

2 WHY I TELL SILLY JOKES

Anattā and the Five Khandhas

16th September 1998.

I have previously mentioned the Three Characteristics of Existence, the *ti-lakkhaṇa*, and this evening I want to expand on that by focusing on *anattā* or non-self. I'm doing this so that you can take advantage of the *samādhi* you've developed so far during this Rains Retreat. This will enable you to gain insights into the nature of the mind, the nature of the body, the nature of this universe, and in particular to penetrate into this truth of *anattā*. Penetrating the truth of *anattā* is the most fundamental breakthrough. It is that wisdom, that understanding, which when it's attained, will enable you to know that you are a Stream Winner, a *Sotāpanna*. It will also make the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha abundantly clear. It will give you understanding of what this practice is all about and also where it leads. You'll understand what *Nibbāna* is and how this whole process works.

Focussing on *anattā* (non-self) is a most important part of *vipassanā*, or insight practice. Throughout the retreat, I've stressed that you cannot split *samatha* and *vipassanā*, and even now I'm not expressing this teaching as anything different from *samatha*. I'm just focussing on another aspect of the practice and using the recollection or investigation of *anattā* as a means of penetrating truth, as a means of developing deeper and deeper calm in the present moment. Every deep insight that you gain should lead to peace and the peace that it brings is a measure of that insight.

Sometimes people like to measure insight with convincing arguments and descriptions, or by their brilliant Dhamma talks or books. That is not a measure of insight at all. I've known many people who have written brilliant books without having any deep insight at all. And knowing the nature of their lives you can see that the understanding they have is basically borrowed from someone else. It is not their own. The measure of insight is the ability to make the mind very peaceful and calm.

Anyone who experiences deep insight will have no trouble at all in gaining *jhānas*.

Anyone who claims the experience of insight and cannot access those *jhānas* – for me anyway – has only superficial insight. Anyone who can gain *jhānas* should be gaining deep insight. At the very least insight into the nature of this mind, and how the mind plays with the outside world and its senses to its own detriment. When the mind keeps to its own home inside, it experiences far less *dukkha* and trouble.

The String of Pearls

This evening I want to focus on that practice which uncovers *anattā*, the truth of non-self. Many people are not able to fully understand the word *anattā*. We only fully understand the meaning of these words when the experience arises. All the words that I can use to describe *anattā* are only pointing in the direction of the meaning. This is sometimes a problem when people mistake the words for the whole meaning and they don't follow those words to see where they are pointing. *Anattā* is the truth that this sensory experience, by which we can know the world, is without a being, without a person, without a 'self'. As a result of that there is nothing that owns, possesses or controls. All that we take to be 'me' is just a misconception. All that we take to be 'mine' results from that misconception. As a result of taking all this to be 'mine' we suffer; we weep and wail when things do not go according to our plans and wishes.

To understand deeply the nature of non-self and to train ourselves, the Buddha gave us the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (DN 22). The whole purpose of *satipaṭṭhāna* is to uncover this illusion of 'self'. Rather than an illusion I'd like to call it a delusion. I'll just pause here a moment to mention the difference between illusion and delusion. To me anyway, illusion is pointing out that there is absolutely nothing there and we're making something out of just emptiness. As I understand the Dhamma, *anattā* is not illusion it is a delusion. The *anattā* delusion arises because there is something there but we misinterpret it to be a 'self', a 'being', a 'me'. What we misunderstand as being 'me' or 'mine' is actually just a process.

The word process is the nearest that we can get to describing the cause and effect relationship that occurs on the level of body and mind without there being any core to that cause and effect. One cause arising produces an effect and that effect completely vanishing causes another effect some time in the future, with nothing in between. It's

just like a string of pearls that has no string through them. If we look closely between two of those adjacent pearls, there's a space, nothingness. When we can see that space of nothingness we understand there is nothing joining those things together except, perhaps, just the process of cause and effect. That's all, but that's something that is very hard to see. One of the reasons it's so hard to see is because people aren't looking in that area. It is the nature of the defilements, of the *kilesas*, to stop us looking in that area, to put up all sorts of barriers and obstacles which, when they're removed, can undermine the self's very reason for existence.

