're being subject to. They're being subject to pain, agony and discomfort and all sorts of bad things. What does the director do at that point, the story comes to a climax, and at that point the good guy somehow fights back, family gets back together again, they're able to recover the money that they might have lost, or the good guy recovers from his injuries or from some kind of loss perhaps you know it's a child who's lost or kidnapped, and the child is back with the family, the bad guy's put in prison. So, all of these things happen.

Do we ever take a moment to realize what's actually going on in front of our eyes? At the beginning of the story, the director wanted us to fall in love with the good guys and start hating the bad guys, so *ràga*, *dwèsha*, desire and aversion already. You are now attached to something and you want to distance yourself from something else. Then what happens, the director gets the bad guys to beat up the good guys. Now someone you like is getting hurt, someone you like is getting shot, or someone you like is getting injured or wounded; obviously you are not going to like that and now you're in distress, you are feeling bad, you're feeling terrible, you're feeling hurt in fact you are suffering. Remember they are getting paid and you are suffering. Then what do they do towards the end of the story at the point of the climax, the good guy is relieved, the good guys put back in a good place, they are back with their family, they've got their money back and all that. Again, they're just acting, they are getting paid, *who do you think is really going through the emotions?* You and I watching the movie. We were made to attach ourselves to something, remember attachment leads to suffering, ***"Tanhàya Jàyathì Sòko"*** so attachment leads to suffering.

At the beginning of the story, you're attached to something, you are now suffering in the middle of the story because whatever you are attached to is being hurt and then you're relieved from that suffering and then you feel good, you feel a sense of pleasure, you are comforted. You're thinking, 'oh, thank god! those guys were saved.' I'm so glad that I came to watch this movie because otherwise; how else would the good guys have been saved. If you really think about this, what you're really doing is, going and giving your hard-earned money, your hard-earned dollars, your hard-earned pounds, your cash to the person that's producing the film, and saying, "Hey mister producer, can you take some of my hard-earned money, put me into discomfort, make me feel really terrible, make me feel bad, make me feel distressed and then relieve me from that please." Isn't that what you're doing? You are paying them to put you into agony and then relieve you from that agony and then you're walking out of the cinema thinking I feel good now. Do you see the irony in that?

The process of finding pleasure

The reason I relate this story is to relate the point I was trying to make before, and that is, what The Lord Buddha asks us, in every birth that you're born you have to go through hunger, and when you're feeling hungry you feed yourself, you put food in your tummy and now you're feeling good and when you're feeling thirsty, you drink some water, you take a drink and now your thirst has been quenched. When you're feeling distressed psychologically, for example: you are wanting your kids to pass the exams or get a good job, then you get them to work really hard or you go work hard, and then, once you get the results of that, you're relieved from that distress. At any point to experience that good feeling to experience pleasure you have to either be put into discomfort by some other external factor or you've got to do it yourself. I'll give you a funny story.

Why do you feel relieved when you go to the toilet? You feel a sense of, that was good. When you go to the toilet because you're physically feeling a sense of discomfort, you walk in there, you relieve yourself, and now the process of doing that feels good. This is why I've asked you in the past, which feels better, relieving yourself from hunger when you've been hungry for one day or relieving yourself from hunger when you've been hungry for two days. Well, it's clearly the longer you've been hungry for, the better it feels, the more pleasure you feel in relieving yourself from that pain. This is what the Lord Buddha asks us. He asks us, *"Do you forever go through this process of subjecting yourself to pain and then relieving yourself from it, and you've been doing it many times over in sansàra or do you find the root cause that gets you into that agony, into that discomfort in the first place and then remove the root causes so that you don't get into that position in the first place."*

For example: if it's hunger, we're talking about, relieving yourself from hunger feels good, agreed. But what if you didn't feel hungry in the first place, you're now not having to treat an ailment, you're not having to treat a condition that is hunger. Clearly that's better than having to treat hunger and then feeling good about it, because well, you're suffering for that time you're hungry, your suffering, and not just that, money doesn't grow on trees You've got to work for it, you've got to go find it, you've got to pay money and for that you have to work hard, you've got to cook your food, 'there's no such thing as a free lunch' it's a very popular saying, that's because you've got to work for it. So, not only are you having to relieve yourself from pain but you're having to work for it as well, which also brings you discomfort, even more pain, this is why it's called *abhisankàra*. So hopefully that is a good reminder for those who might have not listened to that discussion in a previous sermon about how futile this process of going through *sansàra* is trying to find pleasure and happiness.

Why am I born a human?

The choice we have though is without doing that what if we asked ourselves, 'well, why is it that I feel hungry in the first place?' Is it not because I have a stomach? *Why do I have a stomach?* Is it not because I'm born a human being or an animal whichever? *What is the cause for that?* The cause for that is, where we get in to *paticca samuppàda*, the dependent origination. You are born a human because you have planted the seeds to have been born a human. By seeds I don't mean conception, I mean the *paticca samuppàda* process. **'Bhava paccayà jàti', existence gives rise to birth.** So as long as you have cultivated *sankhàra* to be born a human being, you are going to be born a human being. This is why the Lord Buddha says, **"The only way that you can put a stop to this process for good, is to treat your ailments. You find the root cause and then treat the root cause."** So, for as long as we are in *sansàra*, for as long as we are reborn, you have to go through the process of treating hunger, treating thirst, treating diseases, treating loneliness, feeling dissatisfaction, all of these things that bring you pain. The feeling you get when you have to associate with people you don't like, the feeling you get when you have to distance yourself from people that you do like, all of these things you are having to do because you're born a human being, you're born an animal, you're born a *dèva* or a *brahma*. So, if you put a stop to that process at the root, then you are stopping birth at the root and as long as birth has been stopped then none of the above takes place.

Compared to core Buddhist teachings, how important is the doctrine of rebirth?

