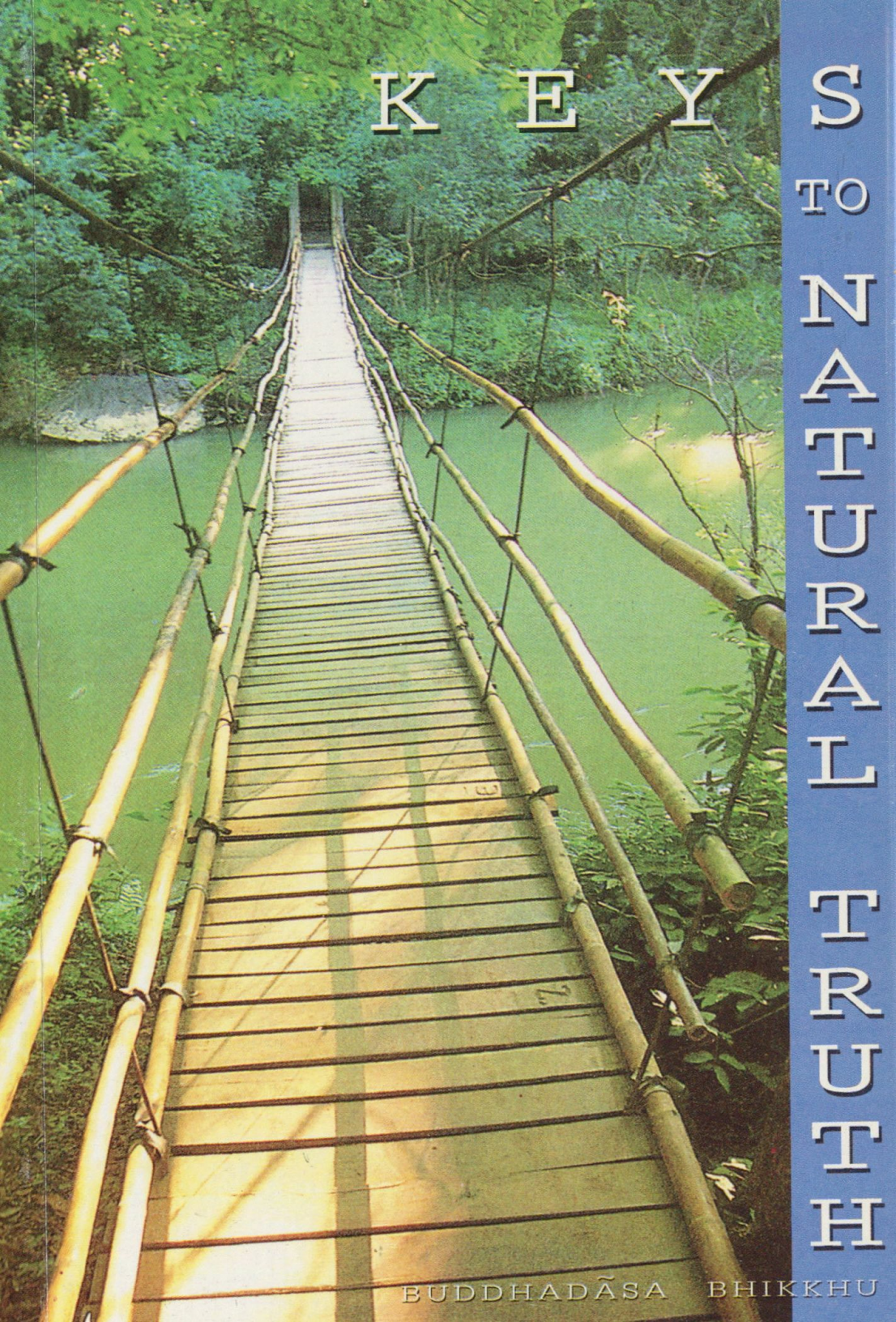


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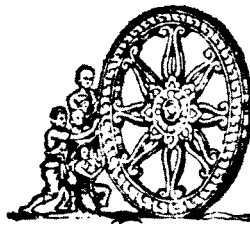
BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU



# KEYS TO NATURAL TRUTH



Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu



มูลนิธิพุทธทาส

# KEYS TO NATURAL TRUTH

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu, Rod Bucknell,  
and others

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## FOREWORD TO SPECIAL IMPRINT (JANUARY 1999)

This copy of *Keys to Natural Truth* is offered by the Buddhadāsa Foundation free of charge. It is available for free distribution only. (“For sale” copies published commercially are available elsewhere.)

The Buddhadāsa Foundation was established in 1986 on the occasion of Venerable Ajarn Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s eightieth birthday. The Venerable Ajarn requested that the foundation not be named after him directly; hence, Buddhadāsa here refers to all “Servants of the Buddha.” Tan Ajarn Buddhadāsa also requested that the foundation concentrate on publishing books in foreign languages, especially English, as his works are already wide available in Thai. Finally, he requested that the foundation make his work available free of cost. Thus, this and future publications of the foundation will be distributed for free to suitable groups and individuals.

Out of respect and appreciation for the Venerable Ajarn’s work, many people have contributed to the Buddhadāsa Foundation. Their generosity has made this book in your hands possible.

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# ANUMONDANĀ

(To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:)

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,  
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,  
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,  
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,  
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,  
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, ageing, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,  
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhādāsa Indapañño,  
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi longlasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,  
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,  
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,  
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

*Buddha dāsa*

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu, 3 February 2531 (1988))

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## *EDITOR'S FOREWORD*

The tragedy of human life is that it is such a mystery to us who live it. The source, the basis, the meaning, and the purpose of our lives are unknown to most of us, which prevents us from living fully, wholly, happily. Although it should not and need not be so, distorted vision and out-of-control thoughts turn ordinary life into a secret. Even this life which each of us calls "my own" is obscured by the confusion and turmoil of emotions, beliefs, opinions, and misunderstandings. Not knowing life, we live it incorrectly and in conflict with nature and its truth. Such living is stunted, cramped, petty, selfish, and sorrow-ridden. How are we to step free of that into the peace, coolness, and joy that we know is natural and right?

Certain beings are deeply moved to clear up this mystery and its tragic pain. The Buddha is one who succeeded perfectly, both for himself and for all humanity. His success came through the direct realization of the Dhamma, the Natural Truth which frees the heart from all misery and problems. As a natural consequence of his awakening, he dedicated his life to helping others awaken. In his own words, "The Dhamma has been preached well by us, thus: like something upside-down, it has been set right; like something closed, it has been

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opened; it has been proclaimed resoundingly; the ragged edges have been cut away.”

Explaining and pointing out the way to Natural Truth is all one being can do for another, but it is enough to help us clear up the mystery of our own lives and find peace. Yet we often fail to understand his gift. This failure is caused by our opinions, lack of awareness, laziness, apathy, and so on. The keys in this book, then, are intended to help open a clear and liveable path through our confusion and weakness into a correct understanding of Dhamma (Natural Truth), so that the Dhamma in turn may illuminate life, reveal its secret, and quench all suffering (*dukkha*).

There are five articles or “keys” here. The first, “Kalama Sutta, Help Us!” sets out a fundamental attitude of Buddhism: we should believe something only after examining it, thinking it through carefully, trying it out, and finding for ourselves that it is correct. The Buddhist path of wisdom is meaningless for those who ignore this principle; they turn it into something else. This key comes from a series of pamphlets recently written by Ajahn Buddhādāsa and called “*Saccasāra* From Suan Mokkh.” (*sacca* means “truth” and *sāra* means both “essence” and “message”). The translation here was begun by Dr. Supaphan Na Bangchang and finished by the editor.

“Two Kinds of Language,” the second key, was translated in 1970 by Roderick Bucknell (at that time Ariyananda Bhikkhu) and has been long out of print. The third key, “Looking Within,” was translated in 1978 by the same translator, and is now published for the first time. Both of these keys help us to apply the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*. “Two Kinds of

Language” shows how to discriminate between the two levels of language which are intertwined in all spiritual speech and literature. Both levels of language must be acknowledged and understood if we are to benefit from the Buddha’s teaching, and Ajahn Buddhadasa gives many examples of how to do so.

The third key shows us where to verify the truths taught by others. Here the Venerable Ajahn counteracts our tendency to be engrossed by external things and orients us in the direction of spiritual truth. He emphasizes that we must look beyond relative and superficial truth to find real truth. The key to doing this is “looking within.” To help us begin this necessary introspection, he shows us the difference between observing external material phenomena and observing internal mental phenomena. Through the latter, the Dhamma may be realized directly and independently.

“Happiness & Hunger,” the fourth key, was translated by the editor and originally appeared in 1987 in “Evolution/Liberation,” a small journal produced, occasionally, at Suan Mokkh. The aim of this article is to clarify the proper motivation for Dhamma study and practice. We tend to ask of Dhamma what it is not meant to provide. Sometimes we even play at Dhamma. Those who seek happiness would do best to find out what they really want, and whether or not the Dhamma can provide it.

The last key here, “The Dhamma-Truth of Samatha-Vipassana for the Nuclear Age,” is a recent translation by the editor. It discusses a few important issues which are regularly confused. First, the way of life taught by the Buddha is

one unified path. If we unnaturally cut it into pieces, it cannot function spiritually. If we try to practice just this aspect or that, we will never realize even that fragment, let alone the whole Dhamma. Second, we create our own problems and suffering; therefore we must solve them ourselves. We should not let our personal truths get in the way of the real truth which frees us. Lastly, we live in an increasingly dangerous world; we have no time to waste. We must be vigilant and practice earnestly.

Many people have contributed to this book, beginning with Ajahn Buddhadāsa and the translators. With the help of Dhamma friends who have read and commented upon the articles, I have done some editing, primarily to harmonize style and terminology, as well as to bring out Ajahn Buddhadāsa's message as clearly as possible. After that, Rod Bucknell has corrected my corrections. Then, the Dhamma Study & Practice Group has seen to the business and technical arrangements. And now you have this book in your hands, which fulfills the wish behind everyone's *Dhamma-dāna* (gift of Dhamma).

Finally, we should remind ourselves once again that the Buddha said, "I declare only *dukkha* and *dukkha's* quenching." This is another necessary key, yet we often read, study, and "practice" with other things in mind, such as getting this or that experience, state, title, or status. Although this point is implicit throughout the five articles, we should discuss the word *dukkha* here in the hope that people will stop avoiding it. The importance of *dukkha*, in ordinary life as well as in Dhamma practice, tends to be taken lightly by some readers.



*Dukkha* may be understood in two senses; first, as a feeling of animate beings, and second, as a universal characteristic of all phenomena. In the first sense *dukkha* means “difficult to bear, hard to endure.” The experience of this feeling—it’s not an emotion—is never satisfying, pleasurable, or happy, and can reach extremes such as suffering and torment. The cause of *dukkha* is always some form of craving, attachment, and ignorance. In this sense, *dukkha* can be translated “suffering, misery, pain, stress.” Correct Dhamma practice clears such *dukkha*, beginning with the cruder manifestations and ending with the *dukkha* so refined that most people never see it.

The second sense, broader and more subtle than the first, means “hateful appearance, ugly once seen.” When penetrating insight reveals them for what they really are, all conditioned things are seen to be unattractive, ugly, hateful, undependable, and oppressive. Our normal vision always latches on to something as attractive, but the Dhamma Eye sees everything as mere illusion and deception. This second universal characteristic follows from and deepens the first, *aniccā* (impermanence). In fact, both senses of *dukkha* result from *aniccā*. All impermanent phenomena are in themselves *dukkha* (second sense) and are *dukkha* (first sense) for the mind that foolishly takes any of them personally. The second sense of *dukkha* can be translated “unsatisfactoriness, oppressiveness.”

Once *dukkha* is understood, *nibbāna* follows. *Nibbāna* is the complete and utter quenching (*nirodha*) of *dukkha*, which can only happen after *dukkha* has been thoroughly penetrated. Literally, *nibbāna* means “coolness” or “cool.”

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It can be described as the cessation of greed, anger, and delusion; and as the ending of all craving, attachment, selfishness, and ignorance. When such “hot” states may arise again, *r'ibbāna* is said to be temporary. *Nibbāna* is permanent when there is no possibility that such states will arise again. The evolution from *dukkha* to *nibbāna* is the sole issue of Dhamma practice. Nothing else is relevant, whether in this book or in life. Thus, our investigation of the following keys should be an investigation of what the Buddha described as the only thing he ever taught — *dukkha* and the quenching of *dukkha*. Then our efforts will bear the fruits of peace and freedom.

We thank you, the reader, for giving this book your attention. May all beings discover the way of natural truth and realize its fulfillment.

Santikaro Bhikkhu  
Suan Mokkhabalarama  
Chaiya, Thailand  
November 2531 (1988)

# *KALAMA SUTTA, HELP US!*

MESSAGE OF TRUTH FROM SUAN MOKKH

# 6 6 May 1988

Translated by Dr. Supaphan Na Bangchang  
and Santikaro Bhikkhu





All people in the world, including the Thai people, are now in the same situation as were the Kalama people of Kesaputtanigama, India, during the time of the Buddha. Their village was in a place through which many religious teachers passed. Each of these teachers taught that his personal doctrine was the only truth, and that all others before and after him were wrong. The Kalamas could not decide which doctrine they should accept and follow. The Buddha once came to their village and the Kalamas brought up this problem with him: that they did not know which teacher to believe. So the Buddha taught them what is now known as the *Kālāma Sutta*, which we will examine here.

Nowadays, worldly people can study many different approaches to economic, social, and technological development. The universities teach just about everything. Then, regarding spiritual matters, here in Thailand alone we have so many teachers, so many interpretations of the Buddha's teachings, and so many meditation centers that nobody knows which teaching to accept or which practice to follow. Thus it can be said that we have fallen into the same position as the Kalamas were in.

The Buddha taught them, and us, not to accept or believe anything immediately. He gave ten basic conditions to beware of in order to avoid becoming the intellectual slave of anyone, even of the Buddha himself. This principle enables us to know how to choose the teachings which are truly capable of quenching suffering (*dukkha*). The ten examples which the Buddha gave in the *Kālāma Sutta* follow.

1. **Mā anussavena:** do not accept and believe just because something has been passed along and retold through the years. Such credulity is a characteristic of brainless people, or “sawdust brains,” such as those in Bangkok who once believed that there would be disasters for the people born in the “*ma* years” (those years of the traditional twelve year Thai calendar whose names begin with “*ma*,” namely, years five through eight——small snake, big snake, horse, and goat).

2. **Mā paramparāya:** do not believe just because some practice has become traditional. People tend to imitate what others do and then pass the habit along, as in the story of the rabbit frightened by the fallen bael fruit.\* The other animals saw it running at full-strength, and then so frightened and excited each other that they ran after it. Most of them tripped and fell, broke their necks, or tumbled to death off cliffs. Any *vipassanā* practice that is done in imitation of others, as a mere tradition, leads to similar results.

3. **Mā itikirāya:** do not accept and believe merely because of the reports and news spreading far and wide through one’s village, or even throughout the world. Only fools are

---

\*The same story as “Chicken Little.”

susceptible to such “rumors,” for they refuse to exercise their own intelligence.

4, **Mā piṭakasampadānena:** do not accept and believe just because something is cited in a *piṭaka*. The word “*piṭaka*,” which is used for the Buddhist scriptures, means anything written or inscribed upon any suitable writing material. Memorized teachings which are passed on orally should not be confused with *piṭaka*. *Piṭakas* are a certain kind of conditioned thing which are under humanity’s control. They can be created, improved, and changed by human hands. So we cannot trust every letter and word in them. We need to use our powers of discrimination to see how those words can be applied to the quenching of suffering. The various schools of Buddhism all have their own canons, among which there are discrepancies.

5. **Mā takkahetu:** do not believe just because something fits with the reasoning of logic (*takka*). This is merely one branch of study used to try to figure out the truth. *Takka*, what we call “logics,” can go wrong if its data or its methods are incorrect.

6. **Mā nayahetu:** do not believe just because something is correct on the grounds of *naya* (deductive and inductive reasoning) alone. These days, *naya* is called “philosophy.” In Thailand, we translate the word “philosophy” as “*prajñā*,” which the Indian people cannot accept because “*naya*” is only one point of view. It is not the highest or absolute wisdom which they call “*paññā*” or “*prajñā*.” *Naya*, or *nyāya*, is merely a branch of thought which reasons on the basis of assumption or hypotheses. It can be incorrect if the reasoning or choice of assumptions is inappropriate.

7. **Mā ākāraparivittakkena:** do not believe or accept just because something appeals to one's common sense, which is merely snap judgements based on one's tendencies of thought. We like using this approach so much that it becomes habitual. Boastful philosophers like to use this method a great deal and consider it to be clever.

8. **Mā ditṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā:** do not believe just because something stands up to or agrees with one's preconceived opinions and theories. Personal views can be wrong, or our methods of experiment and verification might be incorrect, and then will not lead to the truth. Accepting what fits our theories may seem to be a scientific approach, but actually can never be so, since its proofs and experiments are inadequate.

9. **Mā bhabbarupatāya:** do not believe just because the speaker appears believable. Outside appearances and the actual knowledge inside a person can never be identical. We often find that speakers who appear credible on the outside say incorrect and foolish things. Nowadays, we must be wary of computers because the programmers who feed them data and manipulate them may feed in the wrong information or use them incorrectly. Do not worship computers so much, for doing so goes against this principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*.

10. **Mā samaṇo no garū ti:** do not believe just because the *samaṇa* or preacher, the speaker, is "our teacher." The Buddha's purpose regarding this important point is that no one should be the intellectual slave of someone else, not even of the Buddha himself. The Buddha emphasized this point often, and there were disciples, such as the venerable Sariputta,

who confirmed this practice. They did not believe the Buddha's words immediately upon hearing them, but believed only after adequately considering the advice and putting it to the test of practice. See for yourselves whether there is any other religious teacher in the world who has given this highest freedom to his disciples and audiences! Thus in Buddhism there is no dogmatic system, there is no pressure to believe without the right to examine and decide for oneself. This is the greatest special quality of Buddhism which keeps its practitioners from being the intellectual slaves of anyone, as explained above. We Thais should not volunteer to follow the West as slavishly as we are doing now. Intellectual and spiritual freedom is best.

The ten examples of the *Kālāma Sutta* are a surefire defense against intellectual dependence or not being one's own person: that is, neglecting one's own intelligence and wisdom in dealing with what one hears and listens to, what is called in Dhamma language *paratoghosa* ("sound of others"). When listening to anything, one should give it careful attention and full scrutiny. If there is reason to believe what has been heard and it results in the genuine quenching of suffering, then one finally may believe it one-hundred percent.

The principle of the *Kālāma Sutta* is appropriate for everyone, everywhere, every era, and every world—even for the world of *devas* (gods). Nowadays the world has been shrunk by superb communications. Information can be exchanged easily and rapidly. People can receive new knowledge from every direction and corner of the globe. In the process, they don't know what to believe and, therefore, are in the same position as the Kalamas once were. Indeed, it is the *Kālāma*

*Sutta* which will be their refuge. Please give it the good attention and study it deserves. Consider it the greatest good fortune that the Buddha taught the *Kālāma Sutta*. It is a gift for everyone in the world. Only people who are overly stupid will be unable to benefit from this advice of the Buddha.

