

**THE DHAMMA TRUTH
OF
SAMATHA-VIPASSANA
FOR
THE NUCLEAR AGE**



Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

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The Dhamma Truth

Of

Samatha-Vipassana

For

The Nuclear Age

Lecture at Suan Mokkhabalarama

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By Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu

This is the twelfth and final talk of the series “Samatha-Vipassana for the Nuclear Age.” I would like to use this opportunity today to summarize, in one bird’s eye view, every angle and aspect of the topics discussed during this series. My goal is to go clearly and penetratingly into each of them one-by-one. I call this dhamma-sacca (Dhamma-truth), by which I mean that a specific aspect or angle must be scrutinized until we realize, on the most profound level, exactly what its true nature is. Most importantly, dhamma-sacca is the one particular truth most appropriate and necessary for a situation and its circumstances. We must choose the Dhamma-truth that needs to be studied and realized here and now. For this scrutiny, I’ll use the framework of the Four Noble Truths, which consists of the principles:

What is it?

Through what cause does it arise?

What is its purpose?

How does it succeed in that purpose?

Today's talk is called "The Dhamma-Sacca of Samatha-Vipassana for the Nuclear Age." The nuclear age form of Dhamma prepares all people to face the events of our nuclear era: events of war and events of peace. It also prepares us for the general events in the daily lives of human beings. In the case of war, if nuclear war occurs, what sort of Dhamma will enable the mind to face such horrible dangers and punishment? With peace, what knowledge is needed regarding this situation in which there is still this nuclear age kind of peace? As for Buddhists, in order to be true Buddhists who don't waste the opportunity of hearing the Dhamma, what do we need to know about this matter and how should we practice to protect our name, face, and honor? Don't forget that being a Buddhist means being "one who knows, is awakened, and has blossomed into perfection."

Nowadays, what are people doing that we call this "The Nuclear Age"? They can go up to the moon, circle it, land on it, and come back to earth. They can send vehicles to look at, explore, and go beyond the planets. Nothing is at all like the old days.

We can jump from here to there and fly around the world in hours. Things have changed like this. Now that we can go to the heavens nothing is the same. What mental qualities, then, are appropriate for a mankind that has progressed in this direction and to this degree?

Strange And Dangerous Times

Obviously, this kind of progress leads to strange and powerful results. In Dhamma language, we call these results *atimahantaramana* (*ati*, extreme; *mahanta*, great; *aramana*, things known or felt, things which strike or make contact). They are sense objects that powerfully strike the mind in the form of *dukkha* (suffering). Why don't we take a happier view of the situation? Because that's impossible. Material progress that leads people to be infatuated with sensual pleasure and stimulation blocks the way to peace. Even though we may be enjoying some delicious sensual pleasures now, such sense experiences support and increase defilement (*kilesa*), especially the defilement of selfishness. With selfishness reaching extreme levels, there's no peace in sight. Therefore, we can see only these undesirable things that we have created.

There are tragedies, disasters, and crises—the opposites of peace. They come one after another, without any pause between them, and so we call them

atimahantaramana. This is a strange word for ordinary people, but it is normal in Dhamma language. Huge, extreme sense objects dominate the mind completely and their impact is beyond reckoning. Small objects come and go without having any meaning and are forgotten. When objects are large and extreme, however, they're difficult to forget they're oppressive and destructive, and they cause much dukkha. Also, they have the characteristic of another word from Dhamma language - amataputtikabhaya, "danger that makes one parentless."

The danger we're discussing here is amataputtika. It's so great that not even our parents can rescue us. It's so vast that we can't help or parents either. No one can be of help to anyone else. Normally, this word applies only to the dukkha that arises out of birth, aging, illness, and death, in which children can't help their parents and parents are unable to help their children. This is an enormous and absolute danger. And now there is an external danger of the same magnitude, where parents and children can't help each other, which leaves us completely alone. Close your eyes and think about it. If a nuclear missile comes down, who's going to help who? We'll all be dust anyway; who can help who? This peril is of the same proportion and meaning as the words "we can't help each other in the matters of birth, aging, illness, and death."

In this nuclear age, such dangers can come at any time. Although we may have parents and children, it's as if we had no one. Then who will help us? What will help? I think that Dhamma will help us, which means the Buddha will help us.

Don't Have To Cry

Therefore, we must develop and store Dhamma that will help us in circumstances so dangerous that thousands of mothers or children would be of no help. To prepare yourself so that you won't cry is enough. Don't go so far as to prepare yourself to laugh; no one would believe you. Simply being prepared not to cry when disaster comes is splendid enough. You don't have to say that you'll laugh. Actually, if one really has a lot of this sort of Dhamma, I think that one could laugh. Someone with a sufficiently high level of Dhamma can laugh in all events, whether disastrous or beneficial. One could laugh disliking. However, we common folk needn't go so far. We only need, for as long as we haven't died, not to cry. That's plenty good already. Thus, I encourage you to listen to this Dhamma of "samatha-vipassana for the nuclear age," so that you'll be skillful, expert, and correct in its practice. Then you'll remain unperturbed during the enormous changes of the nuclear age.

