

# What is Human Life?



Upul Nishantha Gamage

*Enjoy Dhamma !  
Enjoy Present !  
Enjoy Life !*

*Then you will enjoy the death like you are enjoying the sunset*

Upul Nishantha Gamage



Published by  
Buddhist Meditation Centre  
Nilambe, Sri Lanka

Dhamma Dāna  
For Free Distribution Only

ISBN 978-955-54206-2-4

# **What is Human Life?**

Talk given by

**Upul Nishantha Gamage**

**Venue:**

**Buddhist Meditation Center, Nilambe, Sri Lanka**

**Date and Time:**

**February 07 (Tuesday), 2012 at 10 a.m.**



*Dear Dhamma Friends,* by visiting a meditation centre and being meditators, we look for peacefulness, freedom, happiness, contentment and liberation as a solution for our unending suffering. We can see so many results and gain a lot of experience by visiting a meditation center and practising meditation. There is nothing that can produce results like practising meditation. Therefore, the Lord Buddha valued meditation immensely as something that can produce unlimited fruitful results. Many things have no real value or meaning, like seeds with no ability to germinate or no viability. Such seeds, though look like seeds on the exterior, possess only husks so cannot germinate or bring any fruitful result. Some viable seeds are capable of producing crops only once, while some other seeds are capable of producing crops that can bear fruits for so long, probably for longer than the lifespan of a human being. Some trees can produce fruits only once or twice a year while some other trees can produce fruits endlessly.

Meditation is the only activity that is possible to produce limitless results upon cultivation. Therefore, meditation is considered a spiritual cultivation which is capable of producing limitless fruitful results. Another reason for getting unlimited harvest in agriculture is the ability of not just one branch, but all the branches of a tree to bear fruits and thereby making the whole area of cultivation fruitful. Similarly, meditation can make one's life overflow with freedom, peacefulness, liberation and happiness. One can experience such a life through meditation, not only today but also tomorrow, not only this year but also next year, not only in this life but also next lives. If you rank all the activities that can make your life fruitful, meditation falls on the top of the list. Not only meditation, but other also other activities can make your life fruitful. However, we are aware that it is the meditation, among all those activities, that can make our lives most fruitful. So meditation is worthy of praising and valuing. As we praise meditation from

the bottom of our heart, we come for meditation, practise meditation and spend time on meditation.

*Dear Dhamma Friends*, we sacrifice our lives for many things. Just think how many things we have sacrificed our lives for and keep on sacrificing our lives for. We all got a life at birth. As soon as we were born in this world, we were offered with human lives free of charge, for which we may have probably paid earlier. Human life is not merely something having length and width. Nobody can measure the length and the width of human life, though such measuring is possible with non-human life. We know what animals are capable and incapable of doing or learning. There are limits to what animals can learn/do. With some difficulty, an animal can be taught Sinhala. It can be trained to understand and respond when communicated in Sinhala. But the same animal cannot be taught Tamil or English. This shows that animals can be taught or trained only to a limited extent using language and concepts. An animal can

never be taught that this month is February and today is Tuesday. Such concepts cannot be taught.

Human beings do not have limits to what they can learn. They can learn many languages and many words in a language. Length, width and depth of humanity have no limits. If anything without limits exists, that is human life. Even lives of gods and Brahmas have limits. This means that they can do only what they intended to do by being in such places, nothing else. We do not really know the purpose of our being in this world as there are no such limits. As we are not aware of the real purpose of our being in this world as human beings, we just tend to use the human life arbitrarily. We sacrifice our life for different things, which we think are useful, depending on the occasion and time. We sacrifice the unlimited human life for trivial things. We tend to pay attention to superficial things, like a person who licks an ice-cream to enjoy its taste. Similarly, most people do not think deeply, but they restrict their lives to



superficial activities. Such people do not know the depth of life or the real meaning of life. Not many people experience the essence of life. Therefore, this valuable human life is sacrificed for superficial things and also for limited things.

For instance, money is limited, whether it is hundred or thousand or hundred thousand or one million rupees. Therefore, money is something limited. We exchange an unlimited human life for a limited economy. These transactions are economically profitable but spiritually unprofitable. If one sacrifices his/her life for the sake of economy for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 4 weeks a month and 12 months a year, there may be some economic gains but no spiritual gains. Sacrificing such a valuable life completely over not so valuable things is a crime. In this manner, it is so unfortunate and worthless if somebody surrenders his/her life over superficial things having limited profits.