Those barriers and obstacles need to be overcome. One of the means to overcoming them is *paññā*, or wisdom, some understanding of the Buddha's teaching. Another way is confidence and faith, just believing in those teachings. Even though a person may have been a Buddhist, even a Buddhist monk or nun, for many years, sometimes they don't have that full confidence in the Lord Buddha's teachings. The Buddha said that the five *khandhas*, starting with *rūpa*, the body, are not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self'. *Vedanā*, sensation, is not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self'. *Saññā*, perception, *saṅkhāra*, mental formations, and *viññāṇa*, consciousness, are not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self'. Yet still some people take consciousness, 'that which knows', to be 'me', to be 'mine', to be a 'self'. They take the 'doer' to be 'me', to be 'mine', to be a 'self'. They take perception as if they are doing the perceiving, and they take *vedanā*, this feeling of pleasure or pain with each one of the six senses, as personal. "I hurt, I'm in pain, I am disturbed", and from that you can see how craving and the whole problem of existence arises. Even this body is taken to be a self, 'my body'. That's one reason we are sometimes so concerned with what food we put inside our bodies.

When a person has this delusion of a 'self' in these five areas, it means that they'll be creating a whole heap of craving, clinging and suffering. The Buddha taught that it takes *paññā*, and *saddhā*, or faith, in order to overcome this delusion. So how about following the Lord Buddha's instructions? How about looking at these things as 'non-self'? How about focusing on areas of existence that because of the Lord Buddha's teachings you know are the areas you should put your attention on?

What Do I Take Myself to Be?

Sometimes people have so little confidence in the Buddha that they even think they've completely abolished the view that 'self' is identical to the body, or the 'self' is in the body, or the 'self' controls this body of ours. The Lord Buddha said in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, that you should really look at this body and say: "Is there anything in here that I take to be a 'self', that I take to be 'me', that I take to be 'mine'?" Don't come to a conclusion too quickly.

Take the body as a focus of your contemplation and by contemplation I mean just focussing your awareness on the body and noticing how you relate to it. Notice how you think about this body, notice what you do with it, as if you truly are stepping back from this whole process of mind and body. See the connection between them, see how the delusion of 'self' connects and controls the body. It needs the sustained application of 'insight practice', just looking or observing the attitudes you have to your body. There comes a time when you start to see the very deep and subtle attachments, the very, very fine threads of delusion, which make this body a problem. You can make this body 'mine', you can make this body 'me'. These delusions are deep and profound and they've been there for a long time. These delusions are hidden but they can be seen, they can be extricated or disentangled.

That is why early on in my practice I very quickly discarded the technique of asking, "Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?" because straight away I saw that "Who am I?" was implying that 'I' was something or someone. It was the wrong question to ask because implicit in that question was the assumption that I was something. I was not quite sure of what I was but it was something. My way of developing insight into *anattā* was to ask myself, "What do I take myself to be?" The question, "What do I take myself to be?" was seeing – in the realm of perception, cognition and view – what I actually thought I was, what I believed I was. I was uncovering layers and layers of delusion and, as I watched this body, I saw how I thought about this body, how I viewed this body. Sometimes it shocked me to see that after all these years of practise, having read all of these things and having given talks about *anattā*, I was still taking this body to be 'me', to be 'mine', to be a 'self'.

I noticed this whenever concern arose about the body, about its health, its longevity,

about what it looked like. If someone called me fat or if someone called me skinny or someone made jokes about me – about my race; about my gender, about whatever – if that rattled me in the slightest it was because I still had a view of self towards this body. I still had perceptions, I still had thoughts about this body being something to do with ‘me’ or ‘mine’ – especially if any pain occurred in the body or I started worrying about the safety of this body. I was not willing to let this body go. What you attach to is what you won’t let go, what you can’t let go, what you want to carry on with, what you protect and what you control. All of this is what comes about from the delusion of a ‘self’.

People sometimes think they aren’t afraid of death, but when things are threatening, when they come face to face with a tiger or a cobra, that is when they find out whether they are afraid of death or not. In my early meditations I used to imagine myself in such situations with snakes or tigers. I would seek out dangers, on the level of imagination, to see if I really did think this body was a ‘self’ or not. I wanted to see how I actually related to this body and whether I truly perceived or thought of it as ‘self’. The Buddha said that one should practise *satipaṭṭhāna* on the body to know this body as it truly is: know it to the extent that this is just a body, it’s not ‘me’, it’s not ‘mine’, and it’s not a ‘self’.