You must think back to the topics of the eleven previous talks. From the beginning, how are we to practice each one? Of them which point is the most

important? Realize aniccam, dukkham and anattá (impermanence, un-satisfactoriness, and not-self). Realize sunnata (void-ness, selflessness), Tathata (thus-ness), and then idappaccayata (conditionality). Penetrate to these realizations with every exhalation and inhalation - that's the most important issue. How much is accomplished in practicing on such a level? If one fully sees that "it's only thus, it's only such, " whenever something no matter how enormous arises, if Tathata is seen, that's how to endure and how to remain still. Then, if you want, you'll be able to laugh. But the arahants (Worthy Ones, perfected human beings) probably wouldn't waste energy on useless laughter. Remaining quiet and still is better, without laughing, without crying. That's what's best, having Dhamma that keeps one calm and quiet in all circumstances. Allow me, then, to explain point by point, what it is, where it comes from, what its purpose is, and the method for achieving that purpose.

Before we discuss the meaning of "samatha-vipassana for the nuclear age," we must understand why the word "nuclear" is used here. In using it I don't mean that we must all be scientists who study the theories of nuclear chemistry and physics in all their complexity and detail. It isn't necessary for us to be scientists like that. We only need to know that nothing can act clumsily or hesitantly and still survive in this nuclear era. All things must be like lightning bolts in their arising, in their ceasing, and in their

knowledge of other things. All things must be as fast as lightning bolts. They must be deeper than the ocean and strike like lightning bolts, so that nothing can resist. In just the same way, our acts must accord with the nuclear age. This need for speed and power is what is meant by “nuclear.”

Samatha And Vipassana Are One

When we say “samatha-vipassana for the nuclear age,” we ought to realize the significance of joining the words samatha (tranquility) and vipassana (insight) together. Samatha-vipassana is one thing, not two separate things. If they were two things, we would have to do two things and that would be too slow. When tranquility and insight are united as one thing, there is only a single thing to do. Both samatha and vipassana are developed at one and the same time. That saves time- a precious commodity in this nuclear age.

Let’s review the method of practice that was discussed in the previous talks. When we look at something, we endeavor to see how it truly is, both the characteristics that it has and its deepest reality or truth. In short, when seeing or watching anything, one will see the state of idappaccayata - the activity of causes and conditions endlessly forming and concocting each other. As I’ve summarized this before, sitting right here and looking all around us,

we will see nothing but the flow of idappaccayata that is concocting and being concocted. It flows continuously according to impermanence and the fact that once conditions have formed they force the arising of new things and more new things.

We can describe this as simultaneously seeing with tranquility (samatha), seeing an object and fixing the mind upon it, and seeing with insight (vipassana), seeing the characteristics, conditions, and truth of the thing. These two kinds of seeing happen together. We can say that samádhi (concentration) is added to paññá (wisdom). Samádhi is the mind steadfastly focusing on the object; paññá is seeing what the thing is all about, what characteristics it has, and what its truth is. For example, to look at and fix on a stone is samádhi, then to see that this stone is flowing continuously in change is paññá. You don't have to do it many times; you don't need to do it twice, once is enough. Watch the stone and bring concentration and wisdom together in that watching.

This illustrates the intelligence of the Zen Buddhists. They don't separate samádhi and paññá. Rather than distinguishing between the two, both together are called "Zen." In Pali the word is "jhana" and in Sanskrit it is "Dhyana," which means "to gaze, to stare." Therefore, stare into that thing and see it with both concentration and wisdom. We can see that the Zen sect doesn't distinguish between morality,

concentration, and wisdom. When we stare at something there is morality (sīla) in that gazing. Then fixing on that thing is samādhi and seeing its reality is wisdom. It saves a lot of time to combine three things into one. Yet practicing this one thing yields three kinds of fruit.

Maybe we'll be forced to admit that it's stupid to separate morality, concentration, and wisdom [These are the three trainings (sikkha) which make up the path that quenches dukkha.] from one another, then to practice them one at a time. There's never been any success in doing so. One can uphold morality until death yet never have morality. It is impossible to fulfill any of the trainings when they are separated from one another. There's no use intending to practice (sīla) without knowing why and how to practice (paññā). Actually, we practice morality to support concentration and practice concentration to support wisdom. If we separate them and do only one, there's no chance of success. Therefore, do all three together, simultaneously; in this way there is success.

Enlightened Frogs

There's a Zen picture that I'd like to discuss; I think it will amuse you. It's a picture of a frog sitting at the mouth of its hole. I'm not very familiar with it, but I've seen it a few times. The frog is sitting at the mouth of its hole, it's sitting in the meditation posture. The

words accompanying the picture are the frog's: "If they're Perfected Ones only because they sit in the meditation posture a lot, then I'm a Perfected One (arahant) as well, because I've been sitting meditation all my life." The frog says it has sat in meditation from its birth until the present. The Zen people are teasing other sects, kidding both other Mahayana sects and Theravadins as well, for attaching to sitting meditation, for trying to sit in concentrated states until they become rigid, stiff, and crusty. The frog teases them saying, "I've sat in meditation all my life, therefore I'm an arahant just like the others." This points out something important: Don't practice anything blindly, without examining it from all sides and in all aspects.