So, coming back to the question, compared to core Buddhist teachings how important is the doctrine of rebirth? Well, hopefully you are able to understand that from what we've discussed, it is the process of rebirth that the Buddha comes to cure. That's the disease that He comes to cure, because think about it, if it was just this life that we have to put up with, and I use that word very deliberately, if it's just this life that we have to put up with the suffering that comes with this life; Why? Having to go to work, having to study hard, having to be subjected to pain, suffering, disease, decay and death, all of these things. If it was just this birth that we had to put up with, these things, quite frankly what's the big deal? Think about it. If it was just this birth, I mean there are people who tell me that they don't believe in rebirth, there are two questions I ask them. My first question is well, 'do you enjoy your life as it is?' They say, 'yeah well sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not so good' and then I ask them, well, '50% of the time or 51% of the time is it good or bad'. They think about it and they tell me, 'well I've got to be honest, about 51% of the time or more I'm actually suffering it's either because I've got to do a job'. I mean think about this, we for the 24 hours that we have a day, people work for about eight or nine hours, some people do overtime, so you're actually working for almost half the day. You may be one of the fortunate ones that enjoys

working, but if you were able to get paid or given everything that you wanted in life without having to work for it, would you take it? If not, why do you go on holiday? Again, think about it, why do you take a break from work if you really enjoy work, why do you take a break from work. If that was the one thing that made you really happy then surely every moment that you're awake you should be looking to work. Some people do this, but that's not out of choice but because, they have to. So, in any case we have to work, we have to be subject to disease, to decay, to death, sometimes loss of loved ones, sometimes family breakups, children that die at a young age, and you know parents who have to say goodbye to them, all of these things which bring a lot of pain. If you're subject to pain, 51% of the time which I mean, more of the time than when you're actually happy enjoying life and you believe that this is it, you know; there's no rebirth after this, quite frankly what's the point of staying alive you might as well go commit suicide. I condemn suicide but the point I'm trying to make is, if there is no rebirth and you're thinking actually there's more pain in this life than happiness, you know there's more sorrow than there is joy and happiness, why do you live this life, why not just put an end to it? Well the reason we don't do that is, because either you know you're really attached to this life but then you got to ask yourself the question well, if I'm suffering more times than I'm not, *why is it that I'm attached to this life?*

The second is, well, this is not the last birth, there's a rebirth after this. I'm going to be born somewhere else, so ending your life does not answer the question, is not an end to the story. It's not the solution to the problem because if it was, I would be the first to do it. That does not cure the problem because as long as there is ignorance and attachment, *avidyà* and *tanhà*, these defilements in your mind, the rebirth process takes place. So, rebirth does not stop. In every birth that takes place you have to go through these things. You have to feed yourself, wash yourself, work for existence, find shelter, find food, find medicines and you have to find clothes. So, Euthanasia, you know putting an end to your life or suicide is not a solution to the problem.

This is why you need to focus on trying to find the solution to ending the rebirth process and that is why the Lord Buddha gives us *patichha samuppàda* process. He shows us this is how rebirth takes place, the reasons for rebirth and the causes that give rise to rebirth. So, if you put an end to these causes then you've put an end to rebirth. So, this is fundamental to Buddhism.

How do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and *anatta*?

Now the second question is actually quite interesting, because the question is how do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and *anatta*. We've discussed *anatta* in the past and hopefully this would be a good reminder to those who might have listened in to those discussions but perhaps a good refresher, it's worth it. The Lord Buddha says,

"I don't speak of àtma or anàtma."

My philosophy is that of cause and effect. He says,

"I don't speak of a 'self' or I don't teach of a 'self' I don't teach of a 'non-self', I teach dependent origination, cause and effect."

So, this interpretation of *anatta*, that is in the *Tripitaka*, has been translated today into Sinhala as '*anàtma*' and to English as 'non-self'. But it's worth taking a moment to examine the validity of this translation, to try and ask ourselves well, what does that actually mean; to see if there are perhaps, we are actually dealing with the most appropriate meaning, or if there's something else hidden in the word *anatta*. The Lord Buddha asks us this question,

"Is your eye iccha or aniccha?"

Hopefully you've listened to our discussion about *iccha*, *aniccha*, *dukkha* and may be even *anatta* in the past, but as a reminder he asks us a question, *is this iccha or aniccha?* *iccha* is something that is to our liking, today we give a very loose translation to that and in fact an incorrect translation which is impermanence. It's quite sad, that we've accepted impermanence to be the English translation of the word *aniccha*.

Is it impermanence that gives rise to suffering?

Let's take a very simple example, imagine you had some kind of disease, let's keep it simple you've got a headache. Now if you are of the belief that if something is impermanent then that gives rise to suffering; does that apply in the case of a headache. So, you have a headache would it cause you suffering if the headache was permanent or if it was impermanent? Think about it. Quite clearly if the headache was permanent then you'd be suffering forever. But is it not because your headache is impermanent, by which I mean you could either over time, your headache goes away or perhaps you take some medicine for it and treat it and then it goes away? So, the fact that your headache is impermanent, Isn't that a good thing?

What about if you're in a job and you've been doing that job for many years and you're looking for a promotion or looking to change jobs, you want to work somewhere else, for perhaps better prospects. Well, if your job was permanent, I don't mean a permanent role, what I mean by that is, you are not able to change that. If your job was permanent, you wouldn't be able to leave that job and do something else. Now surely if what you wanted to do was to leave your workplace and go elsewhere then that's what's going to make you happy. So, it's impermanent quite clearly. I mean the fact that you can leave your job and go work elsewhere is impermanence. I mean, that's an example of impermanence, your job is not permanent. Isn't that a good thing, the fact that you are able to do that. If your job was permanent, then no matter where you would like to go and work, you wouldn't be able to leave that place.

Say, you are in a relationship, and the relationship was going bad you didn't want to stay in that relationship for much longer or you are trying to get out of that relationship, if that

relationship was permanent you couldn't break up that relationship. Would that cause you suffering? Well clearly it would. The fact that it's permanent is what's going to cause you suffering, not the fact that it's impermanent. Hopefully, that's making sense. So, the relationship being impermanent is a good thing, if you wanted to get out of it. Now granted if you enjoyed being in that relationship then it being impermanent is not such a good thing because you want it to be permanent, you want the relationship to last for a long time, for you to be happy with each other. If that were the case then great, but if that wasn't the case you know some people get divorced. If that relationship, that connection was permanent that would be problematic, you'd be suffering for the rest of your life. So, you know these are just a few examples for you to think about, is it impermanence that gives rise to suffering or perhaps is it that we've given a somewhat skewed or incorrect interpretation to the word *aniccha* that is in the *Tripitaka*.