Picking up the Gold

It’s interesting, especially when we develop deep meditation, to notice how random perception is. Why, of all of the available things to be perceived, do we choose this and not the other? We can see that we are creatures of habit, we perceive according to habit. We perceive this way and not another way because of so much habitual conditioning. Our race, our gender, our upbringing, our experiences all make us choose from ‘the shelf of available options’ just one or two. So often people choose the same options. It is like going to a supermarket shelf where there are so many different sorts of breakfast cereal and yet choosing the same one or two brands. Every time we look at the mind or at the body, we accept the same perception and miss so much more. That’s why deep *samatha* meditation, especially *jhānas*, blows away those habits. Instead of always taking the same breakfast cereal from the shelf, in that simile, after the experience of *jhānas*, we try others. We see all the products on

the shelf and we know how this whole thing works. Our mind is wide and deep and so powerful that we can do these things.

Investigating perception is a wonderful way of developing the wisdom that breaks the illusion of ‘self’. It’s not only that we think and perceive as an ‘I’, but we perceive in such a way that we sustain that delusion. Basically, when we have the delusion of ‘I’ we want to keep it. There is a simile in the Pāyāsi Sutta (DN 23). Two friends go to a deserted town looking for treasure and they find some hemp and decide to take it away. On the way home one of the men finds some linen, so he throws down the hemp and puts the linen on his head instead. The other man, thinking he had gone to all the trouble of making a well bound up bundle, decided to continue on with the hemp. Further on they found some copper, then some silver, then some gold. The man who had the hemp on his head said “This hemp is good enough for me”, but the other friend would always change what he had for that which was worth more. When they got back home the one who brought back the gold was well received by his friends and relations, but the man who only brought back the hemp was driven from the village. We’ve often had our perceptions for a long time and, because they’re well ‘bound up’, we carry ‘them on our head’ as if they were ours. We refuse to let them go to pick up a new perception. We’ve had these perceptions, especially the way we look at the world, our views and the way we perceive according to those views, for so long that we refuse to put them down and pick up the gold. When we do insight meditation based on deep states of tranquillity, we have the ability to put down the old bundles of hemp we’ve been carrying around for lifetimes and pick up the gold.

We need the quietness and stillness of the powerful mind experienced after *jhānas* – the experience after the five hindrances are abandoned – and then the mind can see things in a different way. The mind is so still that it very easily breaks free from the old ways of looking and we get deeper and deeper. Looking deeper means, as it were, taking off those old wrappers, those old perceptions, old views, old ideas. Uncovering the Dhamma, which is wrapped in all our old conditioning, we get to levels that we’ve never seen before. That’s basically what insight is, seeing deeply into the nature of things to the point where it’s new; it’s something we haven’t uncovered before. We go deeper and deeper and deeper, until we find that what we are seeing is exactly what

is described in the *suttas*. It is what the Buddha and the *Arahants* have been teaching us all along but which we had not accepted. *Rūpa* (body) is not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’. *Vedanā* (feeling) and *saññā* (perception) are not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’. *Saṅkhāra* (mental formations) are not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’. *Viññāṇa* (consciousness) is not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’. We go deeper into the *saṅkhāras*, into thoughts and ideas.

How many people fight wars over ideas, over arguments on who is right and who’s wrong? If we take all these thoughts, all these ideas to be ours, then we’ll argue. If we take them to be ours we will think there is a right and wrong there. We should know that they are only thoughts and ideas; some are more accurate than others because they are pointing to reality, but they aren’t reality.

Sometimes we should look at the thoughts and ideas that arise in our minds with the tool of “What do I take to be ‘me’, to be ‘mine’, to be ‘self’?”. Often we’ll be surprised at the thoughts or ideas we are taking to be ‘me’, to be ‘mine’, to be a ‘self’. This is who I am: this is my thought, my idea, and these are my views. You can very easily define yourself by your thoughts and ideas.