There's another picture that teases in the same way. In this one the frog says, "These guys are accomplished and successful. If they pass this way, I'll jump into the water with a loud plop and scare them out of their wits. Have these accomplished vipassana teachers walk past this way, and I'll jump into the water with a noisy plop to startle them." This pokes fun at those who attach so much to an activity that they preach, "Do only this, do just this." Then they attach so much to any success that it becomes magical and holy, something that never existed in Buddhism. Always remember that Buddhism has never had anything to do with magical and holy matters. Don't drag them in. There's only *idappaccayata*; everything follows the law of

conditionality directly and absolutely. There's no way for it to be anything magical or holy. If you don't realize this, little things like a frog's plop will continue to frighten you.

If we bring magical and sacred things into Buddhism, it will become just more bowing to and worshipping holy things, requesting whatever we want without doing anything. That's a religion of begging and pleading; that isn't Buddhism at all. Instead, we must behave and practice in correct accordance with the law of nature. Then, benefits will progress according to that practice.

Not Here, Not Going There

We can see in the Dhammapada Commentaries, which are full of stories, that the Buddha once gave his disciples a certain meditation object. He gave them a particular matter to take into individual practice and instructed them to come to tell him of any results that occurred. The Buddha didn't sit watch over the monks as is done with people nowadays, nor did he distinguish that as concentration and this as insight. He gave them a meditation object very similar to a Zen koan to think about...no, not to think about, but to guard until they saw clearly. For example, they were to practice in a way that was neither here, nor elsewhere; without past, without present, without future. They were to practice until the feeling of "not

being here and not having gone anywhere” arose. In “being here,” there is the desire to go somewhere, there is craving to find something somewhere. And there’s no past, no present, no future, because these all are identical.

If we are just free of craving - that’s all it takes - past, future, and present have no meaning. This is what the Buddha meant, but instead of explaining the meditation in this way, he had the monks figure it out on their own. He had them meditate until they saw that there is no past, no future, and no present, that there’s no being anywhere, nor going somewhere. Nothing going, nothing coming, and nothing stopping anywhere. “Figure it out yourself.”

The monks did as they were instructed and as soon as they began to contemplate what the Buddha had given them, there was morality, concentration, and wisdom full to the brim. The self-control to do a certain thing is morality (*sīla*). Pouring the mind’s power into that thing is concentration (*samādhi*). Clearly seeing and brightly knowing in successive understandings is wisdom (*paññā*) or insight (*vipassana*). As soon as the monks applied themselves to scrutinizing the matter that had to be understood, *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* arose. They didn’t chant through any rituals about the ten precepts or the two-hundred and twenty-seven precepts. Collecting the power of the body and mind into scrutinizing one certain thing - that collecting is

sīla, the looking is samádhi, and the seeing of the truth of that thing is paññá-vipassana.

The commentaries make it very clear that in his time the Buddha gave meditation objects the scrutiny of which led to both tranquility and insight. He didn't separate practice into different stages to be done one at a time until we die without actually having practiced anything, such as keeping sīla all one's life without ever having sīla. Be very careful about this. Things that are genuinely successful and beneficial become small, simple matters, not the complicated elaborations of our modern thinking and attachment.

Perfectly Natural

I'd like to ask you to observe the way things are naturally. When we think or do anything, the idea and intention to act, and then the intention to do it as well as possible, are gathered together within the act itself. We are able to survive in this life and can win the struggle with nature, because nature creates living things that have the intention to act and act correctly within themselves. But because this happens gradually we don't see it clearly and can't make out the distinctions. If we observe the children running around, we'll see that they develop daily in both samádhi and paññá. Have a small child write the ABCs; she'll improve daily. This shows that there is samádhi (concentration) developing daily in her writing and

there is growing intelligence in her ability to write more beautifully. Can't you see it! Meditation and wisdom work together and develop together until, before long, the child is able to write quickly and beautifully, that is, successfully.

There is nothing that can be done without the simultaneous application of the powers of mind and wisdom. No matter how stupid a person is, if we give him an ax and tell him to cut some wood, and then he returns with the wood, then there must be samádhi and paññá present. Any fool who can cut wood successfully must have concentration to chop down with the ax and wisdom to know how and where to chop so that the wood splits properly. It doesn't take a teacher to do it. In the chopping of wood, concentration and wisdom develop to the appropriate and necessary degree.

All natural things are under the control of nature itself. Síla in woodcutting means the intention to cut wood and to not wander off to play half-way through the work. Steadiness in the chopping and intelligence in knowing how to do it in a simple way are samádhi and paññá. This natural concentration and wisdom is present in everything. Even a cook boiling rice or making curries in her kitchen demonstrates mindfulness and wisdom (sati-paññá), steadiness of mind, and careful control of things. Without these qualities she couldn't cook anything. She couldn't

even light the fire without both concentration and wisdom. Yet this is all natural and according to nature. Also, it's so subtle that you won't realize it if you don't carefully observe and study it. However, it isn't necessary to study this because anyone can cut wood, any fool can light a fire.