What is Aniccha?

In fact, I ask you, it's a challenge if you can find one place in the *Tripitaka* and I'm talking about the *Pàli Tripitaka*, I'm not talking about a Sinhala translation, if you can find one place in the *Pàli Tripitaka* where the word '*anithya*' is mentioned, then please let me know. I can't say, I've read the entire *Tripitaka* but I'm confident that you're only going to find *aniccha*. For example, if you look at *Girimànanda sutta*, the discourse that the Lord Buddha gave to Venerable Ananda, so that he could in turn go and preach to Venerable *Girimànanda*, it's also quite popular one because it can be found in the *Pirith Book (Piruwana Poth Wahanse)*. You'll see, *kathamàcànanda aniccha sannà* it talks about *aniccha* in lots of places throughout the *Tripitaka* you'll find references to *aniccha*. The reason I'm talking about *aniccha* right now is because, to get to *anatta*, you need to have covered your basics. It would make little sense for someone if I just jump straight to *anatta* because there's a strong interlink between these terms. So, is it impermanence that gives rise to suffering; and we've listened to some examples where that is not the case? The headache, the bad relationship that you're in, not you're in but you get the idea if you were in a bad relationship, I don't wish that on anyone and the job that you're not liking, the job that you want to get out of, in all of these cases you want it to be impermanent and only if it was impermanent you will actually enjoy the outcome. If it was permanent then there would not be a pleasant experience for you by any stretch of imagination.

But what *aniccha* means; and this is what The Lord Buddha talks about, the interpretation that we've got to take from the *Tripitaka*. Let's look at the etymology of the word *aniccha*; *iccha* in *pail* and in Sinhala is, to one's liking. There are a few examples that I can give in Sinhala, and I'm afraid I'm going to have to use the Sinhala language here to try and explain these because otherwise there is no way I can give a direct translation to the word *aniccha*; certainly not if I'm trying to explain what the word *aniccha* means, what I'm trying to say, it means I have to use a language, a mediatory language for that purpose. So, if you'll hear the

term 'voluntary' in Sinhalese is 'swechchà', for example a 'voluntary organization' is a 'swechchà sanvidhànaya'. 'Swechchà' being 'voluntary'. 'Sanvidhànaya' means 'organization'. If you did something on a voluntary basis then you know someone would say, 'swechchàven karapu deyak', 'it's that something I've done on a voluntary basis'. So swa+iccha you see the word 'iccha' comes there 'swa' being 'self', 'icchà' being your 'liking', your desire, because that's how something becomes voluntary. For example, if you were a voluntary nurse in a hospital, you're doing it out of your own liking, no one's forcing you to do it. Someone might have asked you to do it, but no one's forcing you to do it, you're not getting paid, there's no remuneration there, you're doing it out of your own liking, that's when it becomes voluntary. So, to do a service that is voluntary, you have to have a liking, a strong liking in fact. So, swa+iccha, 'swa' being 'self', 'iccha' being 'liking'. You see the word, 'swechchà' means voluntary. So, the word 'iccha' comes there.

Let's take another example, the word for 'disappointment' in Sinhala is, 'icchà bhangathwaya'. Again, 'bhanga' is to be destroyed and the word 'iccha' comes here again. So 'iccha' being 'liking' and for someone's liking to be destroyed is clearly disappointment. I like something, I want something, when that is not fulfilled, I'm disappointed. So, you see, how 'iccha' is actually more to do with one's liking, one's desire, or wish for something to be a certain way, more so than impermanence. I'm hoping that this message is sinking into you. Please let me know if that's not clear enough. I'll try and give a few more examples. But I'm hoping it's coming together. So you see, the word iccha is liking, it's desire, it's someone's wish, and therefore when The Lord Buddha says, "**All sankata,**" **sankata being things that are conditioned**, and you know this includes your pet cat, your furniture, your house, your life, your body, you know anything that is conditioned anything that has come in to being due to causes coming together, is subject to *aniccha*. So, what does He mean by that? It is not to your liking. It is not the way it is because you want it to be the way it is. Well you want it to be a certain way, it is not the way it is because that is what you desire.

Concept of Aniccha - Example 1

Let's take an example again; now it's been raining heavily in Anuradhapura at the moment, it's been raining for the last few days. Only yesterday someone walked up to me and said it's been raining for a few days now and we've been waiting for rain for a long period of time in Anuradhapura, but now that it's been raining for a few days we're hoping that it goes away. So, let's see how *iccha*, or one's desire, one's liking or one's wish has to do with this. Now this person, when it wasn't raining for many months they were wishing for rain, they were hoping for rain, that was their desire because he's also a farmer. So, he's wanting rain, and then it rains, for all the time that he's been wanting it to rain it didn't rain. All those months that he wanted it to rain it didn't rain, and then one fine day it starts raining and it continues to rain for many days. Now he wants the rain to stop but it continues to rain. So, do you understand how, whether it rains or does not rain have nothing to do with whether he wants

it to rain, he wishes for it to rain or that is his desire. As long as the conditions are right for it to rain it's going to rain.

I'll take another example, this is something that we really need to get our heads around because; I've said this before, if you condensed all of Buddhism into one single point, imagine you think Buddhism was a universe and you condensed the entire universe, you know how they talk about the Big Bang Theory. By the way, I'm not talking about the TV series. If you condensed the entire universe into one single point, you get, well whatever you get, you know that's where people say, that's how the Big Bang happened. But if you condense all of Buddhism into one point then that would be the concept of *aniccha*. This is why The Lord Buddha says

“Nahì sīlèna watanhòtu- uppajjanthì tathàgata

atthakkarà tìnipadà sambuddhèna prakàshità”

The Buddha doesn't come into this world to talk about *sīla*, to talk about Precepts or to talk about observances. Why He does come into this universe is to teach about *aniccha*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*.