The *Kālāma Sutta* is to be used by people of all ages. Even children can apply its principles in order to be children of awakening (*bodhi*), rather than children of ignorance (*avijjā*). Parents should teach and train their children to know how to understand the words and instructions they receive, to see how reasonable the words are and what kind of results will come from them. When parents teach or tell their children anything, the children should understand and see the benefits of practicing what they are told. For example, when a child is told not to take heroin, that child should believe not merely because of fear. Rather, seeing the results of taking heroin, the child fears them and then willingly refuses the drug on her or his own.

None of the items in the *Kālāma Sutta* state that children should never believe anyone, should never listen to anyone. They all state that children, and everyone else, should listen and believe only after having seen the real meaning of something and the advantages they will receive from such belief and its subsequent practice. When a teacher teaches something, having the children see the reason behind the teaching won't make the children obstinate. For the obstinate ones, gently add a bit of the stick and let them think things over again. Children will understand the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta* more and more as they grow up. They will complete all ten

items themselves as they become fully mature adults, if we train children by this standard.

A scientific world such as today's will be able to accept gladly all ten tenets of the *Kālāma Sutta* as being in line with the scientific method and approach. There is not the least contradiction between the principles of science and those of the *Kālāma Sutta*. Even the eighth item, which states that one should not accept something just because it agrees with one's own preconceived theories, does not contradict scientific principles. True scientists emphasize experimental verification, not their own concepts, opinions, and reasoning, as their main criterion for accepting something as true. Due to these standards of the *Kālāma Sutta*, Buddhism will meet the expectations and needs of true scientists.

If one follows the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*, one will have independent knowledge and reason with which to understand the meaning and truth of ideas and propositions heard for the first time. For example, when one hears that greed, hatred, and delusion are dangerous and evil, one understands thoroughly and instantly, because one already knows through personal experience what these things are like. One believes in oneself rather than in the speaker. The way of practice is the same in other cases. If a statement is about something one has never seen or known before, one should try to understand or get to know it first. Then one can consider whether or not to accept the newly received teaching or advice. One must not accept something just because one believes in the speaker. One should take one's time, even if it means dying before finding out. The *Kālāma Sutta* can protect one from

becoming the intellectual slave of others, even on the highest levels.

There's a problem everytime a new kind of medicine comes out and gets advertised up and down all over the place. Should we offer ourselves as guinea pigs to test it, out of belief in the advertisements? Or should we wait until we have sufficient reason to try just a little of it first, to see if it truly gives good results, before fully relying on it? We should respond to new statements and teachings as we respond to new medicines, by depending on the principles in the *Kālāma Sutta* as a true refuge.

The *Kālāma Sutta* requires us to have wisdom before having faith. If one wants to have faith come first, then let it be the faith which begins with wisdom, not faith which comes from ignorance. The same holds true in the principle of the Noble Eightfold Path: take wisdom or right understanding as the starting point, then let faith grow out of that wisdom or right understanding. That is the only safe approach. We ought never to believe blindly immediately upon hearing something, nor should we be forced to believe out of fear, bribery, and the like.

The world nowadays is so overwhelmed by the power of advertising that most people have become its slaves. It can make people pull out their wallets to buy things they don't need to eat, don't need to have, and don't need to use. It's so commonplace that we absolutely must offer the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta* to our human comrades of this era. Propaganda is much more harmful than ordinary advertising or what is called *paratoghosa* in Pali. Even with ordinary adver-



tising, we must depend on the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*, to say nothing of needing this principle to deal with outright propaganda, which is full of intentional deceptions. So we can say that the *Kālāma Sutta* is beneficial even in solving economic problems.

I ask you all to consider, investigate, and test whether there is found anywhere greater spiritual freedom than is found in the *Kālāma Sutta*. If someone says that Buddhism is a religion of freedom, can there be any reason to dispute or oppose that statement? Does this world which is intoxicated with freedom really know or have freedom in line with the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*? Is the lack of such freedom caused by blind ignorance and indifference regarding the *Kālāma Sutta*? Some people even claim that it teaches us not to believe or listen to anything. Moreover, some actually say that the Buddha preached this *sutta* only for the Kalamas there at that time. Why don't we open our eyes and take notice that people nowadays have become intellectual slaves, that they have lost their freedom much more than those Kalamas in the time of the Buddha? Human friends, fellow worshippers of freedom, I ask you to consider carefully the essence and aim of the *Kālāma Sutta* and the Buddha's intention in teaching it. Then, your Buddhist quality of awakening will grow fat and robust, rather than skinny and weak. Don't go foolishly hating and fearing the *Kālāma Sutta*. The word "Thai" means "freedom." What kind of freedom are you going to bring to our "Thainess"? Or what kind of Thainess is fitting and proper for the Thainess of Buddhists, the disciples of the Buddha?

Now let us look further to see the hidden benefits and advantages in the *Kālāma Sutta*. The *sutta* can help us to avoid the tactless and narrow-minded talk which leads to violent clashes and disputes. For example, it is foolish to set up an unalterable rule for all families regarding who, husband or wife, will be the front legs and who the hind legs of the elephant. It all depends on the conditions and circumstances of each specific family. According to the principles in the *Kālāma Sutta* and the law of conditionality (*idappaccayatā*), we only can say which roles are appropriate for whom depending on the circumstances of each individual family. Do not speak one-sidedly and go against natural principles.

Regarding abortion, people argue until black and red in the face about whether or not it should be done, without investigating to find out in which cases it should and in which cases it should not. Once we follow the principles of the Buddhist way of reasoning, each situation itself will tell us what is proper and what is not. Please stop insisting on one-sided positions.

In the case of meat-eating versus vegetarianism, people blindly argue for one extreme or the other. The problem is that people are attached to regarding food as either meat or as vegetables. For Buddhists, there is neither meat nor vegetables; there are only elements in nature. Whether the eater or the eaten, it's all merely natural elements. The situations where we should eat meat and the circumstances in which we shouldn't can be discerned by using the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*. For just this reason, the Buddha never decisively said to eat only meat or only vegetables, to not eat meat or not eat ve-

getables. To speak so carelessly is not the way of Buddhists.

To say that democracy is always and absolutely good is to speak with one's head in the sand. Those who insist on it haven't considered that a democracy of selfish people is worse than a dictatorship under an unselfish person who rules for the sake of Dhamma and justice. A democracy of selfish people means freedom to use their selfishness in a most frightening and awful manner. Consequently, problems drag on endlessly among those people who have a democracy of selfishness. Stop saying that democracy is absolutely good or that dictatorship is absolutely good. Instead, stick to the principle that both will be good if they are based in Dhamma. Each population should choose whichever system suits the particular circumstances which it faces.

To say that the Prime Minister exclusively must be an elected member of parliament, and never someone who the people haven't chosen directly, is to babble as if deaf and blind.\* Really, we must look to see how the situation ought to be and what the causes and conditions are, then act correctly according to the law of conditionality. This is the true Buddhist way, befitting the fact that Buddhism embodies democracy in the form of dhammic socialism. Therefore, the election of members of parliament, the establishment of a government, the structuring of the political system, and even the course of social and economic development should be carried out using the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*. Please consider each example.

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\*This issue has been a dangerous point of contention between the military and progressive politicians, which has led to coup attempts.

You soon will discover the fact that we must rely upon the principle of the *Kālāma Sutta*.

More than ever the modern world needs the *Kālāma Sutta* as its basic operating principle. The world is spinning fast with the defilements of humanity. It is shrinking due to better transportation and communications. And it is about to self-destruct because proper awareness, intelligence, and wisdom are lacking. Under the power of defilement, the world is worshipping materialism, sex and luxury, because it lacks standards like that of the *Kālāma Sutta*. No one knows how to make choices in line with its principle. Consequently, the world is wholly unfit for peace, while increasing in crime and other harmful evils every moment. Let's eliminate all these problems and evils by relying on the *Kālāma Sutta* as our standard. So let's yell at the top of our lungs, "Help! *Kālāma Sutta*, help us!"

In conclusion, the *Kālāma Sutta* never forbids us to believe in anything; it merely implores us to believe with independent intelligence and wisdom. It never forbids us to listen to anything; it merely asks us to listen without letting our intelligence and wisdom become enslaved. Furthermore, it helps us to be able to think, consider, investigate, and decide with great subtlety and precision, so that we can find golden needles in haystacks as huge as mountains.

Please come, *Kālāma Sutta*! Come invest yourself in the hearts and minds of all Buddhists, of all human beings, in this modern world.

*Kālāma Sutta*, help us!

*TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE:  
Everyday Language &  
Dhamma Language*

Lecture at Suan Mokkhabalarama, Chaiya

8 October 1966

Translated by Roderick Bucknell



Today's talk is rather special. Time and time again I have noticed that, regardless of how the subject is explained, there are a great many aspects of the more profound teaching that the majority of people don't understand at all. People hear things explained many times over and still don't understand. Why is this? If we look into it, we discover the reason. Most of us are familiar only with everyday language, the language spoken by the ordinary person, ordinary worldly language. We fail to realize the existence of another quite different and very special language: the language of religion, the language of Dhamma.

The language of Dhamma is something altogether different from the language of everyday. This point must be borne well in mind. Everyday language and Dhamma language are two distinct and different modes of speaking. Everyday language is worldly language, the language of people who do not know Dhamma. Dhamma language is the language spoken by people who have gained a deep insight into the Truth, into Dhamma. Having perceived Dhamma, they speak in terms appropriate to their experience, and so Dhamma language comes into being. This special mode of speaking is what we call Dhamma language. It is a language quite distinct from ordinary everyday language.

So there are two languages: Dhamma language and everyday language. Everyday language is based on physical things and on experiences accessible to the ordinary person. Being based on the physical rather than the spiritual, it serves only for discussion of physical, worldly matters and situations. It serves only for the tangible things perceived under ordinary everyday circumstances. By contrast, Dhamma language has to do with the mental world, with the intangible, non-physical world. In order to be able to speak and understand this Dhamma language, one must have gained insight into the mental world. Consequently, only people who have seen Dhamma, the Truth, speak the Dhamma language, the language of the non-material mental world which is above the physical.

Let us put this another way. We distinguish ordinary physical language from metaphysical language. The field of metaphysics is utterly different from that of physics and consequently there is a special metaphysical language. So in addition to the ordinary language of the physical, there is a language that transcends the physical. The physical language is the worldly, conventional language used under ordinary circumstances and based on physical things. The metaphysical language is based on mental things. It has to be learned, studied, and understood. It is based not on the physical world but on the mental. I hope you can now see the distinction between everyday language and Dhamma language.

The point now is that if we know only everyday language, we are in no position to understand true Dhamma when we hear it. If we don't know the language of Dhamma, then we can't understand Dhamma, the supramundane Truth that can



truly liberate us from unsatisfactoriness and misery (*dukkha*). The reason we don't understand Dhamma is that we know only everyday language and are not familiar with Dhamma language.

It is essential always to interpret the Buddha's teaching in terms of Dhamma language as well as in terms of everyday language. Both meanings must be considered. Please take careful note of the following passages:

*Appamatto ubho atthe adhigaṇhāti paṇḍito,  
Diṭṭhe dhamma ca yo attho, yo ca'ttho samparāyiko.  
Attābhisamayādhiro paṇḍito ti pavuccati.*

The wise and heedful person is familiar with both modes of speaking: the meaning seen by ordinary people and the meaning which they can't understand. One who is fluent in the various modes of speaking is a wise person.\*

This is a general principle to be applied when studying Dhamma, whether at a high or low level. It is also applicable in ordinary spoken language. The passages cited contain the unambiguous expression "*ubho atthe*," that is "both meanings" or "both modes of speaking."<sup>\*\*</sup> A discerning person must consider both meanings or modes of speaking and not just one of them alone.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Anyone who, for instance, considers only the ordinary everyday meaning and ignores the other meaning, the meaning in terms of Dhamma language,

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\*Samyutta-nikaya I 87. (The author's interpretation differs from the orthodox reading of this passage.)

\*\* **Attha** can be translated "meaning" or "benefit, purpose."

\*\*\* Although some words may have more than two levels of meaning, all of them will fit into these two modes.

cannot be called a wise or discerning person. As the Buddha said, a discerning person is one who is able to take into consideration both modes of speaking. It behoves us, then, to be careful and to study diligently in order to acquire this ability to take into account both possible interpretations, the one in terms of everyday language and the other in terms of Dhamma language.

We shall now consider some examples of what I mean. Each of the following words will be explained according to both everyday language and Dhamma language. This should enable you to clearly understand both modes of expression.

## **BUDDHA**

The first example is the word “Buddha.” As you know, the word “Buddha” in everyday language refers to the historical Enlightened Being, Gotama Buddha. It refers to a physical man of flesh and bone who was born in India over two thousand years ago, died, and was cremated. This is the meaning of the word “Buddha” in everyday language.

Considered in terms of Dhamma language, however, the word “Buddha” refers to the Truth which the historical Buddha realized and taught, namely the Dhamma itself. The Buddha said:

One who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathagata.\* One who sees the Tathagata sees the Dhamma. One who sees not the Dhamma, though grasping at the robe of the Tathagata, cannot be said to have seen the Tathagata.

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\*“One gone to thusness (*tathatā*): a word the Buddha often used to refer to himself.”

Now, the Dhamma is something intangible. It is not something physical, certainly not flesh and bones. Yet the Buddha said it is one and the same as the Enlightened One. "One who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathagata." Anyone who fails to see the Dhamma cannot be said to have seen the Enlightened One. So in Dhamma language, the Buddha is one and the same as that Truth by virtue of which he became the Buddha, and anyone who sees that Truth can be said to have seen the true Buddha. To see just his physical body would not be to see the Buddha at all and would bring no real benefit.

During the Buddha's lifetime, the majority of people were unfavorably disposed towards him. Some abused him and even did him physical harm. They didn't understand him because what they saw was only his physical body, the outer shell, the Buddha of everyday language. The real Buddha, the Buddha of Dhamma language, is the Truth in his mind, knowing which the man became "Buddha." When he said, "Whoever sees the Truth sees me. Whoever sees me sees the Truth," he was speaking Dhamma language.

Again, the Buddha said, "The Dhamma and the *Vinaya* (Discipline), which I have proclaimed and have demonstrated, these shall be your teacher when I have passed away." Thus the real Buddha has not passed away, has not ceased to exist. What ceased to exist was just the physical body, the outer shell. The real Teacher, that is, the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, is still with us. This is the meaning of the word "Buddha" in Dhamma language. The "Buddha" of everyday language is the physical man; the "Buddha" of Dhamma language is the Dhamma itself, which made him Buddha.

## DHAMMA

The second word to consider is “Dhamma” (*Dharma* in Sanskrit). At the childish level of everyday language, this word is understood as referring to the actual books that contain the scriptures, the “Dhamma” in the bookcase. Or it may be understood as referring to the spoken word used in expounding the Teaching. This is the meaning of the word “Dhamma” in everyday language, the language of deluded people who have not yet seen the true Dhamma.

In terms of Dhamma language, the Dhamma is one and the same as the Enlightened One. “One who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathagata. One who sees the Tathagata sees the Dhamma.” This is the real Dhamma. In the original Pali language, the word “Dhamma” was used to refer to all of the intricate and involved things that go to make up what we call Nature. Time will not permit us to discuss this point in detail here, so we shall mention just the main points. The word “Dhamma” embraces:

1. Nature itself;
2. The Law of Nature;
3. The duty of each human being to act in accordance with the Law of Nature;
4. The benefits to be derived from this acting in accordance with the Law of Nature.

This is the wide range of meaning covered by the word “Dhamma.” It does not refer simply to books, palm-leaf manuscripts, or the voices of preachers. The word “Dhamma,” as used in Dhamma language, refers to non-material things. Dhamma is

all-embracing; it is profound; it includes all things, some difficult to understand and some not so difficult.

## SANGHA

Now we shall consider the word “Sangha.” In everyday language, the word “Sangha” refers to the community of monks who wear the yellow robe and wander from place to place. This is the Sangha as it is understood in everyday language, the language of the unenlightened person who has not yet seen the Truth. In Dhamma language, the word “Sangha” refers once again to the Truth, to the Dhamma itself. It refers to the high qualities, of whatever kind and degree, that exist in the mind of the monk, the man of virtue. There are certain high mental qualities that make a man a monk. The totality of these high qualities existing in the mind of the monk is what is called the Sangha.

The Sangha of everyday language is the assembly of monks themselves. The Sangha of Dhamma language are those high qualities in the minds of the monks. The Sangha proper consists of these four levels: the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), the once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*), the non-returner (*anāgāmī*), and the fully perfected being (*arahant*, worthy one, undefiled by any egoism). These terms, too, refer to mental rather than physical qualities, because the physical frames of these people are in no way different from those of anyone else. Where they do differ is in mental or spiritual qualities. This is what makes a person a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, or *arahant*. This is how the word “Sangha” is to be understood in Dhamma language.

## RELIGION

Now we come to the word “religion” (*sāsanā*). In everyday language, the language of the undiscerning person, the word “religion” refers simply to temples, monastery buildings, pagodas, saffron robes, and so on. If there are pagodas and temples all over the place, people say, “Ah! The religion is thriving!” This is what “religion” means in everyday language.

In Dhamma language, the word “religion” refers to the genuine Dhamma which can truly serve people as a refuge or point of support. The Dhamma which actually can be for people a basis of support, which really can bring about the end of *dukkha* (suffering, misery, unsatisfactoriness), this Dhamma is the religion. This is the meaning of “religion” as that term is used in Dhamma language. “The religion is thriving” means that this very special something which has the power to put an end to *dukkha* is spreading and expanding among people. To say that the religion is thriving does not by any means imply progress in terms of yellow robes. The religion in everyday language is temples, monastery buildings, pagodas, yellow robes, and so on; the religion in Dhamma language is the truth which genuinely serves humanity as a refuge.

Those who take the word “religion” to mean “the Teaching” are nearer the mark than those who take it as standing for temples and so on. To consider progress in religion study and instruction as true religious progress is correct up to a point. But it is not good enough. To understand the religion as simply the Teaching is still to understand it only in terms of everyday language.

In terms of Dhamma language, the religion is “the Sublime or Excellent Way of Life” (*brahmacariya*), that is to say, life lived in accordance with Dhamma. It is this exalted way of living which is “glorious in its beginning, middle, and end.” By Sublime Way of Life the Buddha meant the way of practice that can really extinguish *dukkha* (suffering). The glory of its beginning is study and learning; the glory of its middle is the practice; the glory of its end is the real reward that comes from the practice. This is the Sublime Way of Life, the religion of Dhamma language. Taken as everyday language, “religion” means at best the teaching; taken as Dhamma language, it means the Sublime Way of Life, glorious in its beginning, middle, and end. The two meanings are very different.

## WORK

Looking now more closely at things, we shall examine a word that relates to our day-to-day life—the word “work.” In everyday language, the word “work” refers to earning a living. It is something we can’t avoid. We have to work in order to eat, to fill the belly, and to satisfy sensual desires. This unavoidable chore of earning a living is what is meant by the word “work” taken as everyday language. Taken as Dhamma language, “work” refers to mind training—*kammaṭ-ṭhāna*\* , that is, the practice of Dhamma. The actual practice of Dhamma is the Work.

Ordinary people, those who have not seen Dhamma, work out of necessity in order to provide themselves with

\* Literally, “working ground”, meditation or meditation objects.

food and the things they desire. But for the genuine aspirant, the person who has caught a glimpse of Dhamma, work consists in putting the Dhamma into practice. This kind of work has to be done sincerely, earnestly, and diligently, with perseverance and discernment. Many kinds of high qualities must be present if it is to be completed successfully.