Concentration And Wisdom Are Always Available

With no exceptions, nature brings concentration and wisdom together in all things. This is something that nature has ordained all along, so that this partnership is a matter of nature, which proceeds naturally. Consequently, we have the skill, cleverness, promptness, and resourcefulness needed to survive only because adequate samádhi and paññá are available. Whether an animal is about to sting us, bite us, or claw us to death, or we've fallen down, or whatever danger might happen, it is necessary to rectify that situation in order to survive. That survival requires concentration and wisdom that are naturally sufficient. Such is the goodness of nature that it gives us half a chance.

If we step into a fire, the leg will immediately pull back without any conscious mental intention. This is an area in which nature helps a great deal. But should it be impossible to pull the leg back, to remove the foot from the fire, then there must be the knowledge, the mindfulness and wisdom, the problem-solving

ability, the something needed to survive. I've observed that even animals have these faculties, although to a less evolved degree than people. They have the intention to act and then they act well enough to succeed. For a snake to swallow an animal as big as itself takes concentration and wisdom. Sit down and watch for once; a snake can swallow up something as big as itself.

Nature requires that we have both samádhi and paññá, and it provides us with both, only we don't bother to use them. We're careless, proud, overconfident, stupid, or whatever, so that we don't bother to make full and proper use of concentration and wisdom.

More Going On Than You Thought

If we take a purely material example, one that has nothing to do with people, in which there's a kind of awareness and thought that accords with natural law, we can see that more than one thing is necessary to achieve success and benefit. Let's take another look at the ax used for cutting wood. For the ax to bite into the wood, it must have two qualities: sharpness and weight. It can't be light, but must have sufficient weight. Sharpness alone, as with a razor blade, can't do the work. Nor would a heavy but dull ax work; a hammer is useless for chopping wood. For an ax, or any cutting tool, to perform properly it must have both weight and sharpness. Samádhi is the weight

that provides the power to chop, and paññá is the sharpness that cuts into the wood. Both qualities are needed. This example of an ax and its function is merely physical, yet both concentration and wisdom are required. Nobody, however, is interested in these things.

If you were to study from the lowest levels of nature, you'd probably understand this matter. In general, we blur the two qualities into one. We don't know about the realities that deceive us; we don't catch the deceptive facts. Take, for example, a slide projected on to a screen: we think it's a picture on the screen. We don't know that it's composed of two most important factors: light of adequate strength and a slide that is projected by that light. If we turned on the light without the slide, the screen would be all white; there would be just the light-component. When we put a slide in front of the light, it appears as a picture on the screen and we see the picture. We don't see the light because we already see it as picture. We only see the picture on the screen. We never distinguish between the light, as one component, and the slide, as another component, both of which must work together. This is the cause of our inability to distinguish the samádhi component and the paññá component as two separate qualities.

The powerful light, which shines upon the screen is the equivalent of concentration and the different pictures carried by the light are like wisdom (paññá).

We think reality is a picture on the screen; this is the fool's reality. Wise people realize that there are two things at work: sufficient light and a clear slide. Add one to the other and they come together on the screen. Thus, wise people realize that the picture on the screen is impermanent, insubstantial, and not a soul, self, or eternal entity; that it is compounded of two components: light and slide. We ought to know and remember that things are compounded of at least two important components in order for them to appear as something with any meaning or value.

Things work the same way when we see a car drive by; we only see "the car" driving past us. We never think to distinguish the two components; the engine that creates power and the wheels that spin by the strength of that engine. These are different components, as all mechanics well know. In the language of mechanics, they say that if there's no load the motor spins without doing work. In other words, if the engine isn't engaged with the drive shaft the motor spins like crazy to no purpose. Samádhi is the power. If it is put in gear and connected by the drive mechanism to something, then that thing will move accordingly. For example, when a car runs of a generator produces electricity, we don't distinguish the two prominent features, the two important aspects that are twinned together - namely, the energy produced by the motor and the mechanism that converts that energy into motion or some other visible

effect. There are two parts, but we always see it as a single thing. We only see the car go by. When we look at rice mills, elevators, and traffic lights, we only see some contraption doing some strange activity. You ought to observe that the power aspect is concentration and the activity aspect is knowledge and wisdom. This is only natural. Even inanimate things must have these two components-samádhi and paññá. I've spent all this time on this point to help you realize that for success in anything, both factors must be present. Concentration or tranquility is the force or power needed and insight or wisdom is the action that is required by the circumstances.

Now it's clear that samádhi and paññá can't be separated, and that síla is a junior partner or assistant that must always be in tow. Within any action there is morality, because that action must keep itself even and in order. Hence, morality, concentration, and wisdom are revealed in the secret of nature that all success comes through síla, samádhi, and paññá. Concentration is the energy, wisdom is action in line with an objective, and morality is the foundation that allows that action to proceed smoothly. You should thank síla, samádhi, and paññá, these profound and hidden principles, which we never observe or realize. I hope that you will observe and realize them. In addition to that, I want you to improve them and perfect them to be appropriate for the nuclear age.