This is what we're discussing now. He also then says, 'To see me, is to see the *Dhamma*, to see the *Dhamma*, is to see the *paticca samuppàda*. So quite clearly there's a very strong interlink between *paticca samuppàda* and *aniccha*, *dukkha*, *anatta* and hopefully today we can try and meet that link and try and talk about that as well. So, we're trying to give meaning to the word *aniccha*.

Concept of Aniccha - Example 2

The example I was going to give is, let's say a cricket match; we all like a bit of cricket. So, two teams, let's say you have Sri Lanka playing; I don't know whichever your favorite cricket team is, that is not Sri Lanka. For those of you living in Australia perhaps that's Australia, for those of you living in England perhaps that's the English team, wherever you are imagine that's that country. For my example I'm going to use England, so England and Sri Lanka are about to play a cricket match, and if we were to say it's either my liking, my wish, my desire, that's going to be the result or perhaps that of the players that's going to be the result or the Sri Lankan team then, could I be any further from the truth? Well let's examine this. If one were to say the more people that wish for a certain result, that result is going to be, what's going to be. Simple logic tells me that the population of Sri Lanka is a very small fraction of the population of England. So, more people clearly, when this match is being played, are hoping for England to win this game, and a very small proportion of that are hoping for Sri Lanka to win this game. If that were the case and if it was the number of people that were wishing for a certain outcome, was the deciding factor, or even had anything to do with what the outcome was going to be, would that game be worth playing at all? Would Sri Lanka, I mean is it ever in Sri Lanka's interest to play a country that is geographically bigger than them? Sri Lanka being

such a small island they would have very little choice in the game of cricket, as to who they play with, to be quite frank, so you know naturally if that were the logic there and if that were the case, then England would win every time because, you know Sri Lanka has a very small population compared to that of England. So, the English team is going to win every single time, the Australian team is going to win every single time, the Indian team's going to win every single time. *Why?* Well if we are basing our argument on the fact that something being the outcome is to my liking, this is the outcome because I wanted it to be the case. I wanted Sri Lanka to win and therefore Sri Lanka's going to win. Well why, me and may be two million other people are wishing for that, there are about twenty million people let's say, I'm pulling this number out of thin air. Let's say in England 20 to 30 million people are wishing for England to win the game you know beyond comparison, that game is not worth being played.

Concept of Aniccha - Example 3

Imagine you go to someone who is a book-keeper, if you're not familiar with who a book-keeper is, that's someone who takes your money and you place a bet, and then if you win you get a bigger stake, so you get a payback for that, if the country or if the outcome that you're predicting is not going to happen then you lose. That's how betting works. I've never done it but I'm told that's how it works. So, if you go to a book-keeper, the book-keeper's going to ask you a few questions. They're going to ask you, who's going to be playing today; and you're going to say, well it's England versus Sri Lanka, then they're going to ask you, where are they going to be playing this game; and then you're going to say for example, it's going to be played in Sri Lanka and then they're going to ask you okay, great, which ground are they going to be playing the game, you're going to say, Premadasa stadium. It doesn't really matter, then they'll ask you who are the umpire's, do they favour batsman or do they favour bowlers. Then they are going to ask you what's the weather like? Is it, wet weather today or is it quite sunny? Now if you think about it, what are they actually asking you? What they're asking you is, what are the conditions that's going to give you a certain outcome. In fact what they're doing in their own records is, lining up all the conditions they've got; imagine this is how they do it, let's keep it really simple, he's got a pen and a paper (the book-keeper) he's written down all of the conditions that he uses to give the prediction, he's writing down all these conditions, the two countries that are playing, here's the game that they are playing, here are the players, here's how experienced they are, here's how many bowlers in this team and here's how many batsmen this team's got, what about the other team, here are the umpires, here's how experienced those umpires are, it's a wet weather today and the games played at *Premadasa Stadium*. So, what are they doing? They're writing down all of the conditions that's going to give a certain outcome. Now once all the conditions fit into place the bookkeeper's going to give you an outcome and they're going to say, I predict that this, you know X country is going to win this game. It could be Sri Lanka; it could be England. They're not going to predict it accurately a hundred percent of the time because, they're not able to foresee all of the

conditions. But they're going to be able to give a good goal, they are going to have a good go at it *why*? Because they're experienced, they've been doing it for some time, they've studied the multiple conditions that give rise to a certain outcome and based on that they're going to give their prediction. Why is it that we fail to see that what they are doing is a really good example of cause and effect? We fail to see that and we think that actually Sri Lanka is going to win because, I want Sri Lanka to win this game. Our English counterparts are going to think England is going to win because I want England to win this game. Do you see how whether England wants to win this game or the Sri Lankan population or even the team wants to win that game has got absolutely nothing to do with the outcome. I mean you know clearly, you do make certain assumptions all the time, so you know all of these conditions that you can't see, that you can't tell for sure you're going to have to make assumptions, for example; you might say, I'm going to assume that all the players are in good physical and mental health. Now that's an assumption. But that assumption is not always true. In fact, most of the time it's probably untrue because each of the players might have had a bad day or they might be feeling hungry, I don't know, they might not be feeling their best for whatever reason, and it's difficult to take all of that into consideration because, then it becomes a very complex equation to give an outcome to.

But this is where The Lord Buddha was able to see. Only the Lord Buddha possesses this power, the power to see through all the causes that give rise to a certain condition. This is how the Deepankara Lord Buddha was able to foresee the future and forecast that the *Bodhisattva* was going to be a Lord Buddha in a future birth as Gautama Lord Buddha. So, what we are seeing here is clearly that, this is all *sankatha*, all things are conditioned, it's a case of cause and effect. As long as the causes are right you get the effect. Whether you want it to be the case with whatever you want the case to be, whatever you want the outcome to be, has got nothing to do with it.