The work of everyday language can be considered at a higher level. Though our work may be of a worldly nature, if we do it the right way, then ultimately that work will teach us. It will bring us to an understanding of the true nature of the mental life; it will enable us to recognize impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood (*aniccam, dukkham, anattā*); it will bring us to the truth, without our making any conscious effort in that direction. So in Dhamma language, “work” refers to the practice that leads to the truth found right in one’s own mind. Even the job of keeping the body fit and clean is a kind of Dhamma practice, insofar as it has to be done with a good, discerning, industrious mind.

In summary, “work” in everyday language means earning a living out of necessity; “work” in Dhamma language means putting the Dhamma into practice. The word “*kammaṭṭhāna*” (mind training) means work, good solid Dhamma practice. This is the meaning of “work” in Dhamma language.

## **SUBLIME LIFE**

Let us say something more about the Sublime Way of Life. In the everyday language of the average person who knows nothing of Dhamma, the words “Sublime Life” (*brahmacariya*) mean no more than abstention from improper



sexual activity. But in Dhamma language, Sublime Way of Life refers to any kind of purposeful giving up of mental defilement (*kilesa*) and to any form of spiritual practice which is adhered to rigorously. Regardless of what kind of practice we undertake, if we stick to it earnestly, strictly, and without backsliding, then we are living this most exalted way of life. Sublime doesn't mean simply abstaining from fornication and adultery. This is how everyday language and Dhamma language differ.

### *NIBBĀNA*

Now we make a big jump to the word “*nibbāna*” (*nirvāna* in Sanskrit). In the everyday language of the ordinary person, *nibbāna* is a place or a city. This is because preachers often speak of “*Nibbāna*, the city of immortality” or “this wonder-city of *Nibbāna*.” People hearing this misunderstand it. They take it to mean that *nibbāna* is an actual city or place. What is more, they even believe that it is a place abounding in all sorts of good things, a place where one's every wish is fulfilled and everything one wants is immediately available. They want to get to *nibbāna* because it is the place where all wishes are granted. This is *nibbāna* in the everyday language of foolish people who know nothing of Dhamma. Yet this kind of talk can be heard all over the place, even in most temples.

In Dhamma language, the word “*nibbāna*” refers to the complete and absolute extinction of every kind of defilement and misery. Any time there is freedom from *kilesa*\* and

\*Defilements of mind, broadly categorized into greed, hatred, and delusion.

*dukkha*, there is *nibbāna*. If defilements have been eradicated completely, it is permanent *nibbāna*: the total extinguishing and cooling of the fire of *kilesa* and *dukkha*. This is *nibbāna* in Dhamma language. In everyday language, *nibbāna* is a dream-city; in Dhamma language, *nibbāna* is the complete and utter extinction of *dukkha* right here and now. Think about it. In which of these two ways is *nibbāna* understood by most people, in particular by the old folk who come to listen to sermons in temples?

## PATH AND FRUIT

Pressing on now, we come to the expression “path and fruit” (*magga-phala*). The expression “path and fruit” is so popular it has become hackneyed. Even ordinary people doing any old thing may refer to “path and fruit.” As soon as something turns out according to plan they say, “It’s path and fruit!” Even the most worldly of worldlings in the most worldly of situations will say, “It’s path and fruit!” meaning that things have turned out as hoped. This is how the term “path and fruit” is used in everyday language.

But in Dhamma language, “path and fruit” refers to the destruction of *dukkha* and the defilements which give rise to it. To do this in the right manner, step by step, in accordance with the true nature of things, is the meaning of “path and fruit” in Dhamma language. People are much given to using the expression “path and fruit” in everyday speech. To distinguish this everyday usage from the special usage of Dhamma language, we have to be very careful.

## MĀRA

Now we turn to a rather strange word, the word “*Māra*” (the tempter, the devil). The *Māra* of everyday language is conceived as a kind of monster with body, face, and eyes of repulsive and terrifying appearance. *Māra* in Dhamma language, however, is not a living creature but rather any kind of mental state opposed to the good and wholesome and to progress towards the cessation of *dukkha*. That which opposes and obstructs spiritual progress is called *Māra*. We may think of *Māra* as a living being if we wish, as long as we understand what he really stands for.

No doubt you have often heard the story of how *Māra* came down from the *Paranimmitavasavattī* realm to confront the Buddha-to-be. This was the real *Māra* the Tempter. He came down from the highest heaven, the *Paranimmitavasavattī* realm, which is a heaven of sensual enjoyments of the highest order, a paradise abounding in everything the heart could desire, where someone is always standing by to gratify one’s every wish. This is *Māra* the Tempter, but not the one with the ugly, ferocious countenance and reddened mouth, who is supposed to go around catching creatures to suck their blood. That is *Māra* as ignorant people picture him. It is the *Māra* of the everyday language of ignorant people who don’t know how to recognize *Māra* when they see him.

In Dhamma language, the word “*Māra*” means at worst the heaven known as *Paranimmitavasavattī*, the highest realm of sensuality. In general it means any mental state opposed to the good and wholesome, opposed to spiritual progress. This is *Māra* in Dhamma language.

## WORLD

Now we shall say something about the word “world” (*loka*). In everyday language, the word “world” refers to the Earth, this physical world, flat or round or however you conceive it. The “world” as the physical Earth is everyday language. In Dhamma language, however, the word “world” refers to worldly (*lokiya*) mental states, the worldly stages in the scale of mental development—that is to say, *dukkha*. The condition that is impermanent, changing, unsatisfactory—this is the worldly condition of the mind. And this is what is meant by the “world” in Dhamma language. Hence it is said that the world is *dukkha*, *dukkha* is the world. When the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*), he sometimes used the term “world” and sometimes the term “*dukkha*” They are one and the same. For instance, he spoke of:

- the world;
- the cause of the arising of the world;
- the extinction of the world;
- the path that brings about the extinction of the world.

What he meant was:

- *dukkha*;
- the cause of *dukkha*;
- the extinction of *dukkha*;
- the path that brings about the extinction of *dukkha*.

So in the language of the Buddha, the language of Dhamma, the word “world” refers to *dukkha*; suffering and the world are one and the same.

Taken another way, the word “world” refers to things that are low, shallow, not profound, and fall short of their highest potential. For instance, we speak of such and such a thing as worldly, meaning that it is not Dhamma. This is another meaning of the word “world” in Dhamma language. “World” does not always refer simply to this Earth, as in everyday language.

## **BIRTH**

Now, going a little higher, we come to the word “birth” (*jāti*). In everyday language, the word “birth” refers to physically coming into the world from the mother’s womb. A person is born physically only once. Having been born, one lives in the world until one dies and enters the coffin. Physical birth happens to each of us only once. This birth from the mother’s womb is what is meant by “birth” in everyday language.

In Dhamma language, the word “birth” refers to the birth of the idea “I” or “ego” that arises in the mind throughout each day. In this sense, the ordinary person is born very often, time and time again; a more developed person is born less frequently; a person well advanced in practice (*ariyan*, noble one) is born less frequently still, and ultimately ceases being born altogether. Each arising in the mind of the idea of “I” in one form or another is called a “birth.” Thus, birth can take place many times over in a single day. As soon as one starts thinking like an animal, one is born as an animal in that same moment. To think like a human being is to be born a human being. To think like a celestial being is to be born a celestial being. Life, the individual, pleasure and pain, and

the rest—all these were identified by the Buddha as simply momentary states of consciousness. So the word “birth” means in Dhamma language the arising of the idea of “I” or “me,” and not, as in everyday language, physical birth from the mother’s womb.

The word “birth” is very common in the Buddha’s discourses. When he was speaking of everyday things, he used the word “birth” with its everyday meaning. But when he was expounding Higher Dhamma—for instance, when discussing conditioned arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*)—he used the word “birth” (*jāti*) with the meaning it has in Dhamma language. In his description of conditioned arising, he wasn’t talking about physical birth. He was talking about the birth of attachment to the ideas of “me” and “mine,” “myself” and “my own.”

## DEATH

Now let’s consider the word “death.” Death in everyday language means that event which necessitates putting something in a coffin and cremating or burying it. But in Dhamma language, the word “death” refers to the cessation of the idea mentioned just a moment ago, the idea of “I” or “me.” The ceasing of this idea is what is meant by “death” in Dhamma language.

## LIFE

Let’s talk about the word “life.” This word in everyday language, the language of immature people, applies to anything that is not yet dead, that still exists, moves about, walks, and eats. In the more precise language of biology, it refers the

normal functioning of the protoplasm, of the cell and nucleus. The normal functioning and development of these is referred to as "life." This is an even more materialistic kind of everyday language.

In Dhamma language, "life" refers to the truly deathless state, the unconditioned, *nibbāna*, life without limitations. This is life. If we are speaking everyday language, "life" has the ordinary familiar meaning. If we are speaking Dhamma language, "life" refers to the deathless state. When there is no birth, there is also no death. This state is the unconditioned. It is what we call *nibbāna*, and what in other religions is often spoken of as the life everlasting. It is life that never again comes to an end. It is life in God, or whatever one cares to call it. This is the real life, life as understood in Dhamma language.

## PERSON

Now we come closer to home, to the word "person." We think nothing of using the word "person, person, person" all the time. Everyone is a person. But we ought to be careful here, because the word "person" has two different meanings. In everyday language, "person" refers to a creature with a body shaped like what they call a "person" or human being.

But in Dhamma language, the word "person" refers to certain special qualities implied in the word "human"—which means "possessing a lofty mind" or "high minded"—certain high mental qualities. This is not so difficult to understand. If someone criticizes a friend saying, "You're not a person!" what does he mean? The one criticized has a human body just

as does the one criticizing. Why, then, is the first accused of not being a person? The point is that he lacks the special qualities implied in the word "human." Lacking these, he is accused of not being a person. Thus, the word "person" has two different meanings. In everyday language, it refers to a creature of human form; in Dhamma language, it refers to the higher mental or spiritual qualities implied in the word "human."

## **GOD**

Now we consider the word "God." In everyday language, "God" refers to a celestial being with various creative powers. This is the God of everyday language. The "God" of Dhamma language is rather different. It is a profound and hidden power, which is neither human being, nor celestial being, nor any other kind of being. It has no individuality or self, and it is impersonal. It is natural and intangible. It is what we call the Law of Nature, for this Law is responsible for creation and for the coming into existence of all things. Natural Law governs all things. Natural Law has power over all things. Hence in Dhamma language, the word "God" means, among other things, the Law of Nature, what Buddhists call Dhamma. In the Pali language, the Law of Nature was referred to simply as "Dhamma." Dhamma, just that one single word, implies all of the Law of Nature. So Dhamma is the Buddhist God.

## **WOEFUL STATES**

Now let us direct our gaze downwards. Let us look at the "four woeful states" (*apaya*). The woeful states are the nether worlds. Normally four of them are recognized: hell



(*naraka*), the realm of the beasts (*tiracchana*), the realm of the hungry ghosts (*peta*), and the realm of the frightened ghosts (*asura* or *asurakāya*). These four as a group are called the “four woeful states.” They are vividly depicted in temple murals. Hell, the beasts, the hungry ghosts, and the asuras are all depicted according to traditional beliefs, which means all four are thought to apply only after death. In other words, the four woeful states as understood in everyday language are interpreted materialistically. The denizens of hell, the beasts, and so on are thought of as actual lowly, “flesh and blood” creatures.

In everyday language, hell is a region under the earth. It is ruled over by the god of death, who carries off people and subjects them to all sorts of punishments. It is a place where one may go after death. Contrast this with hell as understood in Dhamma language. Here hell is anxiety, anxiety which burns us just like a fire. Whenever anxiety afflicts us, burning us up like a fire, then we are in hell, the hell of Dhamma language. Anyone who roasts himself with anxiety, just as he might burn himself with fire, is said to fall into hell in that same moment. And just as anxiety is of various kinds, so we recognize various kinds of hells corresponding to them.

Now to the realm of beasts (*tiracchāna*). Birth as a beast means in everyday language actual physical birth as a pig, a dog, or some other actual animal. Rebirth after death as some kind of lower animal is the everyday meaning of rebirth into the realm of the beasts. In Dhamma language, it has a different meaning. When one is stupid, just like a dumb animal, then at that moment one is born into the realm of beasts. It happens

right here and now. One may be born as a beast many times over in a single day. So in Dhamma language, birth as a beast means stupidity.

The term “hungry ghost” (*peta*) in everyday language refers to a creature supposed to have a tiny mouth and an enormous belly. It can never manage to eat enough and so is chronically hungry. This is another possible form in which we may be reborn after death. These are the hungry ghosts of everyday language. The hungry ghosts of Dhamma language are purely mental states. Ambition based on craving, worry based on craving—to be afflicted with these is to be born a hungry ghost. These symptoms are just like those that result from having a mouth the size of a needle’s eye and a belly the size of a mountain. Anyone suffering from an intense craving, a pathological thirst, anyone who worries and frets excessively, has the same symptoms as a hungry ghost. Such a person can be said to have been reborn a hungry ghost right here and now. It is not something that happens only after death.

Now to the *asura* or frightened ghosts. In everyday language, an *asura* is a kind of invisible being. It goes around haunting and spooking, but is too afraid to show itself. In Dhamma language, the word “*asura*” refers to fear in the mind of a human being. To be reborn as an *asura*, it is not necessary for the body to die. Whenever one is afraid, one is simultaneously reborn an *asura*. To be afraid without good reason, to be excessively fearful, to be superstitiously afraid of certain harmless creatures—this is what it is to be reborn as an *asura*. Some people are afraid of doing good. Some are afraid that if they attain *nibbāna*, life will lose all its flavour

and be unbearably dull. Some people do have this kind of fear of *nibbāna*. To be afflicted with unjustified fear of this kind is to be reborn as an *asura* right here and now.

These are the four woeful states as understood in Dhamma language. They are rather different from the woeful states of everyday language. Now there is a point worth thinking about in connection with this. If we don't fall into the woeful states of Dhamma language, then we are sure not to fall into the woeful states of everyday language. For instance, if we avoid making the mistakes that lead to affliction with anxiety, then we avoid falling into hell in this life. At the same time, we need have no fear of falling into hell in some later lifetime after death. Again, if we avoid being stupid like the beasts, ravenous like the hungry ghosts, and frightened like the *asura*, then we are free of the kinds of unskillful attitudes that might cause us to be reborn after death as beasts, hungry ghosts, or *asura*.

So it behoves us to interest ourselves only in these woeful states that we are in danger of experiencing right here and now. The kind that we may experience after death can be put aside. There is no need for us to concern ourselves with them. If we avoid right here and now the hungry ghosts and other woeful states as understood in Dhamma language, then no matter how we die, we are certain not to fall into the woeful states of everyday language. If we live and practice properly, we avoid falling into the woeful states here and now, and we are certain not to fall into the woeful states that are supposed to follow death.

Most people recognize that heaven and hell are simply states of mind. Why, then, are they so foolish as to misunderstand the meaning of the four woeful states, which are so much a part of life? True enough, the heaven and hell of everyday language are external realms—though don't ask me where—and they are attained after death; but the heaven and hell of Dhamma language are to be found in the mind and may occur at any time, depending on one's mental make-up. This is how the woeful states of Dhamma language differ from those of everyday language.

## HEAVEN

“Heaven” in everyday language means some wonderful, highly attractive, celestial realm up above. Spend a certain amount of money in merit making and you're entitled to one mansion in heaven, where there are angels by the hundreds. In Dhamma language, however, “heaven” refers first of all to infatuating sensual bliss of the highest order. This is the lower heaven, the heaven of sensuality. Higher up is the heaven called the *Brahmaloka*, where there are no objects of sensuality. It is a state of mental well-being that results from the absence of any disturbing sensual object. It is as if a certain person with a hunger for sense objects had indulged himself until becoming thoroughly fed up with all sense objects. Then he would want only to remain quite empty, still, untouched. This is the state of freedom from sensuality, the condition of the *Brahma* gods in the *Brahmaloka*. The ordinary heavens are full up with sensuality, the highest of them, the *Paranimmitavasavattī* heaven, being completely full of sensuality.

The heavens of the *Brahmaloka*, however, are devoid of disturbance from sensuality, though the “self,” the “I” still persists.

## AMBROSIA

Now let us discuss the word “ambrosia,” the elixir of immortality. In everyday language, ambrosia is a kind of liquor that celestial beings imbibe to make themselves invulnerable before going out again to slaughter and cause general havoc. This is the ambrosia of everyday language. The ambrosia of Dhamma language is Dhamma at its highest, the truth of not-self (*anattā*) or emptiness (*suññatā*). This highest Dhamma, the truth of not-self or emptiness, makes a person immortal because it brings freedom from the “self” idea. When there is no “self,” how can there be death? So in Dhamma language, the elixir of life is the truth of not-self or emptiness. As for the liquor which is traditionally supposed to confer eternal life on whoever drinks it, that is the ambrosia of everyday language, the language of foolish people, the language of people who have not perceived or penetrated to the truth.

## EMPTINESS

A moment ago we mentioned the word “emptiness” (*suññatā*). Let us now have a closer look at it. *Suññatā* is a Pali word. *Suñña* means “void” or “empty,” and *-tā* is the equivalent of “-ness.” *Suññatā* is emptiness or voidness. In the everyday language of people who have not seen or penetrated to the truth, emptiness means simply the absence of any content whatsoever, a physical void, a vacuum, a useless

nothingness. This is emptiness in everyday language. Emptiness or *suññatā* in Dhamma language is quite different. Here everything of every kind and variety may be present in any quantity—everything, that is, with the single exception of the ideas of “me” and “mine.” Everything may be present, everything of every sort and kind you can think of, the entire lot of both physical and mental phenomena, with just this one exception—there is no idea of “me” and “mine.” No “I,” no “my,”—that is emptiness as it is understood in Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha.

The world is empty. Empty of what? Empty of self and anything belonging to self. With this single exception, everything may be present, as long as nothing is regarded as “me” or “mine.” This is the emptiness of Dhamma language. When the Buddha spoke of emptiness, he was speaking Dhamma language. Foolish people understand this as everyday language and take it that there is nothing in the world at all, just a vacuum! If the word “emptiness” is misinterpreted like this in terms of everyday language, the Buddha’s teaching of emptiness becomes meaningless. Those foolish people come out with many strange assertions that have nothing whatever to do with emptiness as taught by the Buddha.

I hope you will take an interest in this and bear it well in mind. This word “empty” applied to physical things naturally means absence of any content, but in the metaphysical context, it means that though every sort of thing may be present, there is utter absence of “I-ness” and “my-ness.” In the physical world, the mental world, or anywhere at all, there is no such thing as “me” or “mine.” The conditions of

“I-ness” and “my-ness” just do not exist. They are unreal, mere illusions, hence the world is described as empty. It is not that the world is devoid of all content. Everything is there, and it can be made use of with discernment. Go ahead and make use of it! Just one thing though—don’t go producing the ideas of “me” and “mine”!

Thus, in Dhamma language, empty does not mean “devoid of all content.” Anyone who takes it as meaning this is ignorant of Dhamma and ignorant of the language of Dhamma. Such a person is speaking only everyday language. If we go forcing this everyday meaning into the context of Dhamma language, how can we ever make any sense of Dhamma? Do make a special effort to understand this word. It has these two quite distinct meanings.