The Path Must Have All Three

Now we'll take a purely Dhammic view. Observe that when various problems arise - dukkha in particular - there also must be solutions for them. All solutions must be complete in certain necessary qualities. The same is true of what we call the Eightfold Path, the Eightfold Path that we've memorized so well. Generally we take only the quick, superficial view of recognizing "that's the Eightfold Path," just as when we see a car go past but don't see the various systems at work within it. The larger system of the Eightfold Path contains hidden subsystems within it. These are the morality subsystem of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right maintenance of Life; the concentration subsystem of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration; and the wisdom Eightfold Path, in those eight factors, there are *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* operating as integrated components that make the whole system work. Having no *sīla* is like lacking any ground to stand on; to have no *samādhi* is to lack energy and strength; and to have no *paññā* is to lack the sharpness needed to cut through problems.

You would do well to remember that concentration and wisdom must join together and work together without any separation. So it seems that the Zen people are actually quite skillful in using the single term "Zen" to mean both concentration and wisdom

working together. If we don't think carefully about this, we'll remain stupid. If we do think carefully about it, we'll admit that their improvement - just "Zen" to cover *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* - is true and correct. We don't need to be frogs sitting in frog - meditation and becoming "arahants" at the mounts of our holes. That's how things will end up if we make such separations. Here we practice morality, concentration, and wisdom together. We Buddhists have the Noble Eightfold Path as a fundamental tenet. In it, morality, concentration, and wisdom are fully present. We must realize the fact that these three components must be intertwined, just as a three-ply rope has three strands twisted into one usable rope.

Now if someone asks, "So what's this samatha-vipassana for the nuclear age?" we'll answer: "the system of practice that completely accords with natural principles, that yields the best, the fastest, and the most complete results in order to be abreast of any situation." Some people will then ask, "If that's true, then isn't the Buddha's teaching enough?" If they're blindly going to ask questions like this, it isn't necessary to answer. The Buddha's teachings are sufficient, more than enough. But his followers are stupid; they don't apply the teachings fully or quickly. They must be up to every situation, and in time, if they're going to catch the sparks before the nuclear fire erupts.

What the Buddha taught is adequate for the nuclear age; it's quick and complete enough for any age. His followers are sluggish, however, and sometimes they split the teachings into so many pieces that it's impossible to do anything right. Rather than spinning everything into a single theme, they unravel it into more threads than can be followed. Whether this is stupid or wise you can see for yourselves. If a person took three ropes, then unraveled them into many strands in order to tether a water buffalo, what a mess it would be! How stupid have things become? If it takes one three-ply rope to tether a buffalo properly, how could we tether that same buffalo with just a single strand from that same rope after we've unraveled it? This point must be scrutinized until we see that the Buddha said all that needs to be said - "Svak khato bhagavata dhammo, " "The Dhamma has been explained perfectly by the Exalted One." It's completely successful already, but we don't act correctly in this matter.

I'm afraid that if we allow this clumsiness to continue, there will be nothing left to use in the nuclear age, because it demands absolute correctness, perfection, and speed - excellence in everything. This is the reason that I'm giving this series of lectures entitled "Samatha-Vipassa for the Nuclear Age."

Why is Samatha-vipassana Necessary in the Nuclear Age?

Now we come to the second topic. From what cause does this thing arise? Why is this thing necessary? Tranquility-insight that is appropriate to the nuclear age is essential because we are beginning to realize that the nuclear era is sliding forward more and more powerfully, and increasingly encroaching upon us. We must prepare something to meet the situation of this out-of-control era. But we aren't going to speak from just this one perspective; to do so would seem to be little Dhamma's worth. We're going to examine this matter from the beginning, from its deepest levels, according to the instincts of beings living naturally, to see that we necessarily must have this thing already.

To state the situation briefly, to be dominated by dukkha is our normal state. Nonetheless, as we enter the nuclear age, dukkha will dominate and trample us more and more strongly, thoroughly, and heavily. How is it possible not to prepare ourselves by improving our practice so that it can cope with the times? We've had natural dukkha all along; as the nuclear age progresses, that dukkha increase to nuclear strength. Buddhists must have the knowledge and whatever else is needed to resist and solve the dangers. If not, we can sit and cry at amataputtikabhaya- the danger in which parents and children can't help each other. It really will make us cry. Think about it, please.

Ordinarily, what afflicts us? I'll use an easy-to-remember simile to illustrate. Ordinarily, we are in a

condition that is like being slapped left and right, right and left, constantly. Normally, naturally, people are in a state that is like being slapped left and right, right and left, all the time. Do you see? If you don't see even this large a problem, we have practically nothing to talk about. And what slaps our faces left and right? The things in the world whose values condition satisfaction and dissatisfaction, liking and disliking. When we say left and right, we mean that on one side there is satisfaction and on the other there is dissatisfaction. Whoever sees this life as equal to constantly being slapped left and right is beginning to see correctly and is beginning to see in a way that will be of use.