Concept of Aniccha - Example 4

I have been asked this question in the past and you're probably thinking of this, I'll throw this into the mix. Someone walks up to me and says well, what about an exam? I want to study hard and I want to pass this exam. Clearly and obviously I can decide what the outcome is going to be. If I don't sit the exam, I'm not going to pass the exam, so how can you tell me that, what my liking, what my desire, what my wish has got nothing to do with the outcome. Well you see, what you've got to understand there is, whether you sit the exam is also a condition for the outcome. It's a cause for that effect. Now you could have studied many hours, you could have done lots of practice, you could have done lots of hard work preparing for your exam, but there is one key condition that needs to come into play for the outcome, that is you passing the exam and that is you going and sitting the exam. If you don't sit for your examination then you're not going to pass your exam quite clearly. It's quite binary to be honest, but the reason you have passed that exam is not because you want to pass that

exam, not because that's what you are wanting or that's what you're wishing for. It is because, all of the conditions for you to pass that exam are being put into play. So, you're studying here, you're doing all your homework, you're taking all the lessons, you're having your extra classes plus you're sitting the exam, plus you're feeling good on the day you're going to the exam. What if you have a really bad headache and you can't focus on your paper, what if you run out of ink and that stresses you out, well if you run out of time see all of these things are causes that give you that outcome, that give you that effect. So, it's due to cause and effect. As long as the conditions line up you get the outcome that you get, simple as that. Hopefully that makes sense. So that is a concept of *aniccha*.

aniccha in quite simple terms is the philosophy, it's a doctrine that, nothing is the way it is because you want it to be the way that it is. It's the way it is because all of the conditions for it to be the way it is have been lined up in that way. Again, going back to the case of the farmer, it's not raining because the farmer wants rain today. It's raining because the clouds are holding sufficient humidity, it's the right temperature, the right amount of wind, you know whatever the conditions are that need to be right for it to rain. Similarly when it's not raining, and the farmer wants it to rain, it's not raining because, you know the farmer wants it to rain or the farmer doesn't want it to rain, whatever the farmer wants, has got nothing to do with that. It is not a condition, it's not a cause that's going to give rise to that effect. Hopefully that make sense. So that's *aniccha*.

How does Aniccha lead to Dukkha

Now, how does *aniccha* then lead to *dukkha* and therefore to *anatta*? Let's discuss that. If something is *aniccha*, and yet you don't understand, you don't view it in that way, you don't see it that way, which is how, all animals have been living throughout *sansàra*. This is why we still go through *sansàra*. It's not a 'if', it's a 'because' really. If you understand *aniccha*, to its fullest extent, you know you are an *Arahant*. So, if you're not an *Arahant* including myself, it's because our understanding of *aniccha* is not complete. There's more *aniccha* for us to understand. But the basic doctrine, the most fundamental level can be understood by most people. That is what we're talking about. Now if something is *aniccha*, but you don't view it as being *aniccha*, you don't accept it as being *aniccha*, by which I mean it's not to my liking, it's only the way it is because the right conditions have lined up for it to be the way it is. *What do I do?* So, I'm thinking, it's the way it is because I want it to be the way it is, *what do I do then?* What I do then, is the cause for all of my suffering and that is to go and attach myself to it. I set expectations, I set an expectation that, here's where it needs to be in the next few moments. In the next moment, the next day, right now, here's where it needs to be.

So, for example let's go back to the farmer. Let's say the farmer is looking to reap the crop tomorrow, now if it hasn't rained for some time but you know he's been watering it through irrigation, it's not water from the sky, it's just water that he's been using from rivers, to feed

his crop. Say he's going to reap his crop tomorrow and he's hoping, he's praying that it doesn't rain tomorrow. Why, because if it rains and if it rains hard then that's going to destroy his entire crop. It's going to destroy all his hard work. There are examples of this in the *Tripitaka*, where this story has happened exactly this way, and The Lord Buddha goes on and explains. He speaks to a farmer who finds himself in this position where he's been looking forward to reaping his crop for some time and unfortunately on the night following which he was going to reap his crop there are torrential rains and all his hard work goes to waste and then his distraught, he's completely disappointed and he finds himself in tatters. The Lord Buddha goes and preaches the *dhamma* to him and saves him from further disappointment and suffering.

But if we come back to the farmer that I'm talking about today, if this farmer is looking to reap his crop tomorrow, and it is raining, clearly and quite obviously, you can imagine, he's going to wish, he's going to hope, and he's going to pray that it doesn't rain overnight. He's going to pray that it doesn't rain tomorrow. So, he's going to set that expectation, he's going to hope for that because, he's not seeing that rain is all but cause and effect. As long as the conditions are lined up for it to rain tomorrow, it's going to rain tomorrow. Whether I wanted it to rain or not has got nothing to do with that. He's not seeing that. If he doesn't see the reality there, he's going to attach himself to that outcome. He's going to attach himself to the outcome where there is no rain, it's going to be a dry day. The moment he does that, if it rains the following day, what do you think is going to happen. He's going to be distraught; he is going to suffer; he's going to be completely shattered, *why?* Because he didn't want it to rain, because when it rains it's going to destroy his crop and all his hard work along with that. So isn't the problem here, that he set an expectation for it not to rain, then it rained, and now he's suffering. This is why The Lord Buddha teaches us, **that expectation which is a result of attachment leads to suffering, 'Tanhàya jàyati sòkò'**

Tanhàya jàyati sòkò

As I said at the beginning, this is something I've been contemplating on, reflecting during the last week. And what I've been thinking about is, if you think about what is the most valuable thing, what is it that human beings, *dèvas*, *brahmas*, animals, any kind of beings, what is it that all beings hold most dear? What is it that beings value the most? What do you think it is? Do you think, it's family? Do you think it's their vehicles? Do you think it's the money? Do you think, it's happiness? Let's just take people; what do you think people hold most dear? Is it property? Is it money? Is it food? Think about it, because the bigger it is, the more you hold it dear, the more you will suffer.