## STOPPING

Now we come to the word “stopping.” Stopping in the sense of not moving, not stirring, is everyday language, the language of the ordinary person. This is one of its meanings. In Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha, “stopping” has a different meaning. To simplify matters we shall consider an example. When Angulimala spoke of “stopping,” he meant one thing; and when the Buddha used the same word, he had in mind something quite different. If you have heard the story of Angulimala, you will be familiar with this dialogue between him and the Buddha.\* Angulimala, in using the word “stop,” was speaking everyday language; the Buddha, when he used it, was speaking Dhamma language.

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\* Angulimala Sutta, Majjhima-nikaya II 86.

In the language of the ordinary person, stopping means coming to a standstill, not moving; but in the language of the Buddha, stopping means becoming empty of self. If there is no self, what is it that goes running about? Why not have a think about this point? If there is no self, where is the “I” to go running about? Obviously the “I” has stopped. This is stopping in the language of the Buddha—absence of any self to be grasped at and clung to, absolute emptiness of selfhood.

To stop is the same as to be empty. This is what is meant by stopping in the Buddha’s language. One may be physically running about and yet be said to have stopped, because no “self” is left to run about. Every form of wanting and craving has stopped. There is no “I” to want anything anywhere, no “I” to go running about. A person who still has desires goes running about looking for every kind of thing, even looking for merit and goodness. Running about, looking for this and that, here, there, and everywhere—this is running. But if one manages to stop desiring completely, to stop being a self, then even though one may go flying around in an aeroplane, one can still be said to have stopped. Learn to distinguish these two meanings of the word “stop” and understand them properly. It will help you to understand the teaching of emptiness also.

## **LIGHT**

If we discuss only these profound questions, you are bound to become drowsy, so now we shall take an easy word—namely, “light.” When we speak of light, normally, we are referring to lamplight, sunlight, electric light, or some other kind of physical light. This is everyday language. In the Dhamma



language of the Buddha, the word “light” refers to insight, wisdom, higher knowledge (*paññā*). Even when the Buddha went and sat in a pitch dark cave, there was still light in the sense that in his mind there was the light of insight, of higher knowledge. On a moonless, starless night, when all lamps have been put out, it is still possible to say there is light if there is insight and higher knowledge in the mind of the one who practices earnestly. This is light in Dhamma language.

### **DARKNESS**

Now “darkness.” In ordinary everyday language, darkness is absence of light, which makes it impossible to see. In Dhamma language, darkness is lack of insight, ignorance of the truth, spiritual blindness (*avijjā*). This is true darkness. If a person lacking true insight were to go and sit right in full sunlight, that person would still be in darkness, the darkness of ignorance as to the true nature of things. This is the difference between the meanings of darkness in Dhamma language and in everyday language.

### **KAMMA**

We come now to the word “*kamma*” (Sanskrit, *karma*). When ordinary people say, “That’s *kamma*!” they mean “Too bad!” Bad luck as punishment for sins previously committed is the meaning given to the word “*kamma*” by ordinary people. But in Dhamma language the word “*kamma*” refers to something different. It refers to action. Bad action is called black *kamma*; good action is called white *kamma*. Then there is another remarkable kind of *kamma* which is neither black nor white, a *kamma* that serves to neutralize the other two

kinds. Unfortunately, the more people hear about it, the less they understand it. This third kind of *kamma* is the realization of not-self (*anattā*) and emptiness (*suññatā*), so that the “self” is done away with. This kind of action may be called Buddhist *kamma*, the real *kamma*, the kind of *kamma* that the Buddha taught. The Buddha taught the transcending of all *kamma*.

Most people are interested only in black *kamma* and white *kamma*, bad *kamma* and good *kamma*. They take no interest in this third kind of *kamma* which is neither black nor white, neither bad nor good, which consists in complete freedom from selfhood and leads to the attainment of *Nibbana*. It wipes out every kind of bad and good *kamma*. People don't understand the method for wiping out *kamma* completely. They don't know that the way to put an end to all *kamma* is through this special kind of *kamma*, which consists in applying the Buddha's method. That method is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path.

The practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is *kamma* neither black nor white, and it is the end of all *kamma*. This is *kamma* in Dhamma language. It is very different from the “*kamma*” of immature people, who exclaim “That's *Kamma!*” meaning only “Too bad!” or “Bad luck!” *Kamma* understood as bad luck is the *kamma* of everyday language.

## REFUGE

Consider now the word “refuge” or “support” (*saraṇa*) In everyday language, a refuge or support is some person or thing outside of and other than oneself which one may depend on for help. For instance, people may depend on employers,

ghosts, good luck omens, or guardian angels. Anything or anyone other than oneself that is relied upon—this is the meaning of “refuge” or “support” in everyday language.

The “refuge” or “support” of Dhamma language is to be found within oneself. Even when we speak of going to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha for refuge, we really mean going to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha that are to be found within ourselves, within our own minds. Only then can they really serve as our refuge. So these supports are to be found within ourselves: our own efforts bring into existence the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha within our own minds. According to Dhamma language, one is one’s own refuge. Refuge is within oneself, not somewhere outside.

## HEART OF BUDDHISM

This brings us to the expression “the heart of Buddhism.” In discussions about what constitutes the heart of Buddhism, all sorts of strange ideas are brought forward. Some people recite this or that formula, such as VI-SU-PA.\* This sort of “heart” is everyday language, the language of stupid people. People with no knowledge of Dhamma will just rattle off a couple of Pali words or some other cliché and proclaim this to be the heart of Buddhism.

The heart of Buddhism, as this expression is understood in Dhamma language, as the Buddha has put it, is the realiza-

\*VI, SU, and PA stand for *Vinaya*, *Sutta*, and *Paramattha* (= *Abhidhamma*), the three sections of the *Tipitaka*. Such sets of initials are still commonly used for memorizing Dhamma topics, but through the influence of Mantrayana, they are regarded by many as magical formulas. Each set is called the “heart” or “essence” of the topic concerned.

tion that nothing whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to.

*“Sabbe dhammā nalam abhinivesaya.”*

Nothing whatever should be grasped at and clung to as “me” or “mine.” This is the heart of Buddhism as understood in Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha. So anyone who is after the heart of Buddhism should be very careful not to get just the “heart” of everyday language, the language of people ignorant of Dhamma. That sort of “heart” is likely to be something ridiculous, laughable, and childish.

What I have said so far ought to be sufficient to enable you to realize how a single word may have two different meanings. An intelligent and discerning person will be capable of considering both modes of speaking. “A wise person is one who is careful to consider both modes of speaking.” “Both modes of speaking” means both of the possible meanings of a word. One is the meaning the word has in everyday language; the other is the meaning that same word has in Dhamma language. A discerning person must consider both meanings, as we have done in the numerous examples dealt with above. The words we have considered so far as examples are rather high-level terms. Let us now consider some more down-to-earth examples. I apologize if some of these appear a little crude.

## **EATING**

Take the word “eating.” In everyday language, to eat is to take in nourishment through the mouth in the usual way. But the eating of Dhamma language can be done by way of

eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind. Think it over. What does the word “eat” refer to here? The eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odour, and so on with the remaining sense organs. This is referred to as “eating,” eating by way of eye, ear, nose, and so on. This is Dhamma language. For instance in Pali and Sanskrit the word “*kama-bhogi*” was commonly used to refer to a person who indulged in sensuality; literally this word means simply “sensuality eater.”

The expression “eating a woman” sounds most peculiar in Thai. But in Pali and Sanskrit it is a perfectly ordinary expression. To eat a woman does not mean to carry off, kill, cook, and eat her. It means to have sexual relations with her. This is what is meant by “eating” in this case, and this is what the word “eating” means in Dhamma language.

On the other hand, the Pali word “*nibbhogo*” (having nothing to eat) is used to describe the Buddha and *arahants* (fully enlightened beings), for they are no longer involved in colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile stimuli, and mental images. Because they are above involvement in these six kinds of sense objects, they are people with “nothing to eat.” Get to know this broad usage of the word “eat” in Dhamma language. It will make it easier to understand the more profound aspects of the teaching.

## SLEEPING

Now the word “sleeping.” When we use this word in the sense of lying down and sleeping like a dog or cat, we are speaking everyday language. But in Dhamma language, sleeping

refers to ignorance (*avijjā*). Though a person may be sitting up with eyes wide open, if ignorant of the true nature of things, this person can be said to be asleep. This is “sleeping” in Dhamma language. To live in ignorance of the true nature of things, regardless of bodily posture, is to be asleep.

### **AWAKE**

To be “awake” normally means to have roused oneself from sleep. But in Dhamma language, it means to be always mindful, to be always fully aware. In this condition, regardless of whether one is physically awake or asleep, one can be described as awake. People who practice mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are always fully aware. Even if they go to sleep, they are immediately fully aware again the moment they wake up. When they are awake, they are awake; and when they are asleep, they are also awake. This is what it is to be “awake” in Dhamma language.

### **PLAY**

“To play” in the language of the ordinary person is to amuse oneself as do children with games, sports, laughter, and good fun. But in Dhamma language, “to play” is to rejoice in the Dhamma, to be joyful over the Dhamma. Even to play with the bliss associated with the deeper stages of concentration (*jhāna*) was called in Pali “*jhānakila*” (concentration-games). This is the “play” of the *ariyans* (those well advanced in Dhamma practice). This is what “play” means in Dhamma language.

### **ANGEL**

Next, the word “angel” (Thai *nang-faa*, literally, “sky-woman”). In everyday language, this word refers to the ex-

ceptionally beautiful female inhabitants of heavenly palaces. They are personifications of physical beauty. But in Dhamma language, “angel” refers to the Buddha-Dhamma. Generally people restrict this meaning to the Dhamma written and studied in books, but in truth it encompasses all Dhamma, for all Dhamma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end (as explained above regarding the Sublime Way of Life). Thus, even the word “angel” has different levels of meaning; and “angel” in Dhamma language is the hope of all worthy Buddhists.

### **FEMALE & MALE**

Now, let us look at the words “female” and “male.” In everyday, worldly language, these words mean the two sexes—the female sex and the male sex. In Dhamma language, however, they refer to the distinguishing marks and signs of certain duties which Nature has assigned to human beings: duties which must be performed co-operatively, in partnership. Female and male have nothing to do with the exchange and consumption of sexual flavors. Rather, they point to the fact that human beings must exist in the world and that the species must not become extinct. This means that the human race must be preserved through the duty of reproduction for as long a time as is necessary for humanity to realize the highest Dhamma— *nibbāna*. The duties called for by this necessity must be divided between the female and male. Once the female and male exist, they help each other to lighten their burdens by dividing their everyday responsibilities and work, which, when done correctly, is Dhamma practice.

In Dhamma language, the signs of the duties which Nature has stipulated in this way are known as “female” and “male.” This isn’t the lowly meaning assumed in everyday language. We shouldn’t think of female and male solely in terms of an instinctual animal activity. Rather, we ought to think of them as signs of the division of those duties which can be carried out properly only in co-operation.

## MARRIAGE

From this we’ll move on to “marriage.” In everyday language, everyone understands this word to mean the ceremony that joins a woman and man according to social customs. That’s marriage in worldly terms. However, in Pali, the language of Dhamma, the word “marriage” is *samarasa*, which translates as “having equal (*sama*) flavor, taste, duty, or function (*rasa*)” through Dhamma or in Dhamma. This means that two people with correct wants and needs are united as one. Physical contact between them is unnecessary, though there may be other forms of contact, such as letter writing.

Marriage is possible even though the skin and flesh of the two partners never touch. This is because their wants are the same and their responsibilities are equal. For example, both genuinely want to transcend *dukkha* using the same principles of practice. Both persons are satisfied in the unified Dhamma practice and in the fruits mutually desired. This is what we call “having equal flavor” which is marriage in Dhamma language and in Pali. The meanings of words in Dhamma language are always as clean and pure as in this example.



## FATHER & MOTHER

Now we come to the words “father” and “mother.” In ordinary worldly language, these words refer to the two people responsible for our having been born. But in the deeper language of Dhamma, our “father” is ignorance (*avijjā*) and our “mother” is craving (*taṇhā*). They must be killed and gotten rid of completely. For instance, the Buddha said:

*“Matraṃ pitraṃ hantvā akataññūsi brāhmaṇa.”*

*“Be ungrateful. Kill the ‘father,’ kill the ‘mother,’ and you will attain nibbāna.”*

Our father, the one responsible for our birth, is ignorance or not-knowing (*avijjā*); our mother, the other one responsible for our birth, is craving (*taṇhā*). The words “father” and “mother” in Dhamma language were given these higher meanings by the Buddha. So the “parents”—*avijjā* and *taṇhā*—have to be killed, destroyed completely, for *nibbāna* to be realized.

## FRIEND

The word “friend” in worldly everyday language refers to a companion, someone who does things that please one. But in Dhamma language, “friend” or “companion” refers to the Dhamma, and in particular to that aspect of the Dhamma that enables us to free ourselves from *dukkha*. The Buddha specifically mentioned the Noble Eightfold Path as humanity’s supreme friend (*kalyanamitta*). In Dhamma language, “friend” means the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding, right intention, and so on up to right concentration. This is what “friend” means in Dhamma language.

## ENEMY

An enemy in everyday language is someone whom we hate and who is out to do us harm. But our enemy, as this word is understood in Dhamma language, is our own misdirected mind. Our very own mind and the misuse of it—that is our real enemy. The misdirected mind is our enemy, not someone outside of ourselves. The enemy that the ordinary person has in mind is the enemy of everyday worldly language. The enemy of Dhamma language is the misdirected mind. The enemy exists any time that the mind is misdirected. It is born in the mind and of the mind. With the mind well directed and fixed on Dhamma, the enemy is absent and the friend is there instead.

## PUTRIDNESS

Now, let us ask, what is “the putrid, foul-smelling thing”? In everyday language it may be rotten fish or something of the sort, but in Dhamma language it is something very different. The Buddha referred to the mental defilements (*kilesa*) as putrid, foul-smelling things. Excessive desire, self-centredness, and obsession with the ideas of “me” and “mine”—these are putrid, foul-smelling things.

All these words that we have considered are nothing but perfectly ordinary words selected to demonstrate the difference between everyday language and Dhamma language. If you think it over, you will realize that this difference is the very reason that we fail to understand Buddha-Dhamma. We don’t understand this highest and most profound of teachings simply because we don’t know the language of Dhamma. We know

only everyday language and are unable to comprehend the language of the nobles ones (*ariyans*, beings well advanced in the practice).

## LAUGHTER

Consider, for example, laughter. The Buddha once said, "Laughter is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle." Think about it. We like to laugh heartily, even though it is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle. It doesn't even embarrass us. We like it. We go right on laughing heartily, guffawing loudly. Why did the Buddha say that "Laughter is the behaviour of an infant in its cradle"? Think of an infant in its cradle and the way it lies there gurgling and grinning at you.

The laughter of the noble ones is different. They laugh at all compounded things (*sankhāra*), which are impermanent and changing, unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self. Because they know, they can laugh at compounded things and at craving, which henceforth can do them no harm. This is the right kind of laughter, the kind that has meaning and worth.

## SINGING

Now consider singing. Singing, such as we hear on the radio, is just like someone weeping. The *ariyans* put singing in the same category as weeping. In singing, the actions of mouth, throat, vocal chords, and tongue are just the same as they are in weeping. But if it is a real song, the song of the noble ones, then it is a paean of joy at having seen the Dhamma. It proclaims the Dhamma and it proclaims satisfaction in the Dhamma. The song of the *ariyans* is a paean of joy proclaiming the Dhamma. This is true singing.

## DANCING

Next, consider dancing, which is so popular. People make a special effort to learn how to do it, and they get their sons and daughters to learn it too. They spend a lot of money on it. The *ariyans*, however, regard dancing as the antics of madmen. You can see for yourself how closely dancing resembles the antics of madmen, if you just compare them. No sane person would ever get up and dance! It has been calculated that a person has to be at least 15% mad in order to overcome his sense of shame to get up and dance. So dancing is the antics of madmen.

The dancing of the *ariyans* is *dhammanandi*. They “dance” and jeer at the defilements, proclaiming their liberation. They are no longer bound hand and foot, arm and leg. Their limbs are free. They can “dance” because they are not bound down by attachment. This is how the noble ones dance.

## BLINDNESS

Think it over. If we know only the language of common people, we can't possibly understand this kind of talk. The wise person says: “The birds see not the sky,” and the foolish person doesn't believe it. Why don't birds see the sky? Because they are flying in the sky. The wise person says: “The fish see not the water,” and again the foolish person doesn't believe it. It never occurs to such people that fish living in water cannot see the water because the fish are in such close contact with it. They know nothing about water. Likewise, earthworms always burrowing in the earth never see the earth. And the

worms that live in a dung heap, that are born and die in a dung heap, never see that dung heap.

Lastly, “humanity sees not the world.” People living and moving about in the world still do not see the world. If they really saw the world, they certainly wouldn’t stay stuck in it. They would be sure to get free to the world and dwell with the Dhamma. People who are bogged down in the world, like worms in a dung heap, know only worldly everyday language. They don’t know Dhamma language. The reason they don’t know Dhamma language is that they are stuck fast in the world like the worms in their dung heap, the earthworms in the ground, the fish in the water, and the birds in the sky. People don’t know Dhamma language. Not knowing Dhamma language, they cannot comprehend Dhamma.

## WALKING NOWHERE

Here is a good example of Dhamma language: “Walking, walking, and never arriving.” The average person will not grasp the meaning. Here “walking” refers to wanting something and going off in search of it. “Never arriving” refers to peace, to *nibbāna*, which remains unattainable. *Nibbāna* is attained by not wanting, not desiring, not hoping, not yearning. So there is no need to walk at all; by not walking, *nibbāna* will be realized. Walking, walking, and never arriving. Wanting, wanting, and never attaining. The more we want anything—want to get this or that, want to be this or that—the more inaccessible it becomes. All we must do is to give up wanting something and we get it in full, straight away.

## SILENCE

In Dhamma language, it is said, "Talk is not loud; silence is loud." This means that when the mind is well concentrated, still and quiet, the voice of Dhamma will be heard. Again it is said, "These things that can be talked about are not the real Dhamma; about the real Dhamma nothing can be said." Everything that I have been saying in this talk is still not really Dhamma, it is still not the actual thing. My words are nothing more than an attempt to explain how to arrive at and understand the real thing. The real thing cannot be discussed. The more we say about Dhamma, the further it recedes from us. We can talk about only the method which will guide us along, which will tell us what to do in order to arrive at the real thing, the genuine Dhamma. So we must stop talking.

This being the case, we shall leave off our comparison of everyday language and Dhamma language. I suggest you think it over and decide whether or not you agree with me concerning our failure to understand Dhamma. Some of us have been listening to sermons and lectures and expositions of Dhamma for ten years, twenty years, thirty years, and more. Why is it, then, that we still don't understand Dhamma, see Dhamma, penetrate Dhamma? The reason we don't understand is simply that we don't listen in the right way. And why don't we listen in the right way? Because we are familiar only with everyday language and have no acquaintance with Dhamma language. We hear Dhamma language and take it as being everyday language. We are just like those foolish people who always take the word "emptiness" in its everyday sense,

completely miss the Dhamma sense, and then make all sorts of ridiculous assertions about it.