This is a matter that we ought to discuss and study together. Why are we in a state that can be compared to having our faces slapped left and right? In this world, there are things that are conceived of and imagined to be pairs, through the foolishness and lack of knowledge in people. People insist that the pairs are real. Things are “just like that,” they are “just that way” These are “the way it is” of fools, the truths that deceive the ignorant. People don't understand and take them to be the truth.

Deceptive Personal Truths

It's amusing that everyone has their personal truths. When someone studies the Buddha's teachings, it remains the Buddha's truth. It's doesn't become one's personal truth until one actually passes through it.

Children have their childish truths. We can't pull them away to do things that they don't want to do, because they have truths and likes of a certain level. Teenagers, young men and women, husbands and wives, everyone has their particular truths according to their particular feelings and sensitivities. Such truths can't be interchanged. Therefore, there are many levels of truth following from the awareness or *sati-pañña* (mindfulness and wisdom) of the individuals who make up each level. There are the foolish, deceiving truths that fools take to be the truth; there are the genuine truths which the arahants have realized; and there are the medium truths in between, where one sees to the other side but is unable to get there and remains stuck on this shore. This last group of truths are for those who see that the other shore is safe, but can't get there yet and are left clinging to this shore. It's the kind of truth called "standing on both gunwales of the boat."

This world is lovely and satisfying. We become infatuated with it and think we are right in doing so. Everyone thinks that it's correct to dote on the delicious tastes and beautiful sights in this world. These are illusory truths of the most foolish kind. Then we begin to study and practice insight. We begin to see that it isn't like that or this, that there's no self or soul as we had thought, and that there's nothing to grasp at, cling to, and identify with in such a way. Grasping and clinging at any time will bite every time.

One begins to want not to cling, which means not to have a self, but can't stop because the attachments and identifications are too firm and tight.

Unable To Quit

We have a simile to illustrate this. A certain gentleman is full of infatuated love and desire for his wife. Late, it becomes apparent that the wife is actually cheating on him and is a wicked person. Yet he can't divorce her, tell her to stop, or kick her out of the house because his infatuated love and desire is too strong. He will remain with that wife who he knows to be dangerous until things pile up and become more and more heavy, to the point where he can make up his mind and divorce her.

This world is the same. In reality it's a fierce world, for it bites us if we attach to it. The same holds for all that we attach to: beauty, entertainment, enjoyment, deliciousness, wealth, gain, fame, and praise; form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought. We've attached to these things for so long that the mind is addicted to the clinging. Even when one practices enough to realize the way things are - "Oh! It bites every time, it gnaws every time" - even then one can't stop. One still can't let go of this world; one still clings and clutches at it. One will continue hugging and embracing this world as something desirable until *sati-pañña* (mindfulness and wisdom) are sufficiently trained to be able to give it all up.

Smokers are an easy example of this point. Those addicted to cigarettes know that the habit is bad and want to quit, but these people can't stop smoking. And drunkards, they know that drinking is evil; they want to quit, but can't. Why not? Because the pleasure still binds them too strongly and they can't stop. These examples make the same point as the story of the gentleman who couldn't abandon his evil wife because the old love and bondage was still great. Such is true for each human being who when born into the world of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts is fond of and bound to it, even up to this very moment. While we are yet sunk ourselves free; we must endure a lot of pain first. Pain must be endured until one day or one night a person is able to give it up, just as one day or one night that person is able to give up cigarettes or alcohol.

This is what we've been talking about- the truth. Truth has various levels. The truth of fools is clung to with all their heart and life. Eventually, they know that it isn't true, that there's something, which is more true. Nevertheless, they still can't abandon the truths that they have attached to. First, they must increase samatha and increase vipassana sufficiently. Then they gradually will abandon ignorant, deceptive truth. This period of transition is what we call "standing on both gunwales of the boat." They see that that side is safe, peaceful, and free of problems and pain, but insist that they must remain on this side with its dukkha

(misery). This is the truth that holds back those people who don't change or don't cross to the other side. Finally, one practices on to higher levels and discovers the truth of anattá (not-self, not-soul). One lets go of everything with the realization that all things are not-self, are free and void of self, and doesn't turn back to find the soul (attá) that one was once attached to.

Everyone is like this. Even Buddhists are stupid. They have their foolish truths, the illusory truths that they have clung to and grasped at since before they were worldlings. Once they listen to this Dhamma and realize their foolishness, realize that they're sunk in dukkha, they want to come over to this side which is free of dukkha. But they can't come over because they're still bound by assada, the delicious charm of the world they have known. So cultivate the mind. Increase samatha and vipassana to higher levels and the mind will incline toward the side of genuine truth. The truth that doesn't deceive is the truth of anattá, through which there is never again any clinging to anything as "mine." When we begin to understand these things, we will see that we should hurry. Hurry to increase the powers of samatha and vipassana in the quickest way possible to cope with these nuclear times!