Sometimes it’s good, if you think you are a Buddhist, to go and see a born-again Christian who challenges you. Many years ago when I was staying in our old *vihāra* (dwelling place) in Perth with Ajahn Jagaro, there was a letter drop in our mail box from a local born-again Christian group. They were giving a film presentation of the ‘*Orange People Exposed*’, ‘*Hinduism Exposed*’, ‘*Buddhism Exposed*’, and strangely enough ‘*Iridology Exposed*’. I don’t know what they had against iridology but that was also included. Everyone was invited and I wanted to go, I asked Ajahn Jagaro, “Can I go? I would like a bit of fun”, but Ajahn Jagaro wouldn’t let me. I was disappointed. It would have been good fun, but it would also have been a test to see whether I would be rattled in the midst of so many people who had such completely different views from me. If one is rattled, if one is upset or concerned, one sometimes gets angry or irritated at a view, at an idea. Why? It’s because we are taking our own views and ideas to be ‘me’, to be ‘mine’, to be a ‘self’. We should look at these things and ask, “What do I take to be ‘me’?”

The Delusion of Freedom

‘That which does’, the ‘doer’, lies very deep inside us. I focus on this choice and freedom because it is a deep part of the delusion of self. It is the reason our Western world, in its delusion, fights for individual freedoms, as if there were any individual freedoms. The freedom to choose, the freedom to be in control of our affairs, is just a delusion. How many people are really free in the West to choose what they want? How many people are completely in the power of advertisements, cultural inducements, peer pressure, conditioning from their youth or from their past lives? How many people are truly free? The answer is only *Arahants*. The choices that we make and the decisions that we take are wonderful things to focus on. Watch yourself choosing to move your legs, or choosing to scratch yourself on the cheek, or choosing this word rather than that word. What’s doing this? Where does this come from? Where does this originate? What chooses? Please never say ‘who’ chooses, because that implies a being in there somewhere. What chooses? Where does it arise? To be able to see that, you need a very quiet mind, a very peaceful mind.

One of the problems people have when they try to do insight meditation and gain deep insight, is not sustaining the attention for long enough. *If the mind can’t watch the breath for five minutes without wandering away, how can it ever sustain the attention on an object of insight long enough to really uncover it?* Five minutes is not enough. We have to watch the meditation object for hours, to see it coming and going. We have to sustain our attention long enough to gain enough data to suspend our old ideas and beliefs – long enough to see the truth. In the simile of the lotus, the sun has to warm the petals of the lotus for long enough for the innermost petals to open up. The mind has to sustain its attention for a long time on something like choice or intention (*cetanā*) – one of the most important *saṅkhāras* – before you can fully understand it, comprehend it and see it for what it is. *Cetanā* is conditioned. We know *cetanā* is conditioned because when we get into *jhānas* *cetanā* stops.

Once you start to see *cetanā* as being conditioned, it makes you doubt that it’s you who is doing this and you also start to see exactly what *cetanā* is. Remember, I said that this is the delusion of a ‘self’. *Cetanā* is real but we mistakenly take it to be a

‘self’, we add something to it that isn’t there. It’s just like a mirage: it’s real light reaching your retina but we misunderstand it to be something else. It is the same with this *cetanā*, the ‘doer’, or rather ‘that which does’, choice. Look deeply at it again and again and you start to find out why you say these things, why you do these things repeatedly. We do it because we did it before; we say it because we said it before. Habits – because we got pleasure there before, the mind seeks pleasure there again. We finally see that we can’t stop this because it is conditioned. It comes from beyond us, beyond a ‘self’, beyond a ‘me’.

Sometimes people ask the question, and it’s a very good question, “If *cetanā* is completely conditioned, how on earth can we stop it and get enlightened?” We can stop it because the Buddha existed and because we have his teachings. That Enlightenment of the Buddha produces a condition to stop our *cetanā*. Without the Enlightenment of the Buddha it would be nearly impossible for us to create the intention ourselves to end *samsāra*. Because of the conditioned nature of *cetanā*, if it doesn’t get conditioned by the Buddha, it would just go around and around, it would be self-sustaining. It needs some external input to break this cycle, and that comes from the *Arahants*, it comes from the Buddha.