So, if I give you an example; the more you're attached to something, let's take two objects that you might own. Let's say, you have an iPad, you also own a mobile phone okay. Now if you are more attached to your iPad, say you walk home one day and you find that your iPad and phone are missing. Which do you start looking for first? If you're attached more to your

iPad, you're going to start looking for your iPad first. If you're more attached to your phone then you're going to start looking for your phone first. So, the more you are attached to something, the more the loss of that is going to make you suffer. The more decay and loss of that object, that thing or that incident is going to make you suffer. I mean it could be something really simple.

Let's say you're looking forward to your birthday because someone promises you a bicycle, the other promises you a toy car. I'm thinking more about kids right now because, I know we do have quite a few of them also. If you are more attached to a bike and you don't get it, you're going to suffer more than if you don't get your toy car. You see, the more you are attached to something the more you're going to suffer when that comes to a loss or when you don't receive it, when you can't find it, when you can't locate it, you're going to suffer.

Again, think about two people that you might like. One you like a lot more than the other. *Whose loss are you going to mourn more?* The loss of the person you like the most, than the other person, right. Just a few examples to get you to think about this. Now my question to you is, using that as your basis for trying to figure out, what is it that you are most attached to? What do you value the most? Have a think about, what is it which if I lose, what is it, if it goes to decay or death, I suffer the most. I threw in some pointers, some examples. Is it your car? Is it your family? Is it your food? Well, what I realized is actually it's none of them. It's not even your life.

What people value the most?

You see what people are most attached to, what people value the most is the simple thing called expectation. It's the death of expectation that causes people to go crazy. It's the demise, it's the death, it's the decay of expectation, the *jarà, marana* of expectation that causes people, that causes beings to suffer more than anything else. Even in the examples I gave you before, take the two people that you like. Why do you like those two people? Is it not because you have expectation from them? Whether it's your friends, your family. Is it not because you have expectations? Let's take two people on their death bed. They're both really ill, but the doctor says, we are able to treat this person, you know it's going to be difficult, but one of these people we are going to be able to treat. We have to keep them under observation and we have to do some operations but, he is going to be able to recover. But the other person they're unable to treat. Then you live with that fact so he says, in six months' time, this person is going to die and that's the person that they've said, they are unable to treat, but the other person they can. Time passes by, so now your expectation is that one of these people is going to be able to get out of bed and go back to living a normal life, whereas the other person is going to pass away. What if it happens the other way around? If it happens the way that you're expecting it to happen, obviously you're going to suffer because you know you're still losing someone that you love, someone that you like. But what if it happens the other way

around. What if the person that passes away is the person that you are not expecting to pass away, what happens then is the death of expectation? Your expectation has not been fulfilled. You have been disappointed and then you're going to suffer a lot.

In the example where I asked you, someone's promised you a bicycle and someone else promised you a toy car. *Why is it that, if it's the bicycle that you really want but you don't get and you suffer the most? Is it not because it's your expectation of that bicycle that has just been destroyed?* See, this is where The Lord Buddha says '*Tanhàya jàyathì sòkò*'. I've said that three times already today, it's that *tanhà*, it's that attachment that gives rise to this expectation. The moment you attach to something, you're not attached to something in the present moment because the present moment is the moment that is. It's the way it is at this moment in time. So, if it's raining right now, it's raining right now. You don't set expectations on this precise specific moment. You always set an expectation on the next moment. That moment could be a day away, it could be a month away, it could be a year away, it could be ten years away or it could be a hundred years away, it could be a second away, it could be the next millisecond, but you always set expectations on a future moment and as soon as you set that expectation you now want that outcome. You're looking for that outcome, you're hoping for, you're desiring for that outcome, not realizing that setting an expectation is a completely futile exercise. It's a completely useless thing to do and not only that, it is going to be the route to your suffering because if everything is in fact *anicca*, everything that is conditioned is the way it is, because there are conditions that give the result that you're seeing today or right now. The moment those conditions change, the outcome is going to be different. So, what's the point of then setting an expectation on that? Because the moment you set an expectation you want it to be a certain way.

Let's go back to the game. The cricket match, Sri Lanka playing England. There's going to be a bunch of people that are expecting Sri Lanka to win. There's going to be a bunch of people that are expecting England to win. Now they're both setting expectations. Clearly one of them are going to be disappointed 99% of the time. Let's not talk about it when a match is drawn. Well, even then, if you're wanting Sri Lanka to win if you're wanting England to win, when the other team has to lose, you're not wanting a tie, you're wanting one team to win. And the moment you set that expectation, obviously you are setting that expectation on a future moment but the moment you set that expectation, you're completely ignoring the fact that my expectation has nothing to do with, what this outcome is going to be. It's all to do with causes and effects. As long as the conditions are there for whichever team to win, that team's going to win whether I want that to be the case or not, has got nothing to do with this. So that is where *dukkha* comes in, because and I'm just talking about one form of *dukkha*. There are three different types of *dukkha*. *Dukkha dukkha, viparinàma dukkha, sankhàra dukkha*. I'm just talking about the *dukkha* in general.

In this situation here, we talked about *anicca* being, the things are the way they are, not because you want it to be the way it is but because the conditions are right for it to be the way it is. Then we talked about *dukkha*. If something is the way it is because the conditions