In this matter we have our easy-to-remember metaphor: we live in this world stupidly, like fools, like worldlings; and so we get slapped left and right,

right and left, endlessly. Or, we could say that with every inhalation and exhalation there is liking and disliking, disliking and liking. We get slapped for this reason and that: now something about our children, now something with our husband, now something with our wife, now something about our possessions, now something about our honor and fame - nothing but what is ready to slap us silly. Getting, we are slapped one way. Losing, we are slapped the other way. Getting leads to love, through which one stupidly sinks into attachment. Losing leads sadness, crying, and moans of despair. Here we have both liking and disliking.

Duality Torments The Worldling

When the mind is on such a low level that it already is liking or disliking something, take a good look and see if that isn't the same as being slapped left and right constantly. When eating delicious food, we get slapped by satisfaction with the deliciousness. When eating unpalatable food we get slapped by anger and aversion. We can say that this is more pitiful and sad than pity itself. The natural state of worldlings, of those who don't know anything, is a life comparable to being slapped left and right all the time by the things that come accompanied by their opposites.

There are many things, which form pairs of opposites or dualities. The first set has already been mentioned-

liking and disliking. Then there are gain and loss, victory and defeat, having the advantage and being disadvantaged. There are many pairs, many dualities, dozens of them, and each is a pair of slaps in the face. That is, they bite a person's heart on both sides because they are dualistic. Dualities have two sides, and whichever side comes by, it bites in its particular way. So if we aren't bitten this way, then we're bitten that way. Life goes on like this until we strip it all away by saying, "That's just how it is; it's just that way. It's idappaccayata just like that; there's no I-ego nor things of mines, no me nor myself." When there's no I, no self, whose face is slapped? Because there's no self to have its face slapped, there's no slapping, and thereby there's no condition in which the mind is tormented and suffering.

The Most Urgent Of All

Is this matter as urgent and pressing as nuclear matters? Think about it. Is this matter as urgent and all-important as the issues of the nuclear age? Anyone who sees the truth of this will realize that this is the most urgent issue of all. We must resolve this problem before the body dies. But most people don't see at all, and so are careless. They cover their ears and close their eyes heedlessly as if nothing were happening. In laughable situations they laugh, in tearful conditions they cry. Laughing and crying, crying and laughing, as if it were nothing.

They aren't aware that their lives are the same as being slapped in the face. Yet one who studies the mind, who reflects upon mental matters, who already has knowledge and understanding of the mind, will have observed that the mind is attacked from two sides: the side leading to liking and the side leading to disliking. The side of liking affects the mind in one way and the side of disliking affects the mind in another way. But fools don't know this. And why not? Maybe because their skin is too thick. They have no awareness. Their nervous system knows nothing about what is going on, because they're totally lacking in genuine wisdom of Dhamma. It's as if their skin is so thick that they can't feel anything. So we must scrape off the ignorance and thickness. Then, as it becomes thinner we'll gradually come to know these things. Whether or not this condition is as urgent a matter as our nuclear problems is something that you must decide for yourselves.

If we understand sunnata (void-ness), the condition of being void of self because there is only idappaccayata (the law of conditionality), there is no self (soul) to be slapped in the face, no "person" who exists to have his face constantly slapped left and right. This is the fact of the matter. Whether it is urgent or not is for you to consider for yourself. If we practice by contemplating these truths - just impermanence, merely not-self, just such, only natural elements, purely idappaccayata- in the ways that we've explained many times, that will be the end of self.

The self gradually fades and disappears until there is no self whatever to be slapped in the face. That's it. The matter ends here.

Why Accept Dukkha?

These days this world is in a state of becoming more and more stupid. No one believe me when I say this. You who are listening, do you believe that the present world is in a condition of increasing foolishness? We don't notice because we only look at those areas where man is clever in material knowledge. People are most clever at making strange, new things that we must buy and must use. Even these video cameras, although an example of the cleverness of modern man, demonstrate that the situation is becoming more and more stupid. These things are totally unnecessary. Why do we let them cause so many difficulties? We surely don't have these wonderful things in order to know Dhamma. They're only used to fall into deeper infatuation with beautiful and delicious experiences. These magical things are crated for humanity to grow stupid and sink more deeply into the mire of delusion. Everything that is considered clever in this scientific age, all these marvelous instruments, when seen from a foolish perspective are thought to be examples of human intelligence. But when they are seen on a more profound level, they're simply proof of the human stupidity that makes us sluggish, that enamors us with

all this, that keeps us stuck here, and that is nearly impossible to get free from.

We can summarize this point by saying that the modern world is in a state of accelerating stupidity regarding the creation of peace. We insist on the qualification “regarding the creation of peace.” Although this world is increasingly idiotic, in the area of creating crises it is increasingly clever; it is quite talented at starting more complicated and troublesome disasters. This is the sort of progress we have. So whether people go to the moon or who-knows-where, they aren’t going for peace. They do these things for reasons of war and increasing affliction. Thus, we must say that the world is becoming more stupid regarding peace. A correct method is needed. Don’t become foolish. Don’t sink into stupidity, but become more genuinely intelligent. Don’t bother with unnecessary matters. Don’t create unnecessary things. As for the unnecessary things which already exist, use them for peace.