Such are the unhappy consequences of not being familiar with both everyday language and Dhamma language. People in this position have not got their wits about them. They lack discernment, the quality the Buddha was referring to when he said:

*Appamatto ubho atthe adhigaṇhāti paṇḍito,  
Diṭṭhe dhamme ca yo attho, yo ca'ttho samparāyiko.  
Atthābhisamayādhiro paṇḍito ti pavuccati.*

The wise and heedful person is familiar with both modes of speaking: the meaning seen by ordinary people and the meaning which they can't understand. One who is fluent in the various modes of speaking is a wise person.





*LOOKING WITHIN*

Lecture with the Buddhist Studies Group  
at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok  
15 December 1961

Translated by Roderick S. Bucknell



In this talk, I will discuss a matter which is extremely important but which most people are inclined to regard as non-essential or as too troublesome to be concerned with. This extremely important matter concerns looking within, examining all things within ourselves.

Looking within is essential for an understanding of Dhamma or Buddhism. Failure to look at things in the right way can be a barrier to understanding, as when two people disagree because one of them has failed to look at a question in a certain important way and so is not in a position to understand the point that another person is making. Disagreement is usually caused by two parties looking at the matter in question in two different ways.

If we are to understand the teaching of the Buddha, we must look within. The Buddha was concerned exclusively with things within, and his teaching is an account of what is to be seen when we look within. The teaching of suffering (*dukkha*) is important—as one of the four Noble Truths, as one link in the chain of conditioned arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), and in other contexts, all of which exclusively concern suffering within. Unless we attempt to look within as the Buddha did, we have little hope of understanding the Dhamma and the

teaching of the Buddha. Consequently, I regard this matter as one requiring detailed examination.

My previous three talks were also devoted to this matter of looking within. Looking at the inner life is what Dhamma is all about. We must look within if we are to make Dhamma one with our life. In my third talk, "The World Within," the explanation that I gave of the true meaning of the term "birth" also depended on this important point. Understanding Dhamma correctly is simply a matter of observing the important and relevant aspects of our inner life. It is essential that a person studying Buddhism should practice looking within.

Some people would say that this matter is too complex and that we would do better not to discuss it; they are under the impression that young people are not capable of looking within. That is the old people's view; they themselves would never look within so they try to make out that young people would never look within either. Nevertheless, we need not concern ourselves with that kind of talk. We need not concern ourselves with these notions about how different people look at things; we need concern ourselves only with how we may come to understand this most important of all things: Dhamma.

## **THE QUINTESSENCE**

This brings us to the question: Why speak of a "without" and a "within"? I assume you will understand this yourselves. I don't imagine that you will need anyone to explain to you at great length that all things have these two sides, an outside and an inside, a without and a within. There is a word in philosophy—and in ordinary usage too—the word "quintes-

sence.” “Quint” means “fifth,” “essence” means “fundamental nature, true substance.” “Quintessence” means “fifth essence.” Philosophers spoke of four outward essences, the elements earth, water, fire, and air. These four were without. The fifth essence was not earth, not water, not fire, and not air, but something else again, something within, namely consciousness, the mental side of things. It is this fifth element or essence that we must take an interest in and come to understand properly and fully.

I ought to mention here that Buddhism recognizes a sixth essence, a sixth element. The first four elements are earth, water, fire, and air, and the fifth is the mind, the element of consciousness. The sixth element is “the void,” the element of voidness. It is also called “*nibbāna-dhātu*,” but the most straightforward word for it is “voidness.” So we have six elements: earth, water, fire, air, mind (*viññāṇa-dhātu*), and voidness (*suññatā-dhātu*). Mind and voidness are the fifth and sixth essences; they lie deep inside; they are “the within.”

Thus, the looking within that we are speaking of means looking at the mind, looking at the ideas of “I” and “my” which are the causes of action good and bad. This is one aspect of Dhamma. As for the sixth essence, this is the state that is void of “I,” void of “my,” void of the idea of being “I” or belonging to “I”—in other words, void of all defilements. To be free of defilements is to be free of suffering, free of all the things that constitute suffering (*dukkha*).

That all these six things should be regarded as elements is completely sound; however, the average person is likely to consider this classification unfounded because he knows only

the elements earth, water, fire, and air, or the elements of modern chemistry. He does not think of the mind and things even deeper again as elements; and as soon as he hears you call them elements, he is likely to lose interest. The word "element" (*dhātu*) as used here refers to things that really do exist, nothing more than that. The things without really do exist without; and the things within, which lie so deep that they cannot be seen, likewise exist. Since these deeper-lying things do exist, they too are to be counted as essences, as elements or potentials from which all things are composed.

For clarity of understanding I should add a few further words of explanation. In discussions of Buddhist principles it is often stated that there are ultimately only three elements: the form element, the formless element, and the quenching element (*rūpa-*, *arūpa-*, and *nirodha-dhātu*). Of these three terms, the first, "form element," refers to the physical elements, which have discrete physical extension, which can be seen, smelt, or felt. These taken together comprise the form element. The second, "formless element," refers to things that lack this kind of form, but which nonetheless have real existence, things that can be known only through the mind simply because they themselves are of the mind. These taken together comprise the formless element. The third, "quenching element," has real existence too, but it consists in the quenching or extinction of the remaining elements. When the first two elements—form and formlessness—reach this element, they are quenched; they become devoid of meaning as if they did not exist. So this quenching element is neither form nor formlessness; it is beyond them both. It cannot be said to have form or to lack

form, because it is beyond both form and formlessness, which is why the Buddha called it the quenching element, or the *nibbāna* element, or the voidness element. But the clearest term is “quenching element.”

Please bear in mind this broader meaning of the term “element.” Here it means much more than it does in the physical sciences, where it covers only the states of matter and energy, or the chemical elements. All the elements of modern science are covered by the form element alone. As for the other two elements, the formless element and the quenching element, you have probably never thought about them. Some of you have never learned anything about them and some have never even realized that they exist.

Coming to listen to this discussion of the Buddha’s teaching on this subject is bound to make you wiser by making you realize the existence of certain hidden things. These things are hidden to us, but they were not hidden to those who attained enlightenment, in particular the Buddha himself. That is to say that for the Buddha the formless element and the quenching element were ordinary, familiar matters, easily comprehended and not especially profound. He knew about them just as we know about earth, water, fire, and air, or about the one hundred-odd chemical elements that modern researchers have discovered. It is necessary, then, to set up a new and more refined theoretical framework in which the term “element” has this wider meaning. The less superficial elements can be perceived only if we look within. If we are to recognize and understand them, we have to look within. This

will bring us to an understanding of the teaching of the Buddha, the person who was an adept at looking within.

For a variety of different reasons, you have come here to do special research into Buddhism. Your Buddhist Studies Group exists for the purpose of bringing about an understanding of Buddhism. It is absolutely essential that this research and study be founded on sound Buddhist principles. We can't just study Buddhism however it happens to suit us, according to our own preferences and convenience. If we insisted on doing it that way, we would get very meagre results, we would waste a lot of time, and in the end we simply would have to abandon the attempt. No real benefit would come of it. So I call on you—indeed I entreat you—to practise looking within and studying within in order that you will gradually come to a deeper and deeper understanding of the fifth and sixth elements.

### **OBJECTIVITY-SUBJECTIVITY**

This looking within can be explained in terms of two ordinary everyday words which are also special terms in the language of philosophy: the antonyms "objectivity" and "subjectivity." The term "objectivity," strictly speaking, refers to the condition that appears when we observe or experience from the perspective of purely physical things, the things which are acted upon. The term "subjectivity" refers to the condition that appears when we observe or experience mental things, from the perspective of the doer rather than the receiver of an action. We must define the meanings very clearly like this. The objective side is the physical side, the



world of objects on which actions operate. The subjective side is the mental side, the world of the mind which is the “doer” of actions.

This all becomes much clearer if we go by the original meanings of the Pali terms. The word “*citta*,” denoting the mind or the subjective side, translates literally as “builder, doer, knower, that which leads away other things.” *Rūpa*, denoting the physical or objective side, is literally “that which is built, that which is easily broken up or destroyed, that which is known, led away, or acted upon.”

What we must do is practice looking at the subjective side, the mind. We have to look at the doer rather than the recipient. It should be clear that to go foolishly looking only at the objective side is to look at that on which actions fall rather than at the actor. This means that one becomes a slave, a slave and servant of objects. By contrast, to look at the subjective side, the mind, the doer, is to become the master, and to gain the upper hand. If you look at the objective side, you are looking passively; if you look at the subjective side, you are looking actively. So it is essential that we practice looking at the side which puts us in the advantageous position, the side which has the upper hand—the subjective side. This is the value of looking within.

Since the day we were born we have lacked proper training in both Dhamma and philosophy. From the day we were born right up to the present, we have been allowed to sink into materialism, to become infatuated with physical things, and we have looked only at the physical or objective

side of things. It is as if we have refused to look at the opposite side of things, the loftier side. But nothing can ever come of just carrying on in the old way. Thus, we must make a new resolution henceforth to look at everything as winners, not as losers. This is why it is essential for us to practice looking at the subjective side of things, until we are able to make the state of things within reveal itself to us in all clarity and no longer be a mystery to us.

### **RIND-FLESH**

Let me clarify further this matter of looking without and looking within by using the most ordinary everyday terms. Looking without and looking within are exact opposites. The without and the within belong together and are inseparable because the things within are dependent on the things without. For example, the body is the basis or dwelling place of the mind; the mind depends on the body. Body and mind are inseparable, yet we can distinguish them as outer and inner, respectively. It is just like a piece of fruit, which has outer rind and inner flesh dependent on each other and inseparable. If we look only without, we see only the inedible rind; but if we look within we find the flesh, the part that is good to eat. If we can't distinguish flesh from rind, we can't eat. If we were forced to eat the lot, flesh and rind together, we would do so very unwillingly.

Thus, there is great benefit in being able to distinguish the within from the without, and then to look at the within. Looking within is essential, but let us not go so far as to develop a negative, cynical attitude toward the without. That

would be an error as grave as ignoring the within. We have always to recognize the value of the outer shell, the without, just as in the case of a fruit. If a fruit had no rind or shell, the flesh could not exist. Without the rind, the fruit could not produce seeds or flesh, and could never develop to an edible and useful stage. The rind is essential, but to think the rind is everything would be altogether pitiful.

In any case, to look without is to see only the outer shell; to look within is to see the real kernel. If a person only looks without, he is the slave of external objects; but if he looks within, he becomes the master of those objects. As I said the other day, sense objects—all the shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile sensations that exist—are the world. As long as the mind is allowed to wander carelessly under the influence of outward-looking, it is a slave to objects, dominated by them, overpowered and dragged along by them as if it were being led along by the nose. As soon as the mind looks within, however, it becomes free, it cannot be led along by the nose, and it is in a condition of freedom from all suffering and torment.

Looking without prevents us from understanding Dhamma, and looking within enables us to understand Dhamma. Always bear this contrast in mind. Why should it be like this? Simply because this thing called Dhamma has to do with the within but is hidden by the without. In saying that Dhamma is hidden, I mean that it is a truth that is as difficult to see as if it were hidden. Dhamma is hidden by the without. We know only about the without; we don't get to know about the within which is hidden by the without. This is our ignorance. To

put it simply, we are deluded, infatuated, pigheaded, stupid, worldly, thick, or however you care to describe it. In the language of Dhamma, this condition is called *avijjā* (ignorance). So Dhamma is the truth that lies hidden in all things; it is the within of all things.

We could put it as I did a few days ago and say simply that the idea of “I” and “my” cannot be eliminated by looking without but can be eliminated by looking within. And why? Again simplifying somewhat, because this “I” and “my” is extremely well hidden, located deep within where we can’t see it and don’t know how to discover it. If we practice looking within, however, using the method taught by the Buddha, the habit of “I” and “mine” simply will reveal itself to us as clearly as do the things without. Looking within will reveal in all clarity that the “I” and “my” alone is the cause of all our chronic suffering. So the “I” and “my” must be killed off by using the right technique—for example, starving them until they wither and die of themselves, like animals penned up without food.

## **MATERIALISM-IDEALISM**

We might go on to make the point that to look without is to be stuck in materialism, while to look within is to go the way of idealism.\* Materialism and idealism are opposites. These terms will be familiar to you so there is no need to spend time explaining them. Looking without is materialism itself and it inevitably brings the fruits of materialism—namely,

\*Ajahn Buddhadasa’s unique use of this term is characteristic of his reworking of Thai and Pali words.

endless slavery to material things and endless problems. Because of materialism, our modern world is full of trouble. No matter who is fighting who, each side is fighting for materialism. Each side may hold to its own particular variety of materialism—a cruder variety or a more refined variety; a very extreme, unmitigated, thoroughgoing materialism, or a very subtle, fine, barely discernible materialism—nevertheless they are all equally infatuated with materialism.

There is absolutely no way that the present crises in the world can be resolved other than through both sides curing their mad obsession with materialism and becoming more concerned with idealism. We must understand that which has nothing to do with materialism, and which is the highest ideal. We require an inner or spiritual idealism. There will then be no need to outlaw war. People will stop fighting of their own accord and begin seeking the true happiness which comes without any loss of flesh and blood or expenditure of materials. People will live in supreme happiness in what we might call an age of true enlightenment. Look at the cost of looking without and at the value of looking within. Do take an interest in looking within, in the one and only way of penetrating to Dhamma, to Buddhism.

If any of you already detest materialism and honour idealism, you ought to practice looking within according to Buddhist principles, which I guarantee will bring genuine benefits. I can't speak for other religions, although they may have the same principles. For the present we are speaking only of Buddhism, and we are asserting that the Buddhist ideal has nothing whatever to do with material things. It is

far above material things. It is supramundane, beyond this world, beyond materialism. Infatuation with the world is the essence of materialism, so we must always look above and beyond the world.

There is another pair of terms that we often come across. They refer to two different manners of speaking to be found in the Dhamma. One is used when speaking about people and their affairs, about things, about the material side; it is called “everyday language.” The other is used when speaking about the mind, about Dhamma; it is called “Dhamma language.” Let us take as an example *Māra* the Tempter, the Buddhist Satan. If we have in mind a kind of demon riding an elephant or horse and carrying a lance or sword, then we are using everyday language. If, however, we have in mind those most dangerous and destructive things, the mental defilements—stupidity, greed, anger—then we are using Dhamma language, the language of the mind and Dhamma. If you don’t practice looking within, you never will recognize Dhamma and the language of Dhamma; you will know only everyday language. If you are particularly deluded, you may fall victim to the propaganda about making merit in order to get to heaven, or making merit in order to escape *Māra*’s snare. But if you practice looking at things in the right way, and penetrate to the truth of Dhamma language, you become a knower of truth, and no one can deceive you.

## WEALTH

There are two more words that we meet frequently in the texts. They describe two kinds of wealth: the wealth of

the worldling, outward wealth; and the wealth of an enlightened being, inner wealth. We needn't say a great deal about this. Jewels, rings, silver, gold, land, fields, elephants, horses, cattle, buffaloes, fame, and power—you know very well that all these are outward wealth, the wealth of the worldling. As for inner wealth, the noble wealth of enlightened beings is Dhamma—that which brings about the extinction of suffering (*dukkha*). The outward wealth of worldlings consists of material things with which we become infatuated; the inner wealth of enlightened beings can be perceived only with a superbly refined mind that is capable of looking deep within.

The relative value of these two kinds of wealth has been described often; we shall just use one example. Outward wealth is not part of us and does not really belong to us. It can be stolen, be destroyed by fire, and fall prey to other disasters; it is never really ours. And what is more, outward wealth is potentially harmful to us. Often it turns on us, creating difficulties and hardships for us. By contrast, the inward wealth of enlightened beings is free from all of these bad properties. It never does harm. It never makes people weep, and it probably never makes people laugh either, because weeping and laughing both leave us out of breath and cannot be compared with freedom, voidness, and equanimity. Thus, the wealth of enlightenment makes us neither laugh nor cry; it brings only stillness and coolness. That's all! We have to use mindfulness and wisdom (*sati-paññā*) to penetrate through the exterior to the within; then we will gain this special kind of wealth, the wealth that is unique to followers of the Buddhist way.

## ILLNESS

Now let us talk about illness. We find that a person who sees only the without is familiar only with illness of the physical kind: bodily ailments, diseases, aches, and pains. He is afraid of them and always losing sleep over them. He is quite unaware, however, of the existence of non-physical illness, of the mental disorders, which are far more dangerous than physical disorders. Furthermore, he is unaware that common ailments of the body are often really due to mental disorders. If a person is suffering from some mental disorder, he is likely to develop a physical illness. Certain intestinal complaints, for example, which are a big problem and very widespread, are recognized by doctors and medical researchers as being the result of prolonged anxiety or mental stress. Every time anxiety arises, the blood circulation to the intestines becomes inadequate as a result of the excessive demands of the over-tense, disturbed brain. Consequently, the intestines become disturbed, too. You may have observed yourselves that if you become very upset about something, you experience abdominal pains so acute as to prevent you from eating. It could be fatal to force yourself to eat when in that condition, because the bowels cannot accept food.

The mental ailment comes first in the form of anxiety. This anxiety is caused simply by mistaken ideas and false views regarding things of the world. These false views lead one to grasp and cling in a way that causes anxiety and mental illness, and ultimately physical illness also. As soon as the mind's condition is weakened, the body's power to resist in-



fection is diminished so that even slight exposure to infection can lead to serious illness. If we are completely free from mental disorders, if we have a strong healthy mind as do forest-dwelling *yogis* and *munis* (quiet sages), then even considerable exposure to infection has no effect. Resistance to infection is adequate so that no illness results and there is no need for medication. Thus, mental strength and well-being is the foundation for resistance to physical illness. We ought to look more closely at this connection between physical and mental disorders, because the only medicine required and the only thing needed to completely control mental disorders is Dhamma. With Dhamma, ninety-nine percent of physical illness could be eliminated. We find that people who live according to Dhamma, such as *rishis* (ascetics) and *munis*, are strong, healthy, and never know sickness. If we want long life, this is how we ought to live, too.

## HAPPINESS

If we look into the matter of happiness, we find another useful comparison. In the texts, two kinds of happiness are mentioned. One of these is the kind found in home life, called *gehanissitasukha*, the kind of happiness that is derived from home life and raising a family. This is external happiness, with which we are quite familiar. Contrasted with this happiness is a kind called *nekkhammanissitasukha*, literally, "the happiness that comes from forsaking the home life." This refers to a mental forsaking, a state of mind in which there is no longer the idea of "my home." That is all it takes; that is all we need to attain the happiness that comes from forsaking the

home life.

Even an old man who can hardly move about and must remain at home all the time, if he knows Dhamma at this level, while still living in the home, may attain the happiness that comes from forsaking the home life. This is because the term “forsaking the home life” refers to a mental forsaking, to a state in which the mind transcends worldliness and goes beyond it. A person who is living at home may experience the happiness that comes from the home life. Or, he may experience the happiness that comes from forsaking the home life, provided he is capable of looking within using the technique and method of Dhamma.

The happiness of home life is called *lokiya-sukha*, worldly happiness; and the happiness that goes beyond the home life is called *lokuttara-sukha*, transcendent happiness. It all depends on the state of the mind. If a person’s mind is this-worldly, he may stay in a monastery or in the forest, and yet attain nothing more than the happiness of home life, because that person is still yearning and struggling as if his mind were trying to get out of a cage and return home. Solitude in a monastery or any other place cannot help him. All that can help is for the mind to be able to look within.