Life and time cannot be separated as life and lifespan are the same. For what purpose do we sacrifice our lifespan? We have lots of problems regarding time. These problems exist only in the human world. Just look at the animal world. Time is not a problem for animals, whether it is too much or too little. Often one may suffer because s/he would not know anything meaningful to do when there is plenty of time. In the end, the person tends to get depressed. For such people, time is such a grief. They feel that even one second is like eternity. We all experience this in varying capacities while feeling loneliness, aloneness and monotony. One may also suffer because s/he cannot attend to all the work within the limited time. In the end, a person tends to get stressed out. See the way we suffer due to both these conditions related to time. Such conditions are called mental illnesses, which require medical attention. However, a person with some sense can realize that time or life time or value of life cannot solve both these problems; having nothing to do when there is plenty of time and inability to

attend to all the work within a limited time. One can give up struggling for accomplishing many things on a long list comprising things that are not very important or struggling for accomplishing many things within seconds as if we have created all these things.

Physical illnesses are caused mainly by germs. Regardless of the country, people are under pressure as they wonder about what to do, how to spend the day, how to spend the night, how to spend the time after retirement and how to spend the holidays. In the end, one may get depressed. Our heads are filled with goals, expectations, targets and aspirations. Therefore, it is difficult to prioritise what to do first, what to do second or what to do today, what not to do today or what to do this month, what to do this year or what to do when young, as a youth, as an adult, in old age, and this life. As there is no clear memory, we think everything has to be done at once. In the end, we get stressed out or develop anxiety. The reason behind all these

problems is due to one's inability to understand life. Because of that, we welcome non-existing depressions and also endless illnesses.

Meditation makes you understand life. It is about understanding the present moment. Life is not 2011 or 2013 but 2012. Life is not January or March but February. Life is not 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> of February but 7<sup>th</sup>. Life is not dawn or dusk but morning. Life is not 9 am or 11 am but 10 am. There is nothing difficult to understand here. There is no need to get entangled, as it causes complexities and complications. With practice of meditation, complexity disappears or evaporates leaving behind simplicity. You become simple, the world becomes simple, and illnesses become simple. When an illness is complex, it is difficult to find its cause, its origin, and the kind of medicine it needs. Illnesses exist. But they are simple. Similarly, there are expectations and goals. But they are simple.

If we want to experience simplicity, first we need to learn how to live in the present moment. The present moment and life are one beautiful entity. These two cannot be separated. Life time is not just 100 or 120 years but the present moment. If you think of life as something 50, 60 or 80 years long, even such a thought can make us suffer a lot as we do not know what to do during that time. Time has nothing to do with nationality or ethnicity. Therefore, life time cannot be measured in years or decades. If you do so, you tend to experience loneliness, aloneness, monotony, etc. Such experience is sorrowful and bitter. On the other hand, a person may feel that his/her life is very short - not yet got a house built, not yet got a two-storied house built, not yet got houses built for children, not yet visited that place or this place-no end to all these complaints. How am I going to attend to all this? What have I done all this time? Have I just wasted life? All these thoughts make us stressful and sorrowful.

Therefore, Buddhism refers to suffering. Life does not have joy or suffering. It is our responsibility to make our life joyful because it was not given by our parents, but we acquired it. Therefore, parents are not responsible for our life and we cannot blame them either. There is no-one in the universe who keeps on giving lives. Therefore, Buddhism says that there is no creator. It is just a myth. Thus, there is no point in praying. There is no meaning of praying. There is no point in blaming and cursing another person for your suffering. There is no receiver of complaints though you keep on making them. Even though we keep on complaining, the sender gets all the blames and cursing back, as there is no receiver. Because of this ignorance, the human society has become a joke. Those who have realized the real truth in life may see that all these things are mere jokes. Meditation makes you look at yourself. Meditation makes you realise that you are not created by anybody. Only causes/concepts and results/effects exist.