All of the luxuries and conveniences with which we fill the world answer only to our defilements (kilesa, e.g., greed, hatred, fear, worry, ignorance). They support people’s defilements and make people selfish. For this reason, all of the cleverness does nothing to create peace. All of the fine things, new products, expensive goods, and magical inventions only make people more stupid than ever. They lead people to infatuation with things that bind and attach the mind.

Thus, there is no dawning of wisdom, no abating of the ignorance. This is what makes me think that samatha-vipassana is necessary for the nuclear age.

Actually, there is some understanding in the world; some people have some sensitivity regarding the situation. They try to free people from dukkha, to get people out of dukkha, but they can't get people out from dukkha, because they don't understand the cause of the problem. There are too many things that have been made to mislead people and sink them in the mass of dukkha, more than too many. Consequently, if samatha-vipassana isn't enough, isn't strong and sharp enough, it won't be able to destroy all this stupidity. As worldly progress develops to whatever degree, it increases our idiocy toward the world at least that much. Thus, that which can solve the problem and protect the world, samatha-vipassana, must develop and increase accordingly. So we have said that a system of tranquility and insight is necessary. This system of practice must be correct, fast and able to keep pace with the material progress of worldling, for they become ever more thoroughgoing worldlings by their developing cleverness in deluding themselves.

Humans get dukkha, difficulties, and troubles from their own foolishness. They make the problems themselves. Is this point too profound for people to see? Why do they continue amassing hassles and difficulties until they're so afraid that they can't sleep

at night? This is the result of stupidity of their own making. They don't know what something is, and are consequently afraid of it.

A Piece of Rope?

To explain this Dhamma point we have an interesting metaphor. Both Buddhists and Vedantists tell of mistaking a rope for a snake, then falling into dukkha because of the stupid snake thus created. That is, in the moonlight at night, when it is dark and difficult to see, there is a coiled piece of rope lying on a path. A man comes walking down the path. There isn't enough light and the man thinks the rope is a snake. He jumps suddenly and cries for help. He created a "snake" for himself. The stupid man creates the stupid snake, then he is troubled and frightened by it. He doesn't even know that the snake isn't real, that it has no mouth or fangs. He wholeheartedly believes that it's a complete, 100% snake, which strikes terror into his heart. There he stands shaking and calling for help. So it is with humans these days. Lacking sufficient light in their minds, they conjure up dangerous things which leave them shaking in fear.



About The Author

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Slave of the Buddha) went forth as a Bhikkhu (Buddhist monk) in 1926, at the age of twenty. After a few years of study in Bangkok, he was inspired to live close with nature in order to investigate the Buddha-Dhamma. Thus, he established Suan Mokkhabalarama (The Grove of the Power of Liberation) in 1932, near his hometown. At that time, it was the only Forest Dhamma Center and one of the few places dedicated to vipassana (mental cultivation leading to “seeing clearly” into reality) in Southern Thailand. Word of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, his work, and Suan Mokkh spread over the years so that now they are easily described as “one of the most influential events of Buddhist history in Siam.” Here, we can only mention some of the more interesting services he has rendered Buddhism.

Ajahn Buddhadasa has worked painstakingly to establish and explain the correct and essential principles of original Buddhism. That work is based in extensive research of the Pali texts (Canon and commentary), especially of the Buddha’s Discourses (Sutta Pitaka), followed by personal experiment and practice with these teachings. Then he has taught whatever he can say truly quenches dukkha. His goal has been to produce a complete set of references for present and future research and practice. His approach has been always scientific, straight forward, and practical.

Although his formal education only went as far as seventh grade and beginning Pali studies, he has been given five honorary doctorates by Thai universities.

His books both written and transcribed from talks fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Thai Buddhists.

Progressive elements in Thai society, especially the young, have been inspired by his teaching and selfless example. Since the 1960's, activists and thinkers in areas such as education, social welfare, and rural development have drawn upon his teaching and advice.

Since the founding of Suan Mokkh, he has studied all schools of Buddhism, as well as the major religious traditions. This interest is practical rather than scholarly. He seeks to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help free humanity by destroying selfishness. This broadmindedness has won him friends and students from around the world, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Now he focuses his energies on his last project, establishing an International Dhamma Hermitage. This addition to Suan Mokkh is intended to provide facilities for:

- Courses which introduce friends, foreign and Thai, to the natural truth explained in the Buddha's teachings and start them in the Buddha's system of mental cultivation
- Gatherings of representatives from the different religious communities of Thailand (and later the world) in order to meet, develop mutual good understanding, and cooperate for the sake of world peace
- Meeting among Buddhists from around the world to discuss and agree upon the "Heart of Buddhism"

Actual results must depend on Natural Law, as Ajahn Buddhadasa and his helpers continue to explore the potential of mindfully wise actions within Nature according to the Law of Nature. He welcomes visitors.

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