No matter where we are, we have it in our power to dwell above and beyond the world, above and beyond the home, simply by looking within. That is all! If you think about it you will see that there is a big profit to be made here. Without having to invest any capital, we receive this special kind of happiness which appreciates all the time. As the Buddha said, “*Laddhā mudhā nibbutim̐ bhujjāmānā.*” This sentence

means that *nibbāna* costs nothing; it is free and we don't have to pay for it. All we have to do is "throw away." It's all right to use this term "throw away." Just throw everything away and *nibbāna* arrives. This simply means having a mind high enough not to remain stuck in the world. That is all there is to it. Throw away the world completely and *nibbāna* is here. We don't have to do anything and we don't have to invest anything. We only have to be uninvolved and empty. Live rightly and *nibbāna* will come of itself.

The danger of always looking without is that we get a distorted view of things: we see a snake and think it is just a fish. Anyone who looks within correctly sees all things in their true nature; he sees all things for what they are. He sees a snake as a snake, and a fish as a fish. A person who sees a snake as a fish is likely to try and pick it up, and we know how dangerous that can be. Another way of expressing this is with the saying "seeing a toothed wheel as a lotus flower."\* The meaning is the same, but the danger involved is greater. There is the story of the man who saw a demon with a toothed wheel on his head, from which blood was spraying all over. He mistook the wheel for a lotus flower and begged to have it placed on his own head. When we say that some people would misidentify a snake as a fish, or a toothed wheel as a lotus flower, we mean that they look at all objects the wrong way, and so fall slaves to those objects, and are worse off than if they were in prison or suffering the torments of hell.

\*The wheel is a dangerous whirling disc with sharp teeth, like a spinning saw blade. The point of the story is seeing something evil and dangerous as good and beautiful. (Ed.)

These two examples that I have given should suffice to clarify the point. If I were to go on giving examples, we would be here all day. What has to be seen is, first, the difference between looking without and looking within, and then, the importance of looking within so that this mind can liberate itself from all things.

Now let us look at how we are going wrong, the ways in which we are behaving incorrectly in respect to this matter. Let us look at Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha; at hell and heaven; at *nibbāna*; at religion; at beauty, goodness, truth, justice, and so on; at all the things that we admire and aspire to. Let us see how we stand in respect to them, and whether or not we are as we ought to be.

### TRIPLE REFUGE

We shall look first at the matter of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The foolish person considers this to be very simple. It's as easy as peeling a banana and eating it. He just recites:

*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchami*

*Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchami*

*Sanghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchami*

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dhamma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

And there he has them: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. So he thinks it's very easy; but of course these words are not the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha at all. What he has in mind is merely an outer shell or even something more

superficial than an outer shell.

Suppose we want to see or reach the “Buddha.” If a person looks without, he may identify a Buddha image as the Buddha, which is a mistake; or he may think of that compassionate human being who lived in India over two thousand years ago as the Buddha, but that would still be a mistake. The Buddha strongly condemned that kind of ignorance. He said, “To see the Dhamma is to see the Buddha; to see the Buddha is to see the Dhamma.” To see the Buddha it was not sufficient just to see his physical body walking about. Even among contemporaries of the Buddha, people born right in the same town, Kapilavastu, there were a great many who never saw the real Buddha. They saw only the outer shell of the Buddha and did not recognize the real Buddha. This is why a great many people became the Buddha’s enemies and sought to harm him.

Becoming the Buddha’s enemy is the unfortunate result of not looking at things the right way. There are many of us like this, and we pass our wrong views on to our children and those less educated than ourselves. Just what is the level of university undergraduates in this respect? This is a question you might do well to think about. Ought we to look for the Buddha in the Buddha image? Or in the physical body of the man who lived and moved about in India all those years ago? We must look for him in the condition of voidness, in the condition of being void of “I” and “my,” in the condition of perfect purity, enlightenment, and peace, in which the mind of the Buddha constantly dwelt—that is, in the Dhamma.

“To see the Dhammā is to see the Buddha; to see the Buddha is to see the Dhamma.”

As for the “Dhamma,” if we look within, we are in a position to perceive the Dhamma, which is a source of joy to the mind. If, however, we look without, we lose ourselves in the books and manuscripts of the *Tipiṭaka* (the “three baskets” of Buddhist scripture); or in the sound of monks chanting and preaching, which is thought of as the sound of the Dhamma; or in the rites and rituals, the outward poses of Dhamma practice. Even the practice of insight meditation is usually a kind of pose. We lose ourselves in the poses of Dhamma and fail to penetrate to the Dhamma itself. This happens to many people. How well are we succeeding in penetrating to the Dhamma? The essence of the Dhamma, the real Dhamma, is the condition of freedom from “I” and “my,” the condition of complete purity, enlightenment, and peace, identical with the mental condition attained by the Buddha himself.

Considering the “Sangha,” if we look without, the Sangha is people, someone’s son or grandson ordained at this or that monastery and having this or that title. Worse than this is to see only the yellow cloth and identify that as the Sangha. There are some people who do identify the Sangha with men dressed in yellow robes. This is just the shell, but there are a great many people who grasp at the shell in this way. For example, some people take a dislike to certain monks and then try to make out that the entire Sangha is the same. This is just ignorance and it is the worst form of slander against the Sangha, because the Sangha is not to be identified

with yellow robes or with people who ordain as monks. The real and genuine Sangha is the Dhamma: the condition of freedom or near-freedom from “I” and “my,” the condition of complete or nearly complete purity, enlightenment, and peace. The true Sangha is identical with the essence of the Dhamma, the Dhamma that exists in the mind of the Buddha.

So anyone who has looked deeply and perceived the real truth of the matter knows that the real Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are not three different things; they are one and the same thing. Outwardly there may be three different things, but these are just the shell. The real kernel and essence of them is one simple thing—namely, the condition of freedom from selfhood, the Dhamma which consists in purity, enlightenment, and peace, totally uncontaminated. This is what we call “voidness.” Even in the scriptures we find statements such as, “In terms of externals, Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are three different things; in terms of absolute truth, in essence and real nature, they are one and the same thing.”

## **HEAVEN & HELL**

“Heaven” and “hell” are usually viewed in physical terms. People are interested in hell as it is depicted on temple walls with its various kinds of torments. In fact these were originally nothing other than the thirty-odd forms of punishment meted out to criminals in India at the time of the Buddha. You can read about them in the history books. At least at the time of Asoka (c. 250 B.C.) these forms of punishment for criminals were still in use, so people depicted the worst of these forms of punishment in their illustrations of hell. This

is the superficial view of hell. This is hell as seen by people looking without. Some people who are a little more perceptive identify hell with prison, but this is still hell without. It doesn't burn the mind like the hell within. The hell that is within is stupidity, greed, and anger; delusion, desire, and hatred; fear, worry, and anxiety. They are a kind of hell that is much more to be feared, a kind of hell that is much more difficult to avoid. The kind of hell that is depicted on temple walls is easy to be bold and unconcerned about; we think that no matter what we might do, we would never fall into it. But no one can be bold and unconcerned about the real hell, the hell within that I have just spoken about. If we look within and truly examine it, we find it is something really terrible. It burns us without there being any sign of fire; it ties us up without appearing to; it binds and ensnares us without our knowing. This is the real hell, the hell we see when we look within. Seeing this we become frantic, desperate, and start seeking a safe refuge from it; and that refuge is easy to find and easy to put into practice. But if we go on foolishly looking only at the hell without, we just go on forever lacking a refuge.

It is the same with heaven. The real heaven is contentment, that state in which we are content with what we get and with what we have, the state in which we have Dhamma. When we are content with what we have, that is heaven. As for the heaven that is depicted on temple walls, that is just another case of addiction to external forms, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile sensations—total subjection to sense objects. Celestial beings are smarter than we human beings, and millionaires have the means to do more than we poor people. At each



level we think that the level above must be heaven, owing to our limited understanding. But all this is the kind of heaven that burns us with anxiety. It is all the kind of happiness that cooks us till we are well-done.\* It boils, grills, roasts, and bakes us till we are well-done. There is nothing peaceful and cool about it. Contentment consists in knowing how to be satisfied and pleased with what we have and what we get. To have this is to have real riches, to be really in heaven. A person who doesn't know how to be content with what he has and with what he gets is in hell; he is a perpetual pauper. Even if he is a millionaire, with millions or hundreds of millions in the bank, he is the poorest of paupers, because he suffers from chronic and incurable thirst. So let us not go looking for heaven in the wrong place. Let us seek it intelligently and with right understanding.

\*Here the original has an untranslatable pun on the homonyms *suk* (well-done, cooked) and *sukh* (happiness).

## *NIBBĀNA*

Now we come to the word "*nibbāna*." We often hear old people say that they want to be reborn after death in the Land of Gems, or in the Land of Immortality. They think of *nibbāna* as a land of gems, having seven levels, and so on, because that is what they have been told it is like. They think that *nibbāna* is a land with a definite location. Sometimes they confuse *nibbāna* with the western paradise of the Hindus and Mahayanists. Some people think of *nibbāna* as similar to heaven, but ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times better. They think that if you multiply heaven by 10, by 100,

by 1000, that is *nibbāna*. They are materialists infatuated with sensual pleasures. They take *nibbāna* to be one and the same as heaven. This is what comes of always thinking of *nibbāna* in terms of outward things, thinking of it as something objective. In reality, as we said before, this thing called *nibbāna* is voidness, the epitome of purity, enlightenment, and peace, because it is the absence of all mental defilements, of all mental suffering.

## RELIGION

This brings us to a word that we very often misunderstand: the word “religion” (*sāsanā*). In Buddhism, as in any other religion, older people always have in mind the physical side of it. They identify religion with temples and with rites and rituals. But these are all just outward forms, just fragments of the tangible, material side of it. They are not the real religion, not what the Buddha meant by religion. The word “religion” as used by the Buddha referred to three things: knowledge; practice in accordance with that knowledge; and the purity, clarity, and calm that come as the fruit of that practice. These three together are religion. In Pali they are called *pariyatidhamma*, *paṭipatti-dhamma*, and *paṭivedha-dhamma* (theory, practice, and experience), the three components of religion. It is to this religion that we must penetrate and attain; whether for the knowledge, or for the practice, or as a refuge, you must realize this religion. And what I have just said is true in a very broad sense; it is true of all religions.

Now we come to some miscellaneous matters, an assortment of concepts which are nevertheless very important.

There are things that are very important to us as human beings, because they are the very basis of suffering and happiness. Consider beauty, goodness, truth, and justice. Just what is beauty? What is goodness? What is truth? What is justice?

## **BEAUTY**

Physical “beauty” is perhaps easy enough to understand. Some people make their living out of bodily beauty and are concerned only about that aspect of beauty. Such people are of two kinds: those who themselves possess the bodily beauty and those who come to buy it from them. That is physical beauty, beauty in the body, beauty in skin and flesh. Then there are people who consider that there is beauty in the possession of wealth, and there are some who see beauty in knowledge, such as in a high level of education. Such people are concerned with the body, wealth, or level of education, but these forms of beauty are all of the physical kind. They are just what we see when we look without, at the outside.

Real beauty is something within, something in the mind. If the beauty of Dhamma is present in a person, then that person is beautiful. That person possesses the beauty of Dhamma in body, speech, and mind. It has nothing at all to do with external appearance, wealth, or level of education, though a person who has superficial beauty also, is beautiful in both ways, both within and without. If you must choose between external beauty and internal beauty, which kind will you take? Think it over.

## GOODNESS

On the question of “goodness” the materialist is bound to consider that goodness consists in getting. To get this or that and make it “mine” is good, and everything else is not good. Let’s have a look at this. Let’s look at ourselves and at other people, at all the people in the country, and see what kinds of things they consider to be good. They all consider the things which they get and the process of getting them as good, don’t they? Some people just accept as good whatever everyone else accepts as good. They think, “If everyone else considers such-and-such things as good, how could I possibly disagree? How could I be the one and only person to have a different opinion?” The Buddha never thought like that. Even if everyone in the country disagreed with him, he didn’t mind. For him the good had to be genuinely good; and the genuine good, the ultimate good, consisted in freedom from sorrow, anxiety, suffering, and ignorance. The genuine good had to consist in purity, clarity, and calmness.

Some later schools added to this definition. There have been numerous schools that have come into vogue and then gone out of vogue again, just like short-lived fashions in men’s shirts. Each introduced its own particular concept of good. Each was localized to a certain region and lasted only a short while. At a certain historical period it was considered that the good consisted in this or in that; and then in the next period it was no longer thought to be so. These kinds of good are all just deception and delusion; each of them is a function of the then current level of sophistication.

As for the real and genuine good, that good which human beings ought to attain in this life, there is nothing higher than the coolness of the kind that is found in Dhamma. This alone can be called “the Good.”

## TRUTH

Now let us talk about “truth.” Each of us has eyes, ears, a nose, a tongue, and a touch-sensitive body, so all of us can judge things as true according to what our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body tell us. We can test and verify material things. Worldly truth, which has nothing to do with Dhamma, is a matter of what we see or feel or believe to be true. We are deceived as to the nature of objects and of cause-effect relationships, all of which are subject to change. What is true one moment may not be true the next. Even the laws of science are subject to change, as scientists well know. A “law” which at one point in time is firmly believed to be true is later found not to be true and so is thrown out. This is because the truth at any particular point in time is a function of our ability to perceive it, of our resources for testing and verifying. This is worldly truth, the kind of truth that has nothing to do with Dhamma.

Truth that is truly truth does not change. In identifying “suffering” we must identify true suffering; “freedom from suffering” must be true freedom from suffering; the “cause of suffering” must be the true cause of suffering; and the “way to the elimination of suffering” must be the true way, not some false lead. These truths are the very special truths of the Buddha and of all enlightened beings. Let us think of

truth or of truths in this way. The whole purpose of education in whatever form is to get at truth. The purpose of all philosophy is to arrive at truth. But as things are, education and philosophy are incomplete, are half-baked, go only half way. They just fumble and bumble around with no hope of finding the truth. In seeking truth let us concentrate our attention on the most important matter of all, namely, the matter of suffering (*dukkha*) and the elimination of suffering. To realize this truth is to arrive at the most useful, the most precious, and the best thing there is, although there are countless other things we might examine which would be of no use whatever. This is why the Buddha said, "One thing only I teach: suffering and the elimination of suffering." There were countless other things about which he might have talked but regarding which he remained silent. From the first day he spoke only of one thing, the thing that is the most useful of all.

## JUSTICE

Finally, we come to the word "justice" or "rightness." In this world, it may sometimes be the case that "might is right," or that expediency is right, or that the evidence given by a witness is made the basis for rightness and justice. Now if the witness is lying, or if he is mistaken regarding the accuracy of his evidence, then the supposed justice based upon it is totally deceptive. Real justice can only be based on Dhamma. Justice based on worldly criteria is worldly justice; it is always only outward, relative justice. On the other hand, justice that is based on Dhamma is totally independent of human error. It is absolute. Examples are the law of *kamma*; the law of

impermanence, suffering, and non-self; and the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the extinction of suffering, and the way leading to the extinction of suffering. These are absolute and they are totally just. They do not favour anyone; no-one has any special privileges in respect to them. They are laws of nature which have fixed, absolute force.

Let us keep in view the kind of justice that we can genuinely rely on, and make it our refuge. Don't become infatuated with worldly justice, which is inconsistent and relative. Don't be too much for it or against it, because worldly justice is bound to be only as it is. Sometimes we may disagree with worldly justice, sometimes we may totally disapprove of it. The workings of worldly justice sometimes make us feel elated and sometimes make us weep. This is an intolerable situation. We need a kind of justice which doesn't make us weep, feel elated, or get excited about worldly matters. That kind of justice is to be found in the principles of Dhamma; they are the best criteria for rightness. Holding to Dhamma as the basis for justice, we shall be able to laugh within, not without; we shall be able to smile within forever after, and that is the elimination of suffering (*dukkha*).

## CHARMS

There is just one more little thing that I would like to say: something about charms and talismans—outward talismans and inward talismans. Outward talismans are the sort that people wear around their necks, foreheads, and waists. They are so common that I don't need to tell you anything about them. But what kind of protection do they really give? We

can go and look at the corpses of people who have been killed and find that they were wearing talismans. And we can see people yet living who are suffering greatly, people who are being burnt up with distress and anxiety. The more distressed they become the more talismans they hang about themselves and the more they perform rituals like pouring prayer water. And the more they do all this, the more distressed and anxious they become. The more they do this, the more deluded they become, too. These are the benefits of outward talismans.

The benefits of inward talismans, the genuine Buddhist talismans, are just the opposite. Anyone who wears the talismans of calmness and coolness acquires instant purity, clarity, and calm. If, in the ultimate case, he wears the highest of all talismans, he dwells in total voidness, in total freedom from harassment and annoyance of any kind. This is the effect of the Buddha's talismans.

All that has been said here simply explains the conditions and characteristics necessary for an understanding of looking within. Should we look without or look within? How should we look? Which way of looking is most important? If we are loyal to Dhamma, to religion, or to the Buddha, there's nothing to do but hurry and practice looking within. In particular, we ought to extinguish inner suffering. The genuine cessation of suffering is an internal matter; it must happen within. Thus, there are no sacred objects, holy ceremonies, divine powers and persons, or any such holy things. Dhamma alone is sacred and holy.

Genuine Dhamma is reality. We needn't mention "holiness," for Dhamma far surpasses holiness. Compared with



the word “Dhamma,” “holiness” has very little value. So it is best to give up all of the holy objects and sacred ceremonies. If one falls for such holy things, one will never meet the truly sacred and holy thing—Dhamma. Trust in, dependence on, or complacency towards superficial, external things prevents one from realizing the essence within. It’s like only eating the bitter rinds of mangosteens but never the sweet flesh. The refreshing fruit is never experienced, although such benefits exist in the world because Nature has created them for us and created us with the ability to realize them.

Realizing the fifth essence is one of the fruits of looking within. Realizing the sixth essence, voidness, is an even better one. This looking within penetrates to the heart and center of all things. In the end there is oneness with voidness—being empty of “I” and “my.”

These are the fruits and benefits of knowing how to look within, of realizing the subjective state that becomes apparent when we look within. Looking within is characterized by activity rather than passivity, and the active one is always victorious. We should be victorious, undefeated in this way, as is appropriate for disciples of the Buddha. The Buddha is sometimes called “The Victorious One” (*jina*), “The Victorious Lion” (*jinasīha*), and “The Victorious Monarch” (*jinarāja*), for he is victorious over everything. We too can be victorious by using his methods. As explained above, success comes with expertise in looking within.



# *HAPPINESS & HUNGER*

Lecture to foreign meditators at Suan Mokkhabalarama  
7 May 1986

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu



Today I'd like to talk about something which most of you probably misunderstand. Although you've all come here with an interest in Buddhism, you may have some wrong understanding. For this reason, please gather your mental energies and set your mind to the task of listening. Pay special attention to what will be said today.

The thing we'll be talking about is happiness (*sukha*). This is a word that is quite ambiguous both in Thai, *kwam sukh*, in the Pali language, *sukha*, and even in English, happiness. In all three languages, this word has many varied meanings and applications. It's often difficult to understand exactly what people mean when they say the word "happiness." Because this subject can get very mixed up, it is necessary to reach some understanding of this thing, which is why we'll be speaking about happiness today.