are there for it to be the way it is, but yet, you then go on and set expectations based on your views, based on your hopes, your desires that, I wish that it were such and such, or I wish that if it were this and not that, the moment you set that expectation, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. Possible disappointment, *why?* Because, what you're hoping for may or may not happen. It may happen if the conditions are right for it to happen. It may not happen if the conditions are not right for it to happen. But your wish, your hope, your desire has got nothing to do with it. You see how simply saying that, something is impermanent does not give this profound meaning to what The Lord Buddha described. You see now, if something is *aniccha* it leads to *dukkha*. Hopefully this is sinking in. Simply saying that something is *anitya* or impermanent then therefore leads to suffering, does not give this profound deep meaning to what The Lord Buddha taught. I mean quite frankly, before The Lord Buddha's time do you think people lived their life thinking, how everything I see around me is permanent. This tree is permanent, my life is permanent, this house that I built is permanent. Do you think that's how people lived their lives before The Lord Buddha came into being? Do you think people needed The Lord Buddha to come along and tell them that, "*Hey guys actually things are impermanent*" and then they go, 'oh, never realized that, *really?*' Actually, it doesn't take a Buddhist to realize that things are impermanent. People died before The Lord Buddha's time, many many times. People saw death, disease around them, people saw healing, things break, families break, people dying, because of wars, disease, all of these things. Flowers dying, trees falling, storms you know all of these things are examples of *anitya* or impermanence. You don't need a Buddha to explain that. I mean quite frankly. But the meaning that we've been just talking about; how things are not the way they are because you want it to be the way they are. But without an understanding of that, if you then go and set expectations, because you're thinking actually no it is the way it is because I want it to be the way it is. Based on that wrong view (*mityà drushti*), you set an expectation and the moment you set that expectation; what you are doing is, you are setting yourself up for potential disappointment and if the outcome that you hoped for, you wished for, does not come through, guess what happens, disappointment, suffering, unhappiness (*dukkha*). This is what the Lord Buddha says, *aniccha, dukkha*. Now let's move on to *anatta*.

Anatta

For someone that understands or someone that sees, all this time I've been thinking that things are the way they are because I wanted it to be the way it is, I want it to be a certain way. Well actually today I realize that nothing's the way it is because I wanted it to be that way. How I want it to be has got nothing to do with the outcome. Another example just came to my mind. Let's say, you wanted to add up a few numbers and get an answer, you write on a piece of paper $a+b+c=z$, and now you go ahead and substitute numbers to, a b and c. So, you're writing $2+2+2=6$. Now someone says well, $2+2+2=6$ because I want it to be that way. *Really?* Where does I want $2+2+2=6$, where's my liking, my desire, what *has that got to do*

with anything? It's not part of the equation. If you really wanted to add this is what I want the answer to be just add a +0 to the equation. It's the same thing. So, $2+2+2+0=6$. What's the +0? And that's what I want it to be. Because that's the same effect, whatever outcome you want in that equation, you know that factor is the same as adding a zero to that equation. Adding a zero makes no difference to that equation. Just as much as your desire, your wish, your liking, has got nothing to do with that equation.

So, in the case of *anatta*, when you understand this doctrine, when you understand this theory, when you understand this philosophy, you then begin to realize, what I've been doing all along is setting expectations on something that has nothing to do with what my expectation is. The outcome has simply been a case of outputs or rather effects depending on causes. That's got nothing to do with what I want. To continue to keep expecting things, to continue to keep wishing for a certain outcome is useless, meaningless. Now in Sinhala, 'atta' or 'artha' is 'meaning'. So, if someone asks you what's the meaning of the word *aniccha*, they could say what is the (*arthaya* of *aniccha*) *aniccha kiyana ekè arthaya kumakda?* In Sinhala that's how you would ask. *Artha* is meaning, and that is what *atta* is. Meaning 'essence'. *What is the essence of something?* Now when you understand for yourself clearly, it's crystal clear, how something is the way it is because there are the right conditions to give a certain output, to give a certain outcome for me to then go and set my expectations, attach myself to that, because I'm expecting it to be a certain way I'm thinking which is to my liking. The whole process of doing that, is meaningless. There is simply no essence in doing that. It's futile, it's useless. That is the meaning of *anatta*.

Now when you understand what we've just been discussing do you not feel that, actually I can see how this might be something The Lord Buddha would have explained. But if I then said, okay let's go back to the conventional meanings, you know let's say, my hand is *anitya*, my hand is impermanent and therefore my hand brings me suffering, and therefore my hand is non-self. My hand is *anitya*, my hand is *dukkha*, my hand is *anàtma*. *What meaning does that give you?* I mean quite frankly I'm still struggling to find meaning in that and I doubt I ever will. Take any other object, your car; whether a toy car or a proper car. My car is impermanent, therefore it brings me suffering, and my car is non-self. Don't you think, if The Buddha had put it that way, you would have had a few people scratching their heads, wondering what do you mean my car is non- self.

Well what the Buddha did say is, your car is *aniccha*. If you're looking at a brand-new car or a car that you like, it's not the way it is because you want it to be the way it is. Your car is running smooth or your car is brand new or is functioning properly because all the right conditions are there for it to function properly. Okay that makes sense. Now don't go setting expectations on that though, don't go setting expectations on, this is my desire, this is my wish, I want it to be this way, because the moment you do that, what if those conditions change. As soon as the conditions change the output is going to be different, the outcomes going to be different, the result is going to be different. If you then understand that process; my car is only the way it is because the right conditions are there for me to be the way it is.

Therefore, it's meaningless for me to go set expectations on that. It's futile, it's essence less if I were to go and expect my car to be a certain way, because as soon as the conditions change effects are going to change, so whatever it is the way it is right now, is the way it is right now. Don't you think that would have helped a lot of people come to their senses, come to an understanding, "now I see then this is how everything around me, how this whole universe operates. My children, they are *aniccha*. My house is *aniccha*. My wife is *aniccha*." By that I mean again it's there not the way they are because I wanted to be there the way they are. They are the way they are because the conditions have lined up for them to be the way they are. What about my life, this body, and my mind?

Is my mind the way it is because I want it to be the way it is? Well if your mind was the way it is because you wanted it to be the way it is, shouldn't you be able to focus on one thing for as long as you wanted to, think about nothing else whatsoever no distractions. So, I say think about a Buddha statue for a whole 15 minutes and don't think about anything else, and if I were to go silent just now, and ask you to think about that for the next 15 minutes. *Do you think you'll be able to maintain your concentration on that? Really?* On the Buddha statue and nothing else, you can't think about the Buddha's *dhamma*, you can't think about what I've been talking about, you can't think about the sounds that are coming from outside, or what's going on TV, what's cooking, or what the weather's like, if it's raining outside, you can't think about your friends, your family nothing. Whatsoever, you've got to think exactly about that and that only. Do you think your mind is the way it is because you want it to be the way it is or is it because the conditions are there for it to be the way it is?