The whole universe is about concepts and acting accordingly. There are concepts related to physics, biology, geography, economics etc. There is nothing else but actions/effects and concepts/causes. Take a simple example. Suppose we fall on the ground. Tiles and fruits fall on the ground. They keep on falling. At any moment, everything above the ground may fall. According to physics, things that are above the ground fall due to the gravitational force. It is a concept discovered by Sir Isaac Newton. He did not invent it. He just discovered it. A person can only make a discovery about the universe, about nature. S/he cannot impose rules on nature. Nature is a book comprising unlimited concepts. We can compile different concepts and make booklets, such as physics, chemistry, sociology and psychology. A new science can be made based on few concepts. Therefore, new sciences emerge. But new sciences such as psychology and anthropology may last only for a short while compared to other sciences.

The cause of action of falling is the gravitational force. In this manner, wherever we look at, whether there is a tree or a star or sand or a body or its interior, we see only an action, nothing else. We experience an action. We are seeing something. It is an action, not a thing. Likewise, hearing, feeling pain, tasting, smelling, thinking, feeling happiness are actions, not things. Everything we experience as life or world is an action or an effect. Nobody can experience anything that is not an action. As our sensations are not sensitive enough to experience anything other than actions, we experience only actions.

There are only six actions we experience; seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling and thinking. The universe or life or world is a compilation of these 6 actions associated with human beings possessing 6 healthy senses. For a blind person, life is a compilation of 5 actions. It is impossible to comment on a life of an animal though we try. Anything that is not an action does not become an experience. A person may love you, hate you



and scare you. You may feel cold. You may feel healthy. All this is actions. All what we experience as life are actions.

However, we experience only actions, not their causes, because we do not see them. Often we do not even see the actions if we are dreaming, if we are in hypnosis and if we are ignorant. We have no idea about what is happening. It is so sad that many lives pass days, months and years without knowing what is happening. There is no difference between this building and such a life because the building is not sensitive enough to know what it happening. Human life possesses such sensitivity and ability. However, if human begins do not use this ability, there is no different between them and this lifeless building or a rock or a stone. We eat but often we are not aware of the taste. Therefore, the worst unskill is ignorance, not unawareness of the month, year, day etc. Ignorance is unawareness of what is happening and what you are doing at this very moment. This is very simple. There is no need to know any particular language,

grammar, mathematics, psychology etc. Simply know what is happening in you and what you are doing in this very moment. Though knowing what is happening is very simple, because of our ignorance, the worst unskill we commit, we do not know what is happening. As ignorance is not a sin but an unskill, it does not make you go to hell but travel in this unending saṃsāra (circle of life). It is not important whether we are on the ground floor, first floor, second floor, third floor or the top most floor of saṃsāra (circle of life). All these floors are in the same building complex known as saṃsāra (circle of life). Those who are in saṃsāra (circle of life) suffer either because they cannot do what they want in life or they have nothing much to do in life. All our suffering can be centered on these two situations; suffering as there is nothing to do in life or suffering as there is no opportunity or time to do what we want to do in life. All those who are in saṃsāra (circle of life) undergo these two types of suffering. It is not the fault of saṃsāra (circle of

life), but the ignorance. As I stated earlier, ignorance is not a sin but an unskill.

Do we know what is happening? We see, but do we know that we are seeing? We hear, but do we know that we are hearing? We smell, but do we know that we are sensing smell? We taste, but do we know we are sensing taste? We are in pain, but do we know that we are experiencing pain? We think, but do we know that we are thinking? Do we know or not? What should we know? We should know what is happening in this very moment. That is all. It is very simple, thus it is possible. Every human being has the ability to be aware of what is happening. Animals do not have that ability. That is the real meaning of the word “human” (Buddhist term is Manussa for Human. It refers to those who can develop their mind), which refers to a higher state of mind. When we are born as human begins we acquire a higher state of mind, which makes it possible for us to know

what is happening. However, we do not make use of this ability.

We do not observe life but we use it as if we use a vehicle without checking the levels of water, oil etc. Where should or shouldn't we go in the vehicle? If we continue to live like this, what can happen to life? Thus life shatters and becomes inactive. This happens not because of age. It is only the physical body that becomes inactive due to age. Life is not the physical body. It is very complicated to explain the concept of cause and effect, focussing on the human body. Birth, sickness, aging, death are events of the physical body and life. According to Buddhism, one may live 100 years without any physical illness or without taking any medicine though such living is very rare. However, it is extremely impossible to live without our life being afflicted even for a second. Buddhism points out that life often gets sick, feeble and weak, if it is used without any monitoring, observing or scrutinizing, like driving a vehicle

without paying any attention to the information displayed on the dashboard and without checking the levels of petrol, engine oil, air pressure of tires etc.

