

## *Borrowed Goods*

*April 12, 2021*

We read about how the clinging-aggregates are suffering, so our first reaction is that we want to get rid of them, but it doesn't work. Remember the Buddha's statement that our duty with regard to them is to comprehend them. You get rid of *craving*, but with the clinging-aggregates you've got to know them, really understand them, to the point where there's no more passion, no more aversion, no more delusion around them.

The delusion is the big problem; you don't know them well. So how do you get to know them? Think about Ajaan Lee's comment. He often said that the aggregates are like borrowed goods, and you don't just throw borrowed goods away; you have to return them to their owner and you have to return them in good shape. In the meantime, if you're wise, you get some good use out of them.

How do you get use out of the aggregates? You turn them into the path. You turn them into concentration, as you're doing right now. The fact that you're sitting here focusing on the breath: That's form. It's one of the elements in the body.

Then there's feeling: There may be pains here and there in the body, but you're trying to create a feeling of ease, a feeling of well-being, which can sometimes get so intense that it qualifies as rapture.

You're holding a perception in mind. When the breath comes in, *how* does it come in? What are the routes in the body? And when you think about the breath energy, how does it relate to the in-and-out breath? How many levels of breath energy are there in the body? Ajaan Lee has many different analyses of the different levels. How do *you* analyze them? What's *your* experience of the breath? And when you perceive it in a certain way, what does that do to the breath? What are the best perceptions for when you're sick? What are the best perceptions for when you're tired—for when you're nervous, upset? How do you perceive the breath in a way that helps?

Then there's fabrication: the verbal fabrication of directed thought and evaluation, and just the underlying intention even in the higher levels of concentration—the intention to stay here, to stick with one object.

And then there's consciousness: the awareness of all these things.

In this way, you're using all five aggregates to make them into a path, to turn them into concentration.

You use them as you develop discernment as well. Because what is discernment? Directed thought and evaluation, perceptions—different kinds of perceptions and fabrication, basically.

So you want to get some comprehension out of the aggregates. Think about the duty in those terms: not so much you're just comprehending them; you're getting some comprehension *out of* them, understanding how the mind creates suffering for itself and seeing how it doesn't have to. When you realize it doesn't have to, that's when you've gotten good use out of the aggregates.

So they're borrowed goods. You moved in on them when you took birth. You wanted this form, and you were hoping for feelings of pleasure—after all, the human realm is one of the more pleasurable ones. You probably came in with some perceptions about what kind of pleasures you wanted. You also had fabricated some plans, so you moved right in without asking permission, and then you get upset when the aggregates don't do everything you want. When you look at the fine print of the contract, you realize that they never signed the contract. But here you are.

Ajaan Lee talks about the kammic debts we incur just through having a body. A lot of his talks have to do with all the animals whose flesh we've eaten, and even if you're vegetarian, you've got kammic debts to your parents, kammic debts to all the people who've had to make sacrifices so that you could survive and have a measure of well-being. So you've got to pay them back. You pay them back, again, by doing good things with the aggregates: not just meditating but all the good things you can do with a body, all the good things you can do with your intentions.

So don't be in too great a hurry to say, "Well, they're inconstant, stressful, not-self. I want to be rid of them." This morning someone asked me how to sit down to meditate and anticipate that you're going to gain insight into not-self during the meditation, and I told him, "You don't anticipate that." What you anticipate is looking at what you're making out of your aggregates and seeing where you're doing it without skill, and how you could be more skillful about it. That's when you're gaining some comprehension out of the aggregates.

Anything that's unskillful, you let it go, but for the time being, you hold on to skillful things. There's a skill to letting go. You're not going to comprehend the aggregates until you've made something good out of them. So you do your best to make something good, and treat them well, because you need them to practice.

Someone once came to Ajaan Lee and asked him a question: His friends were making fun of him—they found out that he was practicing the Dhamma, and they weren't. They had said to him, "So, the Dhamma says that your body's not-

self. Why won't you let us hit it?"—and he didn't know how to respond. And Ajaan Lee said to tell them, "Look, it's borrowed goods. I have to give it back in good shape." And it wasn't just a clever, quick answer.

The strategy of the path is that you want to make something good out of these aggregates. After all, you've borrowed them, which means you're in debt to somebody. So try to get the noble attainments out of them, and at the very least get the first noble path. That way, you've profited from them, and when you send them back, everybody's happier. You put them down not because you don't like them but because you've got something better, something that doesn't require clinging.

With the aggregates, you have to look after them. If you're going to feed on them, you have to feed *them*. Remember that image of the aggregates: that they chew on you even as you're feeding on them. When you finally get some of the noble attainments out of them, you don't have to feed on them; they don't have to feed on you. Everybody's a lot happier—a lot happier and a lot better off.

Think of Ajaan Lee's image of the wound. We've got a wound here, having this body, having these aggregates, and you don't just let a wound go. You clean it, you put medicine in, you cover it up, and eventually it's going to heal. *Then* you can think about not having to look after it any more.

In the same way, you've got these aggregates and you're going to have to look after them as long as you don't have anything better to hold on to—or anything better at all—but when you take good care of them, they'll deliver you to a good place. *Then* you can let them go, and everybody's happier all around.