It’s interesting to watch *cetanā*. I’ve mentioned to people some of the experiences that I have had with *cetanā*, with my will. Early on I really thought that I was in control of this body and mind. If I decided to do something, I did it. But one of the things that really rocked me in my early years was how much I was a creature of habit, a creature of conditioning. In the hippy era I was a rebel. I thought I was being an individual, making my own choices. That’s what rebelliousness is all about, making your own choices rather than following what everyone else is doing. Then I went to a rock festival and found that everyone else was dressed in the same way as me, they had the same hairstyle with beards, beads, and green velvet trousers. I wasn’t the only one. Maybe I was the only one with green velvet trousers in Acton but not on the Isle of Wight during the festival. I realized that I was just wearing a uniform and from that moment I started to see that it was just a physical, external thing. How much of your mind is just you wearing a uniform? With your choices, with your thoughts, you’re the same as everybody else, just like sheep. I remember a

monk telling me once that his father was a farmer and he had worked on the farm. One day he found a whole line of sheep completely circling a thicket of bushes in the middle of a field. They couldn't see to the other side of the bushes, so they were all walking around in a circle. He didn't know how long they had been there following the one in front in an unbroken circle, but he suspected that if he hadn't broken the circle they would still be there today, just walking around one following after the other. That's a wonderful simile for our mind just following one thought after another, one choice after another, round and round *samsāra*. Being a farmer he managed to take hold of one of the sheep and pull it out, breaking the line. In that simile, the farmer stands for the Buddha taking out one bit of delusion to stop this whole circular process of conditioning.

Look at 'that which does' and ask yourself, is that what you take yourself to be? Is it important that you have the freedom to choose? Are you afraid of being 'brain washed' and someone else taking over your choice? Are you afraid of surrendering to the *vinaya* or the rules of the monastery? Why? Isn't it that you are taking the choice to be yours? You think you want to be independent, but basically you are under the illusion that *cetanā* is a 'self', a 'me' or 'mine'.

Why I Tell Silly Jokes

I once had the opportunity to visit one of the *Arahants*, Taungpulu Sayadaw. I was with some other monks in Bangkok and we heard that he was in town so we went to see him. He was there and so we went up to chat with him. There was an interpreter present and the other two monks with me asked questions, silly questions I thought, so I asked the silliest question. I only had the chance to ask one question of this great monk, Taungpulu Sayadaw. I was cheeky enough to ask him, "Who is answering these questions"? Taungpulu answered straightaway, "*nāma*". Even though he only spoke Burmese I understood the Pāli word *nāma*: Mind, that's all. It's mind, just a process, it's not Taungpulu answering. That really hit me. When you ask questions of these great monks they sometimes give answers that you don't expect!

So these are the things that I contemplate again and again and again. We see that there's no one answering these questions, it's just *nāma*, just mind, not a thing, not a

person, just a process, ‘that which chooses’. Look closely at choice because from choice we get control. Choice is attachment, control is craving and it’s what creates *saṃsāra*. You can’t be choice-less. That was one of Krishnamurti’s many mistakes: ‘choice-less awareness’, he chose to be choice-less. Choice is there, *cetanā* exists, but we need to see its causes. When we see where it comes from, we realise it’s not coming from ‘me’, it’s not coming from a ‘god’. It’s not coming from anything, it’s just cause and conditioning. There are many reasons why I talk like this. If you want to know why I tell silly jokes, it’s because my father used to tell silly jokes. It’s conditioned, so don’t blame me. Once we start to see all of this we understand about *saṅkhāra* not being a ‘self’, not being ‘me’, or ‘mine’. If it’s not ours we can let it go. That’s the test to find out if we’ve truly seen *anattā*.

If we’ve truly seen that this body is not ours, we can let it go, we can let it die. If someone comes along with a gun and they’re about to shoot us, if there’s no escape, “Okay, let them shoot”. We can be without fear because we know this body is not ours. In the same way if someone comes to steal our car and we can’t stop them, “Okay, off you go, it’s not mine”. It belongs to the Buddhist Society and hopefully the insurance company will buy us a new one if it gets stolen. If they don’t it doesn’t matter, we just won’t go into Nollamara on a Friday evening. Great! We should look upon our body in the same way as the monastery car – it’s convenient but we don’t own it.

Whatever it is, if we see that we are losing it and we are afraid, or we can’t let it go, that means we take it to be ours, there’s a ‘self’ in there somewhere. Can we let go of choice? Can we for example let the senior monk do all the choosing? Why not? Or even deeper, can we stop choosing? When you are meditating, can you let go of *cetanā* when you’re practising *samādhi*? What I’m asking is can you enter *jhānas*? In a *jhāna* choosing ceases, we’re not doing anything, the mind isn’t moving.