The happiness felt in the everyday lives of ordinary people is one meaning of happiness. Then, there is the other kind of happiness, the happiness that arises with the realization of the final goal of life. There are these two very different things, but we call both of them "happiness." Generally, we mix up these two meanings, confuse them, and never quite understand what we're talking about.

## WHICH HAPPINESS DO YOU WANT?

Here's one example of how the ambiguity of this word can cause problems. It's likely that you came here to study and practice Dhamma in search of happiness. Your understanding of happiness, the happiness you desire, however, may not be the same happiness that is the genuine goal of Buddhism and the practice of Dhamma. If the *sukha* (happiness) that you desire is not the *sukha* that arises from Dhamma practice, then we're afraid that you'll be disappointed, or even heartbroken here. It's necessary to develop some understanding of this matter.

In order to save time and make it easy for you to understand, let's set down a simple principle for the understanding of happiness. The usual happiness that common people are interested in is when a particular hunger or want is satisfied. This is the typical understanding of happiness. In the Dhamma sense, however, happiness is when there is no hunger or want at all, when we're completely free of all hunger, desire, and want. Help to sort this out right at this point by paying careful attention to the following distinction: happiness because hunger is satisfied and happiness due to no hunger at all. Can you see the difference? Can you feel the distinction between the happiness of hunger and the happiness of no hunger?

Let's take the opportunity now to understand the words "*lokiya*" and "*lokuttara*," as they are relevant to the matter we're investigating today. *Lokiya* means "proceeding according to worldly matters and concerns." *Lokiya* is to be in the world, caught within the world, under the power and influence of

the world. Common translations are “worldly” and “mundane.” *Lokuttara* means “to be above the world.” It is beyond the power and influence of the world. It can be translated “transcendent” or “supramundane.” Now we can more easily compare the two kinds of happiness: *lokiya-sukha* (worldly happiness), which is trapped under the power of, governed by the conditions and limitations of, what we call “the world,” and *lokuttara-sukha* (transcendent happiness), which is beyond all influence of the world. See this distinction and understand the meaning of these two words as clearly as possible.

We must look at these more closely. *Lokiya* means “stuck in the world, dragged along by the world,” so that worldly power and influence dominate. In this state there is no spiritual freedom; it’s the absence of spiritual independence. *Lokuttara* means “unstuck, released from the world.” It is spiritual freedom. Thus, there are two kinds of happiness: happiness that is not free and happiness that is independent, the happiness of slavery and the happiness of freedom.

This is the point that we’re afraid you’ll misunderstand. If you’ve come here looking for *lokiya-sukha*, but you study Buddhism which offers the opposite kind of happiness, you’re going to be disappointed. You won’t find what you desire. The practice of Dhamma, including a wise meditation practice, leads to *lokuttara-sukha* and not to worldly happiness. We must make this point clear from the very beginning. If you understand the difference between these two kinds of *sukha*, however, you’ll understand the purpose of Suan Mokkh and won’t be disappointed here.

By now you ought to understand the difference between the two kinds of happiness: the happiness that comes from getting what we hunger for and the happiness of the total absence of hunger. How different are they? Investigate the matter and you will see these things for yourself. The happiness of “hunger satisfied” and the happiness of “no hunger”: we can not define them more succinctly or clearly than this.

### **ENDLESS HUNGER**

Now we'll observe further that the happiness based in the satisfaction of hunger is hopeless and can never be satisfied. The many things which arouse hunger are always changing. Whatever satisfies hunger changes, making that satisfaction fleeting and illusory, and so hunger returns. Hunger itself changes and, hence, can never be satisfied. This situation is eternal. The world today is stuck in this happiness which comes with fulfilling desires. The modern world is trapped in this endless problem.

Imagine, if you can, that you are the sole owner of the world, of the universe, of the entire cosmos. Now that you're the owner of everything, does hunger stop? Can it stop? Would you please examine this carefully with and in your own mind. If you were to get everything that you could possibly desire, to the point that you owned the whole world, would your hunger cease? Or would you hunger for a second universe? Would you want a third?

Consider the fact that hunger never ends by our attempts to satisfy it. In spite of this, the world today continues to develop in education and evolution that seeks merely to produce things



which are more lovely and satisfying. Modern technology and science are slaves of hunger. Our world is falling into this deep hole of endlessly producing increasingly seductive things to try to satisfy hunger. But where are you going to find happiness in such a world?

I'd like to make some comparisons to illustrate how the worldly happiness of common sentient beings advances from phase to successive phase. The new-born infant is happy when it is cuddled in its mother's arms and sucks milk from her breast. This satisfies the infant until it grows a little older, a little bigger. Then the mother's arms and breast aren't enough. It learns about other foods and delights. Now its happiness depends on ice cream, candy, and junk food, on playing little games and running around the house. Then it grows older and those games don't satisfy the child any more. It wants to play football or play with dolls. These two are outgrown eventually and the teenager's interests and happiness revolve around sex. The previous kinds of satisfaction are of no more interest. When they become young men and women, don't expect them to be satisfied with the old types of happiness. Now, all they think about is sex and dates. Finally, the human being marries, becomes a wife or husband, and has hopes and wishes tied up in a house, money, and possessions. There's no way they can be satisfied with childish happiness (unless they haven't really grown up). The human being changes from stage to stage, and happiness also changes from stage to stage. It is continuous and endless. Hunger develops from stage to stage until death. After that, many believe, there is rebirth as a *deva* (celestial being); and still there's hunger,

heavenly hunger for the happiness of *devas*. It never stops. Even in heaven with the gods or in the kingdom of God, should such things exist, hunger doesn't stop. In Buddhism these all are considered to be examples of worldly happiness that only deceives and confuses.

### **WHERE DOES HUNGER STOP?**

I'd like to ask if in the Kingdom of God, or in whatever place God is, whether according to the scriptures of Christianity or any other religion, when we're with God can hunger and desire stop? If the Kingdom of God is the end of hunger and craving, then it's the same thing as Buddhism teaches: *nibbāna*, or the happiness that is beyond the world because hunger has ended. But if we understand the Kingdom of God differently, if it is a place where we still hunger, then Buddhism isn't interested. Endless desire for better and better things to take as one's own is not the goal of Buddhism. Buddhism takes the fork in the road that leads beyond the world.

As for this thing we call "the world," in the Buddhist description it is divided into many levels, realms, or wanderings. There's the common human world, with which we're most familiar, and its human types of *sukha*. Above this are the various heavenly realms where the *devas* supposedly live. First, there are the sensual wanderings, the *kāmāvacara*, of those who have sexual desires. These are supposed to be "good," at least better than the human realm. Next, there are the Brahma wanderings, of which there are two categories: those dependent on form (matter) and those independent of form. These are better than the normal realms of existence,

but they aren't the end of hunger. There is no more sensual hunger in the *rūpāvacara*, the fine-material wanderings, but the "beings" there still hunger after material existence. The "beings" of the *arūpāvacara*, the non-material wanderings, are hungry as well. They hunger for non-material things rather than material. On each of these worldly levels hunger persists. The wants of the self don't stop. There are always things which the self wants. These highly refined states of happiness utterly fail to transcend the world. Even the highest Brahma realm is caught within the world, trapped below the power and influence of desire.

How are we going to finish hunger? We must turn around and destroy it. We don't need hunger. We must take this other path where there is no hunger. The essence of this path is the absence of the feeling of self, of "I" and "mine." This point is very profound. How much knowledge must we have, how much must we see, in order to stop this illusion of self?

It is necessary to realize this connection between the end of hunger and the cessation of the self illusion. In worldly situations there is always a self or "I" who hungers and strives to satisfy that hunger. Even if this self is on the highest heavenly level where hunger is only for the most refined things, nonetheless, there's a hungry self trying to get. Hunger persists as this self seeks to acquire things for itself without ever truly succeeding. By examining the many levels of getting and of happiness, we see that hunger is hopeless. Why? Because "self" is hopeless.

## “THE BEST”

When you arrive at this stage, you ought to be familiar with what we call “the good” or “the best.” You all have ideas about “the best” and think that you deserve to get and have “the best.” Your hunger only goes as far as “the best.!! Whatever you identify as “the best”—whether a day on the beach or five minutes of rest from the turmoil in your head—is where your hunger grasps. Even while basking in God’s radiance, the hunger for the best doesn’t stop. We desire one kind of “the best,” but as soon as we get it our hunger reaches after a better “the best.” This has no end as long as there’s a self that wants “the best.” “The best” has no end point; we can’t take it as our final goal. We continuously talk about “the best” or about the *summum bonum*, but our meanings are so very different: the best of children, of teenagers, of adults, of old folks; the best of the world and of religion. Yet each of these visions of “the best” makes us “the hungriest”—hungry in refined, profound, subtle ways. We can never stop and rest in any “the best,” for they are all *lokiya-sukha*.

“The best” cannot stand alone. It doesn’t go anywhere without its mate “the worst.” Through our grasping at “the best” we’re burdened also with “the worst.” Thus, our fixation on “the best” is merely self-perpetuating hunger. There’s only one way out. If we keep searching for *sukha* in the world, we’ll never find it. We must turn in the other direction, toward *lokuttara-sukha*. Hunger must end, even hunger for “the best.” Evil is one kind of busy trouble. Good is just another kind of trouble. To be free of all *dukkha*, the mind must be beyond good and evil, above best and worst—that is, it must dwell in

voidness. This is the opposite of worldly happiness. It's the *lokuttara-sukha* of freedom from the self that hungers. There's no other way out of *dukkha* than from evil to good and then from good to voidness. In voidness hunger stops and there is true happiness.

### **THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL**

Those of you who are Christians or who have read the Bible will be familiar with the story of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that appears at the beginning of Genesis. It tells how God forbade Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them that they would die if they did not obey. If you understand the meaning of this passage, you will understand the core of Buddhism. When there is no knowledge of good and evil, we can't attach to them, we're void and free of *dukkha*. Once we know about good and evil, we attach to them and must suffer *dukkha*. The fruit of that tree is this attachment to good and evil. This causes *dukkha* and *dukkha* is death, spiritual death.

Adam's children, down through the ages to us, carry this burden of knowing good and evil, the burden of the self that attaches to good and evil and suffers spiritual death. We identify things as good and attach to them. We identify things as bad and detach from them. We are trapped in worldly conditions by our dualistic obsession with good and bad. This is the death of which God warned. Will you heed his warning?

Now what are we who have inherited this problem going to do about it? To continue running after the satisfaction of

our hunger for “the best” is simply to perpetuate this cycle of birth and death. Thus, Buddhism isn’t interested in any of the realms of *lokiya-sukha*, of good, better, and best. The Buddhist solution is to be above good and evil—to be void.

Please understand that “the best” is not the highest thing. If you talk about God as the “supreme good,” Buddhists won’t be able to accept your words. To say that God, the highest thing in the universe, is the collection of everything good or the perfection of good is to limit God, The Supreme Thing, within dualistic conditions. Buddhists cannot accept this. The God of the Bible himself said that if we know good and evil we must die.

If you say, however, that God—if we choose to use this word—is beyond good and evil, then Buddhists can agree. In Buddhism, the goal is to transcend both good and evil, and realize voidness—to be void of “I,” “me,” “mine,” and “myself.” If we don’t know good and evil, we can’t attach to them and there is no *dukkha*. Or, if we know good and evil but still don’t attach to them, then there is no *dukkha* just the same. Thus, the highest point for humanity is beyond good.

## **ABOVE & BEYOND GOOD**

Beyond good there is nothing to hunger for and no one to hunger. Hunger stops. The “I” who hungers and all its desires disappear in voidness—the emptiness of self and soul. This voidness is the purpose of the practice of Dhamma. It is the way to transcend the endless cycles of hunger and worldly happiness. It is the Supreme Thing, the final goal of Buddhism.

The thing to observe in this matter is that it is impossible to attach to good and evil when there's no knowledge of good and evil. When there's no attachment, there's no *dukkha* and no problem. Once the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been eaten, however, there is this knowledge of good and evil. What happens then? If we lack the wisdom (*paññā*) to know that we shouldn't attach to good and evil, we'll go and attach to the good and evil of common sentient beings. Thus, there is *dukkha*, which brings with it all the problems of life. These are the results of eating that fruit: attachment, *dukkha*, and death.

Once there is this knowledge, there is no going back to a state of innocence in which good and evil aren't known. After this knowledge arises, after the fruit has been eaten, we must go on to know fully that good and evil cannot be attached to. It is our duty and responsibility to learn this. Don't attach to good and evil because they are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). Good and evil are *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. When there's this correct knowledge of good and evil, there's no attachment. Then there's no death, just as with Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit. We've all eaten that fruit; we all know about good and evil. There's no going back to a state of innocence for us. Instead, we have the duty to know that good and evil should not be attached to. They must not be attached to. Please understand this matter wisely.

Don't attach to good and evil. Know them so thoroughly that you will never attach to them. This is the heart of Buddhism and the essence of Christianity. Both religions teach this

same thing, although people may interpret it in quite different ways. If you understand this, you will have the key to the genuine happiness of freedom from hunger.

You can see that if we grasp and cling to “good,” we are hungry for good. If we have something better, we hunger for what is better. If we have what is the best, we hunger for the best. No matter how “best” something is, it still causes hunger. We hunger for the best best. Inevitably, this hunger is the problem that leads to *dukkha*. No matter what the degree of hunger, it will still cause some sort of *dukkha*. Coarse hunger afflicts us in a crude way, while even the most subtle hunger—so refined that it can’t be seen or understood—harms us in a way too subtle to be seen. If there is hunger, there will be *dukkha*. Life will be troubled and disturbed, making perfect peace and perfect happiness impossible.

## VOIDNESS

This is why Buddhism teaches voidness (*suññatā*)—the voidness of “I” and “mine” that transcends the best. If we have knowledge of beyond the best, of the voidness that is neither good nor evil, there’s no problem. In *suññatā* there’s no hunger. Even the most subtle levels of hunger disappear. Therein *dukkha* is quenched and true spiritual peace remains. This is the final goal. As long as there is the slightest hunger, it prevents the final goal. As soon as all hunger has been extinguished, and with it all problems and all *dukkha*, genuine emancipation is evident. Emancipation in Buddhism is this freedom from hunger that comes with the realization of *suññatā* (voidness). Please study this matter until your life is totally



free of hunger.

## NATURAL HUNGER & UNNECESSARY HUNGER

Let's go back and take another look at this thing we call "hunger." We ought to know that there are two levels of hunger. First, there is physical, material hunger, which is a natural process of life. The body instinctually feels hunger regarding its natural needs: clothing, food, shelter, medicine, exercise. This kind of hunger is no problem. It doesn't cause *dukkha* and can be satisfied without causing *dukkha*. Then, there is the second kind of hunger, which is mental, that we call "spiritual hunger." This is the hunger of thinking born out of attachment. Physical hunger really has no meaning, for it causes no problems. Even animals experience physical hunger, so they eat as allowed by the limits of the situation. Spiritual hunger, however, being tied up with ignorance (*avijjā*) and attachment (*upādāna*), destroys the coolness and calm of the mind, which is true happiness and peace, thus bringing *dukkha*.

The problem of human beings is that our minds have developed beyond the animal mind. The consciousness of animals has not learned how to turn physical hunger into mental hunger. They don't attach to their instinctual hunger as we do, so they are free of the *dukkha* caused by craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*). The human mind is more highly evolved and suffers from more highly evolved hunger. Through attachment the human mind knows spiritual hunger.

We must distinguish between these two kinds of hunger. Physical hunger can be dealt with easily. One day of work

can satisfy our bodily needs for many days. With mindfulness and wisdom, physical hunger is no problem. Don't foolishly make it into *dukkha*. When it arises, just see it as *tathatā*—thusness, the state of being “just like that.” The body has a nervous system. When it lacks something that it needs there arises a certain activity which we call “hunger.” That's all there is to it—*tathatā*. Don't let it cook up into spiritual hunger by attaching to it as “my hunger” or the “I who hungers.” That is very dangerous, for it causes a lot of *dukkha*. When the body is hungry, eat mindfully and wisely. Then physical hunger won't disturb the mind.

Hunger is solely a mental problem. The highly developed human mind develops hunger into the spiritual hunger that results in attachment. These are mental phenomena—*taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (grasping and clinging, attachment)—which aren't at all cool. Although we may be millionaires, with homes full of consumer products and pockets full of money, we still hunger spiritually. The more we consume, the more we hunger. However much we try to satisfy mental hunger, to that extent it will expand, grow, and disturb the mind ever more. Even billionaires are spiritually hungry.

So how are we to solve this problem? There is the Dhamma principle that stopping this foolish hunger results in peace of mind, cool happiness, freedom from disturbance.

Physical hunger doesn't bother us. It's easy to take care of, to find something to eat that satisfies the hunger. Spiritual hunger, however, is another matter. The more we eat, the more we hunger. This is the problem we're caught in—being annoyed, pestered, bothered, agitated by spiritual

hunger. When nothing annoys the mind, that is true happiness. This may sound funny to you, but the absence of disturbance is genuine happiness.

We're sure that each of you is bothered by hopes and wishes. You've come here with your hopes and expectations. These hopes, wishes, and expectations are another kind of spiritual hunger, so be very careful about them. Don't let them become dangerous! Find a way to stop the expecting and hoping. Live by *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom); don't live by expectations.

Usually we teach children to be full of wishes—to “make a wish,” to “dream the impossible dream.” This isn't correct. Why teach them to live in spiritual hunger? It torments them, even to the point of causing physical pain, illness, and death. It would be kinder to teach them to live without hunger, especially without spiritual hunger. Live with *sati-paññā*, do whatever must be done, but don't hope, don't dream, don't expect. Hopes are merely spiritual hunger. Teach them not to attach. No hunger, neither physically nor mentally—think about it—what happiness that would be! There's no happiness greater than this. Can you see?

### THREE KINDS OF SOLITUDE

Lastly, we'll talk about the benefits of the end of hunger. To do so, we'll ask you to learn one more Pali word. Listen carefully and remember it, for it is a most important word: *viveka*, in Pali; *vivek*, in Thai. *Viveka* can be translated “utmost aloneness, perfect singleness, complete solitude.” Because people no longer understand this correctly, you've

probably never heard of it. First, know that *viveka* has three levels. Physical *viveka* (*kāya-viveka*) is when nothing disturbs the physical level of life. Mental *viveka* (*citta-viveka*) is when no emotions disturb the mind, when the *citta* isn't troubled by things like sexual lust, hatred, fear, frustration, envy, sentimentality, and love. This mental *viveka* can occur even in a crowded noisy room; it isn't dependent on physical solitude. The third kind, spiritual *viveka* (*upadhi-viveka*) is when no feelings or thoughts of attachment to "I" and "mine," "soul" or "myself" disturb the mind. If all three levels happen, you are truly alone and free.

Merely being free of physical disturbances while emotions pester one isn't *viveka*. Many "meditators" run off into forests and caves to find solitude, but if they bring their emotions with them, they won't find what they're looking for. True happiness will elude them. If the emotions don't annoy them, but feelings of "I" and "mine" disturb and distract them, it can't be called "*viveka*," either. There must be no feeling of "I" or "mine" interfering. Then, there will be no hunger of any kind disturbing and no hopes pestering. This is solitude. The mind is perfectly alone. This is the happiness that is the aim of Buddhism. It is *vimutti* (emancipation) on Buddhism's highest level. The final goal of Buddhism, the highest liberation, isn't a mind that is merely happy or quiet. The ultimate goal is total freedom from all attachment, from any clinging to "I" or "mine." We want you to know about these three levels of *viveka*.