How do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and anatta?

So, this is where, I mean the question we were trying to answer is how do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and *anatta*. Hopefully you're beginning to see that actually there is absolutely no contradiction between these two. Because *anatta* as we have just described is nothing to do with self. It's not to do with self or non-self or the word self has nothing to do with *anatta*, just as much as what I want it to be has nothing to do with *aniccha*. In fact, you know, The Lord Buddha says in his own words "I don't preach a doctrine about self" which I think I said at the beginning. "I don't teach a doctrine about non-self." In his own words He says I don't teach non-self and then we go on to say that He talks about *anàtma*, which is non-self. Well He's already said, I don't talk about non-self. So that's the contradiction. The contradiction is using the interpretation non-self for the word '*anatta*'. I want you to think about this. Don't just take it at face value don't just take it because I'm saying this is the case, and as I said go and look at the Tripitaka if you have access to that or as I said even the *Piruvàna Poth Wahanse*. Look at the *Girimànanda Sutta*, you will see *aniccha* and also *Katamàcànanda anatta sannà*. Again, He doesn't talk about *anàtma*, He talks about *anatta*. The only time I think, Tripitaka mentions *anàtma* is when someone actually comes and asks Him, "what do you think about *anàtma*?" and then His reply is, "I

don't preach anàtma. I don't preach that kind of doctrine." So hopefully this is some food for thought today and I also want you to think about what I said before.

What is it that is most precious to all of us?

This is about what is it that is most precious to all of us. Come to think of it, it's not our material possessions, it's not people we love, it's not the food we eat, it's not the clothes we wear, it's not the cars we drive, actually if we were to describe that, if we were to think that we are most distraught, we are most disappointed when we lose the things that we love the most, then you've got to understand that actually what you're most attached to is expectation. Expectation of a certain outcome. Because as soon as you realize that expectation is not going to take place, that expectation is not going to be fulfilled, that is when you're going to be disappointed. You know we talked about the farmer. The farmer sets an expectation, let it be dry tomorrow because I want to reap my crop, the farmer is really not disappointed because it rained. The farmer is disappointed because his expectation was destroyed. Why do I say this? Because there are days when the farmer wished it would rain? So, rain is not what he has the problem with, or it's not the rain or the lack of rain that he has a problem with. What he has a problem with is, he set an expectation and now he's been disappointed. That expectation has not been fulfilled. That is what has destroyed him.

Listening to sermons is only 20% of your path to Nibbàna, the remaining 80% is the application

So, what I would encourage you to do until next week is, think about the times as I've said in the past; These sessions we have, they're only 50% of what's going to help you, on your path to *Nibbàna*. The remaining 50%, I would even say 20%, of what you need to cross the bridge to *Nibbàna* is what we talk about here. 80% is your practice. Your application of what we talk about here, how you use the principles we discuss and apply them in your day to day lives, how you put them into practice. When you're feeling *ràga dwèsha* and *mòha*, how do you apply the doctrines that we talked about, how do you apply the medication *aniccha dukkha anatta*, into your lives into those situations to recover yourself from those situations, to remove yourself from *ràga dwèsha mòha* the defilements that take you further in *sansàra*. and that can only come with practice. Because just as you need practice to learn to ride a bike or to farm or to drive a car you need to practice *aniccha dukkha anatta* to help you cross the sea of *sansàra*, the ocean of *sansàra*.

So, with that I hope, that today's session has been useful. I have some news for all of you and that is, there's a magazine called *Hela Bodu Piyuma*, I'll type it into YouTube and into Skype. I think if you do an internet search for that, you'll be able to find this magazine. There will be an English article that's going to appear in *Hela Bodu Piyuma* from here onwards. This magazine comes out every *Poya day* which is once a month. You can go online and find this and get access to this magazine so there's lots of similar articles but starting this month and the last issue was on the 3rd of November there's a four -page English article. Useful information I think about Buddhist concepts, Buddhist philosophy, the deep and hidden meanings of the Buddha's teachings. The *Dhamma* that we are trying to talk here, the *Dhamma* that we discussed through these sessions in written form and hopefully in language that is easy to understand for both, young as well as mature listeners/readers even. If you have any suggestions about perhaps some topics that you might want to see on there, then there'll be an email address at the bottom of that article that you can send your comments to, and you can also send your comments about your thoughts, about the article itself, whether you think it's useful, whether you think there's something else we could possibly do. So, share your thoughts hopefully that will be of use and share the message out with anyone else that you might think might find it useful.



- 00:03:15 Start
- 00:04:30 Invitation to all beings to witness this meritorious deed
- 00:12:32 Questions received from a listener
- 00:14:34 What evidence is there for the existence of rebirth?
- 00:22:11 Describing how rebirth takes place using Dependent Origination, *patichha samuppàda*
- 00:26:24 How do we experience pleasure in life?
- 00:29:53 How does one enjoy watching a movie?
- 00:37:24 The process of finding pleasure/happiness is futile
- 00:41:18 Why am I born a human?

- 00:43:50 Compared to Core-Buddhist teachings, how important is the doctrine of rebirth?
- 00:50:13 How do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and anatta?
- 00:52:40 Is it impermanence that gives rise to suffering?
- 00:56:30 What is Aniccha?
- 01:03:10 Concept of Aniccha - Example 1
- 01:06:32 Concept of Aniccha - Example 2
- 01:10:01 Concept of Aniccha - Example 3
- 01:15:47 Concept of Aniccha - Example 4
- 01:19:19 How does aniccha lead to dukkha
- 01:24:36 Tanhàya jàyatì sòkò
- 01:29:04 What people value the most – Expectations
- 01:39:27 Anatta
- 01:48:42 How do you reconcile the contradiction between rebirth and anatta?
- 01:51:04 What is it that is most precious to all of us?
- 01:52:55 Listening to sermons is only 20% of your path to Nibbàna, the remaining 80% is the application
- 01:57:45 Transfer of Merits