Cetanā moves the mind, it wobbles the mind, it disturbs the mind. In *jhānas* the mind is at ease, not moving; you can call it ‘choice-less awareness’. Choice-less awareness in *jhānas* is the moment where there is no choice. There’s no new *cetanā* appearing, just the old *cetanā* from before the *jhāna*. People sometimes pull me up on this and

say that in the Anupada Sutta (MN 111, 4) Venerable Sāriputta knew in first *jhāna* that *cetanā* was there. I gave a simile some years ago about where *cetanā* fits into *jhāna*. It's like shooting an arrow, you aim and you let it go. The 'aim' is there; it exists throughout the arrows flight until it hits the target. But once the arrow is shot from the bow it cannot change its course. The *cetanā* is fixed, the 'aim' is fixed, the 'aim' you could say is carried with the arrow until it hits the target. The same applies to *jhānas*; you have *cetanā*, but once the *jhāna* begins – the arrow has left the bow and is flying, carrying that *cetanā*, but is unable to be changed until the flight of that mind state ends and the *jhāna* breaks. That's how *cetanā* exists within a *jhāna*: it is immovable, unable to be activated. To see 'that which does' as not 'me or mine', not 'self', is enough to be able to let it go and be able to abide without thinking, without doing, allowing the process to stop.

Ajahn Chah's famous simile is of a leaf that only moves because of the wind blowing. The nature of the leaf is to be still. Take away the wind and the leaf wobbles less and less until it comes to stillness. Take away *cetanā*, which is the wind in that simile, and the mind wobbles less and less until it stops in *jhāna*. That's what the *jhānas* are, the mind stopping and not moving. Those who still haven't seen the *cetanā* as not-self will have a hard time with *jhānas*. Contemplate, give rise to insight into non-self, 'that which does', as not 'me', not 'mine', not 'me' doing these things. I'm not choosing these things. Investigate that, until such time as you can see this *cetanā* as just a process; it's got its causes, it's got its effects, and you see them all. It's not me!

The Last Citadel

There is another place, which is the last citadel of the 'self'. The 'self' is in a castle, its own medieval castle. Castles have a citadel or keep, the strongest part of the castle or fort with all the castle walls around it. Outside the walls are moats and defences. That's what it's like trying to come to the citadel of the 'delusion of self'. You go through barrier after barrier until you finally come to the heart where the delusion of 'self' hangs out. This is the last place and Māra will defend it almost to the death. That self is the 'doer' and even more so the 'knower', 'that which knows', 'that which experiences', the *viññāṇa*, the *citta*, whichever you like. Do you take 'that which experiences' to be you? Do you think it is 'me' behind the eye when you're seeing, or

‘me’ listening behind the ears, or ‘me’ inside the body feeling all these pleasures and pains through the sense of touch or ‘me’ experiencing the thoughts? You have to investigate this consciousness, the ‘knowing’, and ask the question, “Do I take this to be a ‘self’, to be ‘me’ or ‘mine’?”

The more you know and experience, the bigger the illusion of ‘self’ becomes. “I’ve been there, I’ve done that.” “I know all this; I’ve experienced all of that.” See ‘that which knows’ as not being ‘me’, not being ‘mine’, not being a ‘self’. Test that understanding by seeing if you can let go of ‘knowing’, let go of experiencing. When you can put it down, that’s when you understand it’s not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’”. Can you put down seeing or thinking about seeing, hearing or thinking about hearing, smelling or thinking about smelling, tasting or thinking about tasting, touching or thinking about touching in your meditation, or does every sound disturb you? Or, as Ajahn Chah said, do you disturb every sound? If so, why? It’s because you still take consciousness – here the consciousness of the five senses – to be yours, to be you. I am hearing this; if I don’t hear this I disappear. That’s the reason you won’t let go of experiencing this body. If I don’t experience this body and everything shuts down, then I don’t exist. That’s why we can’t let go. If we could understand that consciousness, the mind knowing, is not ‘me’, not ‘mine’, not a ‘self’, we could let it go. That way we can get into *jhānas* easily. This is nothing to do with ‘me’; look at what you take to be a ‘self’, the ‘doer’ or the ‘knower’.