After living for some time, life is feeble and sick now. S/he may get to know about the benefits of life by reading a book or listening to a Dhamma talk. However, maybe it is too late now to experience the benefits of life as it is so feeble and sick, though the physical body or age has no problem. Events such as birth, sickness, aging and death are not related to someone's age. A child, a youth or an adult may experience these events. Life cannot be measured with years. It is only the body that can be measured with years. We make a living without looking at life. We make a living without seeing life. It is alright for an animal to live in that manner as an animal suffers a lot physically. Both animals and humans suffer. But animals experience more physical suffering than mental suffering; maybe about food; coldness and warmth of the

environment; getting killed by somebody. In addition to all this physical suffering we are loaded with mental suffering. Humans, not animals or ants, suffer the most mentally. Apparently we use our higher state of mind for suffering, particularly for mental suffering. It sounds very hilarious. There is no better joke than this. A person does not have to look for any other type of entertainment. We must not laugh but see the senselessness of this.

Human life is the most wonderful creation of the universe. There is nothing better than human life. We may come across great inventions but there is nothing superior to human life in the three worlds. As we are not aware of the value of human life we use this supreme creation to invent suffering, sadness, loneliness, monotony, restlessness and stress. Animals have problems that they inherited at birth such as hunger, thirst and safety. They keep on looking for solutions for their problems. They do not invent problems. The Dhamma says that human

begins have only four needs, which are physical needs such as foods, shelter, clothes and medicine. Hunger and foods are not mental but physical things. No suffering is associated with hunger as the solution is simple, which is to feed us with rice, bread etc. Most people suffer not because of hunger but because of the involvement of the mind, which projects questions/thoughts associated with hunger. What is to be eaten? What is to be eaten to suit the social status, profession, economic status? What is eaten by those around me? What is going to be bought by others from this shop? All these are mental complications. Even at the time of cooking, similar thinking arises. How to cook? What to cook? Look for variety in each meal etc. All this makes cooking a complex process. If the mind is complex, all the thoughts are also complex. Even though only four basic needs exist, human beings suffer a lot unlike animals, because of the involvement of their craving mind which cannot be satisfied easily.

Let's use this supreme creation of the universe to end this suffering and to live a simple and ordinary life. We can meditate and look at ourselves to become ordinary persons. Only human beings can become ordinary persons. We experience unusual suffering because we have not used our ability to become ordinary persons. If you become a special person you have to experience special suffering. Attempting to overcome our suffering makes our experience more and more special. There is no end to it. Be simple as there is nothing so beautiful, delicious and deep or meaningful like simplicity. Those leading meaningful lives are simple. Those having meaningless lifestyles tend to become complex as a cover up for them.

There is no real problem here. We look for solutions when there is no problem as if we look for medicine for a non-existing illness. As there is no illness, there is no cure either. Though there is no illness we have fallen sick. Those who are afflicted



with mental problems think that a problem exists. No, there is no problem. The way you think creates problems.

Simply see what is happening at this moment as life is nothing but the present moment. There are no units to measure life. The second, minute or hour hands of a clock or a calendar cannot measure life. A person who sees the present moment sees life. We are engaged in one of the six actions mentioned earlier. To understand how these actions take place, we ought to find out the concepts, principles, theories and mechanisms operating behind these actions. We see only the action not the mechanism. We ought to first see the action clearly. Then we can see the mechanism or the concept. For instance, something falls on the ground, which is the effect. It happens due to the gravitational force, which is the concept. When we see the effect first, then the cause becomes clear, which makes it easy to solve problems in our life.

We think that the creator has not properly created our life. Or, our parents have given us our life. We also think that there is a person - parents or husband or wife or boss or children or someone invisible - who should be responsible for our suffering. Therefore, we either blame someone or pray for someone. We do that because of our ignorance, unlike animals who do not pray. As there is a concept behind each effect, what is the pointing in praying? Can our praying or cursing stop or reduce the gravitational force? There is no point in praying or cursing or blaming, which are useless acts as there are concepts/causes behind all the actions/effects. It is very much useful to know, learn and observe these concepts/causes. Meditation is very much meaningful as it makes us to know, learn and observe these concepts/causes. Therefore, the modern world is moving away from praying towards meditation.