There will come a time especially after deep meditation when you look at all these five *khandhas*, especially the ‘doer’ and the ‘knower’, and you will see to the very depths that there is not a person there, not a being; it doesn’t belong to you; it’s completely conditioned. A very common simile for the *jhānas* is the simile of the lake. When there are ripples on the surface there’s activity, the mind is not at peace. When we are looking at the lake without any ripples, when the surface is absolutely smooth without any movement or agitation either on the surface or in the water, the mind is at peace. Only then can we look into the water and see to the very depths of the water. If there is any movement it creates distortion in the water, the light gets bent, and we can’t really see clearly what’s at the bottom. Sometimes mud is stirred up at the bottom making it cloudy, but when that water becomes absolutely still and

it's been still for a long time, all the mud settles and the water is crystal clear as a result of stillness. We can then look into the water and we can see clearly without delusion, without things being bent and distorted. We can see clearly right to the very bottom of that body of water. Only after *jhānas* can we see clearly right into the bottom of this mind, right into the bottom of 'knowing' and 'doing'. We can see that there's nothing there, just a process arising and passing away.

If you really see the process that delusion takes to be 'me' or 'mine' or 'self', not only do you see the truth of *anattā* but you also understand how *saṃsāra* works. You see how the process is not a path with a heart; this is a path without any heart. It might not be very amenable to lay people, but the *anattā* path is a path without any heart whatsoever. If you see that process you can understand how it can generate future births, how the process can go on and on. People who understand *anattā* understand rebirth as well. Being able to see *anattā* is to also understand Dependent Origination, cause and effect, that process which people misunderstand to be a 'self', to be 'me', to be 'mine'.

Looking at all of these things in terms of what do I take to be 'self', to be 'me', to be 'mine', seeing that these are the things in experience that one takes to be a 'self', helps understand why one can't let them go. Just knowing that much, focusing on that and uncovering the delusion, having that still mind so you can see right to the very bottom of the lake, you see that there is no one there, there's nothing. Knowing is just a process of consciousness; no one is 'doing', it's just *cetanā*. Then like Bāhiya (Ud 1.10), you will know that in the seeing there is just seeing; there is no one doing the seeing or choosing to do the seeing. In hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; there is just hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. No one is doing the touching, no one is experiencing the touching; it's just consciousness and mind objects, or mind activity. It's not an 'essential mind', not an 'original mind', it's just a process. When you see that you'll be free.

Be careful with 'knowing' or 'doing' because it's always as if you're behind a screen and the world is outside. It's easy to see that the world beyond is not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self', but we also need to see the world inside. It's like following the

beam of a projector, not just looking at the screen where the movie is, but looking back at where this movie is coming from, and seeing it's just a machine making all these illusory images of sight, sound, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts and mind objects. It's just like a movie that's all. It's not real. We add the reality to it, we make the 'self'; we construct it through *papañca* (proliferation).

When we see all of that, tracing the thing to its source and seeing that it is completely empty, then like Bāhiya we can live not taking up anything in the world as a 'self', as 'me', or 'mine'. There comes the end of rebirth. You know Stream Winning when you've seen how stupid you were for so many lifetimes taking something to be a 'self', usually the 'doer' or the 'knower'. You've seen that, you've uncovered it; you know the stupidity of it. You know that it's only a matter of time before perception and thought fall into place. You know that *saṃsāra* is doomed when through each of these senses, each of these *khandhas*, you don't even perceive or think for a moment that these things are anything to do with a 'self', or with 'your' mind. You know it's just a process, that's all.

It becomes like the simile of a meteor circling around the Solar System for so many millions of years, so many hundreds of millions of years, and then suddenly it strikes the atmosphere of the earth and goes out in a blaze of light. That's it, it's finished, gone. Just as the *Arahants*: having gone around *saṃsāra* for millions, tens of millions, countless millions of times, until they meet the Dhamma. They meet the Dhamma and go out in a brilliant blaze of teaching.

You know that you cannot claim Stream Winner falsely. If you tell another person that you're a Stream Winner and it's just boasting and you don't really believe it, it's a *pārājika* offence (the gravest offences proscribed by the monastic rules of discipline) and you have to leave the monkhood for the rest of your life.

So please focus on the contemplation of *anattā*. What do I take to be 'me', to be 'mine', to be a 'self' in terms of the five *khandhas* and the six senses, not as an intellectual exercise but as a tool to uncover things you've yet to see as a monk.