Who are you at this moment? Do you know who you are at this moment? We ask this all-time question and try to find answers. We can give answers that are valid forever. For instance, if someone asks me who was I about 25 or 30 years ago or even earlier than that, I would say “I was Upul”. I would give the same answer if someone asks me who I am going to be in another 10 years. The answer is the same. It is not a wrong answer either. However, the question about “I” or suffering related to “I” does not get solved. We need to understand that these answers cannot overcome suffering because they are superficial and have no real knowledge about a person. Someone who does not know me can say that “I am Upul”. It is the same with your name. We transmit this ignorance from one person to another person. We can keep on giving the same answer to the question “Who am I?”

If you want to know who you are, you need to come to the present moment because you are right here, not in your birth

certificate or passport or driver's licence. Why do we have to limit this supreme creation of the universe to a piece of paper? What a crime or foolishness it is. It is the worst ignorance. A person cannot understand him/herself with the help of an identity card. All these identity cards are not made by those who have understood you. All these identity cards, which provide information on signature, thumbprint, surname, address, date of birth etc. are valid for your body not for your life. Who has been circling around the Sun for 50 years of age? Nobody knows the answer. However, anybody can ask the following questions and find answers. How many rounds have we been circling around the Sun? When did you start circling around the Sun? Which year? Which month? Which day? What time? Answers to all these questions are related to the date of birth. What is your name and surname? From which country, village, and hospital you started circling? Did you start circling as a male or a female? How many circles have you completed up-to-date? All these answers are easy. But, there is no answer

to the question - who has been circling around the Sun? Birth certificate or passport or driver's licence or any other identity card cannot answer this question. Suffering with no identity has been circling around saṃsāra (circle of life). To find out who has been circling around the Sun, one has to come to this moment. Who am I in this very moment? I am an observer of silence, a listener, a speaker. I am not only listening but also thinking. I am a decision maker on what was just heard. I am a person who is agreeing or disagreeing. It is so easy to understand who I am in this very moment, like looking at the dashboard while driving. Just look at your life while living.

As life is a message, read the message. All the suffering is a result of not reading life, like a person getting stuck on the road while driving due to running out of petrol, water, engine oil etc. I am a person who is listening. I am a person who is agreeing or disagreeing to what I hear. I am a person who is judging. The answer to "who am I?" depends on what I am doing in this very

moment. There is no other “I”. It is only an action and there is no “you” or “I”. The whole universe is an action. All the three worlds is an action, not an object or a thing. If the three worlds are considered some objects, then their compositions need to be investigated. There is no end to such investigations. We were taught when we were little that the atom is the smallest unit of elements. It is known now that there are other things within atoms. Therefore, the composition of such things is investigated. There is no end to these investigations. If you take life as an element, there is no end. If you take life as an action there is an end because an action can be stopped.

As saṃsāra (circle of life) and suffering are actions, not elements, it is possible to end the saṃsāric journey (circling around life) and suffering. Anger is an action, not an element given by somebody. Therefore, there is no point in scolding somebody. When you understand the concept, its action can be stopped. According to Buddhism and science, elements or

energy can be converted, but it is not possible to destroy them. According to Buddhism and science, an action can be stopped. How can a person who is getting sick be stopped? How can a person who is coming down with fever be stopped? Science looks for solutions as actions can be stopped. For instance, fever is not a thing but an action so can be stopped. Similarly, loneliness is an action not a thing so can be stopped. If you are a person who feels lonely at this moment, just see that you are lonely. Then you need to find out why you feel lonely. It is about seeing loneliness and looking for cause of loneliness. If you change the concept or the cause, the action or the result changes ending suffering over loneliness.

*Dear Dhamma Friends,* you can end this samsaric journey (circling around life). We have been experiencing an unending pain and suffering. We have been thinking about when we can end our suffering. There won't be an end unless you end it in this very moment. Human is a supreme creation possessing the

capability of ending this suffering and discontent. Just try to see clearly who you are. What you are doing in this very moment. Nobody is responsible for what you are doing right now. There is nothing much to do. The illness known as life is a result of ignorance. This illness can be cured by getting rid of ignorance, which leads to cessation of suffering. Use this ability to lead a healthy life.

**May The Triple Gem Bless You!!!**