If you are able to practice mindfulness with breathing completely and correctly through all sixteen of its steps and

stages, then you will discover these three kinds of *viveka*. Then you will receive the happiness of never being tormented by hunger again. But if you don't like this kind of happiness, if you prefer the happiness of responding to hunger, of feeding desire, then nothing can help you. Buddhism won't be able to help you a bit. It can't help you because Buddhism aims to eliminate the kind of happiness and enjoyment that depends on things to satisfy its hunger. We want that to end. We need the kind of *viveka* that is undisturbed by hunger.

This is what we are afraid you may misunderstand. If you don't understand the Buddhist kind of happiness, you might expect something that Buddhism can't provide. Then you will be disappointed. You will be wasting your time here. If you want the happiness that comes from responding to hunger, we have nothing to talk about. There's nothing for us to say. But if you want the happiness born from not having any hunger at all, we have something to talk about. And we've said it already.

We hope that you will meet with success in your practice and development of mindfulness with breathing. Once you have, you will receive the genuine happiness born of the total absence of hunger.

Thank you for coming to Suan Mokkh and using it beneficially.



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

Lecture at Suan Mokkhabalarama  
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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-Vipassanā* 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 & DANGEROUS TIMES**

Obviously, this kind of progress leads to strange and powerful results. In Dhamma language, we call these results *atimahantāramaṇa* (*ati*, extreme; *mahanta*, great; *āramaṇa*, 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 *atimahantāramaṇa*. 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—*amātāputtikabhaya*, “danger that makes one parentless.”

The danger we're discussing here is *amātāputtika*. It's so great that not even our parents can rescue us. It's so vast that we can't help our 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 at both matters that encourage liking and that encourage 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-vipassanā* 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 *anattā* (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self). Realize *suññatā* (voidness, selflessness), *tathatā* (thusness), and then *idappaccayatā* (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 *tathatā* 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-vipassanā* 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 VIPASSANĀ ARE ONE**

When we say “*samatha-vipassanā* for the nuclear age,” we ought to realize the significance of joining the words *samatha* (tranquility) and *vipassanā* (insight) together. *Samatha-vipassanā* 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 *vipassanā* 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 *idappaccayatā*—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 *idappaccayatā* 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 (*vipassanā*), seeing the characteristics, conditions, and truth of the thing. These two kinds of seeing happen together. We can say that *samādhi* (concentration) is added to *paññā* (wisdom). *Samādhi* is the mind steadfastly focusing on the object; *paññā* is seeing what the thing is about, what characteristics it has, and what its truth is. For example, to look at and fix on a stone is *samādhi*, then to see that this stone is flowing continuously in change is *paññā*. 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 *samādhi* and *paññā*. Rather than distinguishing between the two, both together are called "Zen." In Pali the word is "*jhāna*" and in Sanskrit it is "*dhyāna*," 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\* 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,

\*These are the three trainings (*sikkhā*) which make up the path that quenches *dukkha*.

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 *vipassanā* 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 *idappaccayatā*; 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 and 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 yet a self, some person that is here. In “having gone,” 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 (*vipassanā*). 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 10 precepts or the 227 precepts. Collecting the power of the body and

mind into scrutinizing one certain thing—that collecting is *sīla*, the looking is *samādhi*, and the seeing of the truth of that thing is *paññā-vipassanā*.

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 *samādhi* and *paññā*. Have a small child write the ABCs; she'll improve daily. This shows that there is *samādhi* (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 *samādhi* and *pañña* 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. *Sīla* 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 *samādhi* and *paññā*. 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-paññā*), 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 & 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 *samādhi* and *paññā* 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 *samādhi* and *paññā*, 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. *Samādhi* is the weight that provides the power to chop, and *paññā* 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 *samādhi* component and the *paññā* 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 (*paññā*). 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. *Samādhi* 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 or 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—*samādhi* and *paññā*. 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 *samādhi* and *paññā* can't be separated, and that *sīla* 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 *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.



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 *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, 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 subsystem of Right View and Right Intention. In the Noble 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 mouths 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-vipassanā* 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—“*Svākkhāto bhagavatā 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-Vipassanā* for the Nuclear Age.”

### **WHY IS SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ 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 belittle 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* increases 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 *amātāputtikabhaya*—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 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-paññā* (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. Later, 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-paññā* (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 deeply in that infatuated love, it grips us too strongly to pull 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 *vipassanā* 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 *anattā* (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 (*attā*) 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 *assāda*, the delicious charm of the world they have known. So cultivate the mind. Increase *samatha* and *vipassanā* to higher levels and the mind will incline toward the side of genuine truth. The truth that doesn't deceive is the truth of *anattā*, 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 *vipassanā* 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 to 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 *idappaccayatā* just like that; there's no I-ego nor things of mine, 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 *suññatā* (voidness), the condition of being void of self because there is only *idappaccayatā* (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 *idappaccayatā*—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 believes 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 created 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 enamours 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-vipassanā* 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-vipassanā* 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-vipassanā*, 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 worldings, for they become ever more thoroughgoing worldings 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.

As is well known, a kitten will be frightened of a brick or a block of wood if we tie the kitten to it with a rope. The kitten is afraid of the block because it believes the block is dangerous, and so cries in fear. It's the same with modern man. He creates all sorts of things, thinking that they will be good, progressive, advantageous, rich, or whatever the dream, but they end up causing him to be afflicted by fear and the many other problems caused by those things. In economics, politics, and other arenas of social competition, people are producing things that frighten them and cause them problems. Because wisdom is inadequate these things are common. So don't let these things into your homes, don't let them spook you into stupidity, fear, insomnia, and neurosis. These things which irritate the nerves, don't let them in. If you allow them to enter, they'll bite their owner so that, at a minimum, you can't sleep at night. *Vipassanā* (insight) is the clear, bright knowledge that will get rid of all these things.

Nowadays, we lack adequate wisdom and think ropes are snakes. Things that aren't even dangerous frighten people to death, although they are only things that have arisen out of our own foolishness and inability to think in the right way. This sort of thing is happening more and more. On the other hand, people see saw-tooth discs as lotus flowers: things which can genuinely help are seen as useless, while dangerous

things are taken to be helpful.

People search out the bait of defilements as solutions for their problems. This is what is meant by the saying, “People see saw-tooth discs as lotus flowers.”\* Such remedies are more harmful than the problems, yet these remedies are all too common these days. Saw-tooth discs are mistaken for lotuses, ropes are mistaken for snakes, dangerous cures are taken for minor illnesses. We create these things out of our own stupidity; otherwise they wouldn’t exist. Then when it’s time to get rid of them, we can’t. We see things backward; we take unsolvable messes as the solutions to our difficulties.

### **SACRED OBJECTS ARE NO HELP**

Which brings us to a matter for which I’ve been criticized many times. If I say anything more, I’ll be attacked again, but I can’t skip over the topic of magic, sacred objects, charms, and talismans. They can’t solve anything, but people still use them as solutions. They’re conjured up without pause. I’ve even asked people with chains of amulets around their necks, “If we fill our homes and cities with these things, will your suffering end? If we fill the world with charms and amulets, will the world be free of *dukkha*?” They answer “No...no...” with a load of the things clanging around their necks.

Things that can’t help, we want. Things that can help, we don’t want. What are we going to do? The things that nourish intelligence and *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom) are tossed away unwanted, while things that darken and dim the mind are wanted, hoarded, and clung to more and more.

\* cf. “Looking Within”, p. xx



What can we do about this? Whose problem is this; whose mistake is it? Is it the error of Buddhism? Of the followers of Buddhism? Whose fault is it? Please think about this carefully.

Only when correct understanding and sufficient wisdom or *vipassanā* arrive will this darkness be cleared up and dispelled.

### **SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ CAN STOP THE CRISES**

Now to the next topic: What advantages will nuclear age *samatha-vipassanā* bring? Actually, I've been telling you all along throughout this talk. To make it completely clear and easy to remember, I'll say it again now. It will stop all the crises, and then there can be permanent peace. By "crises" we mean all the difficulties, hardships, and abnormalities in our world. When these things are absent, there is peace. This world has two conditions which oppose each other: crisis and peace. When the world is full of hardships, we call it "crisis"; when the world is full of tranquility, we call it "peace." In order to calm away the crises and not cause any new ones, and then have genuine, lasting peace take their place, we must use *samatha-vipassanā* that is appropriate for the nuclear age.

The essence of this matter is: dispel the darkness, let in the light, then walk the correct path. When the darkness is gone, the light can shine, and it will be possible to walk the right path. That's all there is to it, this is our only objective. There's a metaphor which I've used in the past: correct *samatha-vipassanā* will be a cloth to wipe away the tears of crying people, whether the tears of beggars or the tears of millionaires. The rich and wealthy also cry; they commit suicide, they feel

oppressed, they let tears fall the same as beggars. The cloth that can wipe away the tears on all levels is just this one—knowledge of *samatha-vipassanā* that is sufficient for the nuclear age.

Beggars, if they're silly, cry just the same. They'll need to use that very same tear-wiping cloth as the millionaires, the exact same cloth. Think about it. Is this necessary or is it not? Between the beggars and the millionaires there are many levels of people: the ordinary poor, farmers, laborers, merchants, civil servants, professionals, and whoever, up to the rich, royalty, and the deities in heaven. If the deities up in heaven begin to cry, they'll need the same cloth to wipe away their tears. This is how it is; there's no cloth to wipe away the tears of fools other than *samatha-vipassanā* that is up to the mark and appropriate for the nuclear era.

This metaphor covers many topics. It covers all the terribly fearsome matters that lead people to hang charms and talismans around their necks. Nothing else will dispel that fear except for correct knowledge of true *samatha-vipassanā*. This is appropriate and true protection, because it doesn't lead to ignorance, craving, clinging, and then the arising of *dukkha*. It isn't possible for *dukkha* to arise in the mind and heart of a person who has full nuclear age *samatha-vipassanā*. That person's mind is cool, cool because no fires of defilement burn it, for in that mind is the meaning of "*nibbāna*." *Nibbāna* is coolness, all levels of coolness, from that of this type of person right up to the final level which is absolute coolness. When there is no longer self, no *kilesas* (defilements) are born

again; this is the highest, the supreme and final level of coolness—*nibbāna*.

Or if you prefer, it's *amata* (deathlessness), not dying, beyond death, which is the same thing. When *samatha-vipassanā* are fulfilled completely, there will be no one to die. With no individual who dies, there is no death. We call this *amata*, deathlessness, because there is no person who dies. Now, however, there is still attachment to a person, an individual—namely, “me.” Thus there must be the one who dies: one who is born, who ages, who falls ill, who dies. When we attain the highest *sati-paññā* of the Buddha, to the point where there is no self or soul belonging to anyone, there is no more birth, ageing, illness, and death.

This, exactly this, is the goal. There must be this level of *sati-paññā* especially in this age when everything helps create stupidity. Progress in the modern world only serves to encourage stupidity—infatuation with the new, the strange, the delicious, the seductive. There's nothing that causes us to be aware of what should and should not be done, what is enough and more than enough. Because nothing encourages such awareness, we fall into delusion almost from birth. As soon as a baby is born from its mother's womb into this modern world, it is met by all sorts of things that lead it astray. The baby begins its life by going astray, then loses its way more and more, until there is nothing better than what it likes. Consequently, today's children have no parents, no teachers, no religious exemplars, no merits and good deeds, no religion, nothing much of use or benefit. They have only ego, just this ego that wants to satisfy its selfish defilements.

This is the real problem. I'm not saying that everyone is like this, but it's getting worse, and eventually everyone will be deluded. Not everyone has reached that point yet, but the way is being prepared for everyone to fall.

So whoever has a child, grandchild, or great-grandchild—be careful! Set them on the right path. Turn them around on to the path that they should travel. To do otherwise is equivalent to turning them loose to walk into hell, into blazing fires, into things that make life purposeless, where there are only problems and *dukkha*. Please accept this knowledge as something essential, to be developed and preserved for sentient beings and human beings. Without this knowledge there is no humanity; there is nothing to distinguish us from beasts.

### **INCREASE SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ'S POWER**

There's one more topic and we'll be finished. What method will do it? What method will produce *samatha-vipassanā* that is appropriate for the nuclear age? We've said this so many times, it's like pounding our fist on the ground. We insist on it and there's no way for it to be wrong. We speak according to the principles of the Buddha's teaching and with certainty pound the earth with our fist. There's no room for error; it's correct both in foolish ways and in the true way. We'll take the way that is correct, the way that will extinguish *dukkha*. The true path will quench all suffering.

We must realize that the needed Dhamma principle already exists. The Noble Eightfold Path—exclusively this and nothing else—can solve the problem. There is only this way. No other path can solve the problem and quench *dukkha*;

the Noble Eightfold Path is the only way. To increase its power and energy is to increase the power of that very same *samatha-vipassanā*. The Lord Buddha used the two interchangeably. When he spoke of the path that extinguishes *dukkha* or of the method of practice for realizing the cessation of *dukkha*, sometimes he specified the Noble Eightfold Path and sometimes he specified *samatha-vipassanā*. Both are found in the Pali scriptures. Yet no one ever hears of this, because it is never taught. Only the discourses discussing the Noble Eightfold Path are taught, never those that discuss *samatha-vipassanā*. But they're actually the same thing; *samatha-vipassanā* is the Noble Eightfold Path.

### **SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ FOR EVERYONE**

Not speaking about the facts has led to a gap in our knowledge; so we don't understand that there are different ways of talking about this one thing. Because this hasn't been taught, some people have an erroneous understanding. They are confused to the point that they feel *samatha-vipassanā* is totally different from the Eightfold Path. Some people even say that *samatha-vipassanā* is only for hermits in the forest, only for people who have abandoned the world completely. Others go even farther and blindly say that even the Eightfold Path is only appropriate for people who have abandoned the world, left it behind, and are no longer in it. In fact, the two are really the same thing, that which must be attained and used by everyone who still has life in this world.

We therefore practice *samatha-vipassanā* of the sort that sees all things correctly as they really are, and then tell

ourselves “just thus, only thus, just thus.” This will increase the power of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, or, if we specify its name more clearly, will increase the power of *dhammaṭṭhiti-nāṇas*. These are the “insight-knowledges” (*nāṇas*) regarding the “normal and natural standing” (*dhammaṭṭhiti*) of conditioned phenomena: seeing impermanence (*aniccam*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*). Increase the power toward the insight-knowledges (*nāṇas*) that realize *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*. Then it will give birth to *nibbāna-nāṇas*, the insight-knowledges that realize *nibbāna*. Increase the energy behind the insight-knowledges that see “just thus, only thus, simply *idappaccayatā* (conditionality).” Increase the power toward these knowledges and they will increase the power and strength going into the insight-knowledges that see what *nibbāna* is like, what the total quenching of *dukkha* is like. Increase the power toward the *dhammaṭṭhiti-nāṇas* and they will cause the birth of the *nibbāna* insight-knowledges.

### POUR ON THE FUEL

If we want the fire to blaze, we must add fuel. If we want the *nibbāna* insight-knowledges to blaze in strength, we must give them fuel—that is, the insight-knowledges regarding *dhammaṭṭhiti* (normal, natural standing of things). The practice of noting truths, as we have described in the previous talks, is the insight-knowledges about *dhammaṭṭhiti*. Such development of wisdom is the wood, oil, and fuel that causes the fire to flare up more strongly. This fire we’re talking about is the fire that illuminates darkness, the fire that destroys

ignorance, the fire that leads to the realization and penetration of *nibbāna*. Thus, if we practice to see the reality of everything, correctly noting truth constantly, it will increase the power and strength of the *nibbāna* insight-knowledges and the fire of *nibbāna* will shine brilliantly in all directions.

We use a material metaphor and speak of increasing the fuel for Dhamma so that Dhamma will flare up. The fire of Dhamma is dying out, it's almost extinguished, there's no light left. Increase the fuel to the fire of Dhamma! The fire of Dhamma will blaze forth and radiate its brightness everywhere so that people will follow the right path. People will be able to follow that path to the highest truth—the truth that there is really no self. The same holds true for the young man who loved his wife so passionately that he couldn't divorce her even when it became apparent that she was wicked and adulterous. He must add the fuel of knowledge of correctness, increasing it until he is able to abandon that evil wife of his. Then the matter is finished, the problem is ended, and there is no *dukkha*.

Nowadays, we've fallen in love with the world—sights, sounds, odors, tastes, touches, and thoughts—to the degree that we love it even though it bites us. We're infatuated with the world in spite of the biting and clawing. The fact that it bites us means that it isn't loyal to us, it has another lover, and it isn't honest with us. But we still can't let go. We're just like the fools who can't stop smoking and the slaves who can't give up alcohol, because we don't have the strength and fortitude to sacrifice the petty charms of these things.

## SELF-PUNISHMENT

We must observe until we see the wicked punishment of *attā* (self, ego, soul) clearly enough that we can't stand it any more. We must end *attā* once and for all. Nowadays, the best we can hope for is indecision, like that of people who hate cigarettes but can't stop smoking, or hate alcohol but can't give it up. Now, we remain drunk on *attā*, attached to "I" and "mine," and can't give it up. We don't have enough strength to throw it all away. Please increase the power for Dhamma, for *vipassanā-samatha*, which is the fire that will flare up brightly and burn all the evil defilements with it.

Living the Noble Eightfold Path, or genuine *samatha-vipassanā*, strengthens the realization of *tathatā*—*tathatā*—*tathatā*, "just thus—just such—just thus." It's only thus, that is, everything accords with *idappaccayatā*; there's no part or portion that can be clung to as a self or as a possession of self. This realization grows in power until no thing, no part of anything, no matter what its level, is taken to be a self or a possession of self. Then there is no *dukkha*, and no way the mind can ever feel *dukkha*. If the mind realizes *tathatā*, it can't experience *dukkha*. If the mind realizes *idappaccayatā*, it won't suffer *dukkha*, because it doesn't attach to anything as its "self," including even itself, the mind itself. This mind doesn't cling to anything as being its self, because it sees according to reality. It's a mind that has been released, a mind that is delivered and saved.

What we mean is to accelerate the machinery of seeing *tathatā*, "just thus," or *suññatā*, "voidness," or *idappaccayatā*



“interdependent conditioning of causes and effects.” It’s all the exact same matter, the matter of absence of a self. Now, people are engaged to and getting married to *attā*, to the self. Instead, they should increase the vigor and energy put into upholding correctness—the extinction of *dukkha*—as the fundamental principle of life. Why get lost and buried in temptations, delusions, and defilements? When sunk in illusions and impurities, people are just like this modern world, which gets closer and closer to disaster each day. Progress! Progress in ways that will destroy the world. It’s hard to believe people can continue saying this world is civilized, when that same civilization is destroying this very world by bringing upon it the dangers of the nuclear age.

### **IF ITS THE PATH, IT DELIVERS**

Please devote your lives to more, higher, and better practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, or *samatha-vipassanā* if you prefer to call it so. When the Noble Eightfold Path, the set of causes, is perfected, then two more factors, the fruit of those causes, arise. They are Right Knowledge (*sammā-ñāṇa*) and Right Deliverance (*sammā-vimutti*). These two are never discussed or studied in this country, but the Pali scriptures are full of them. Right Knowledge and Right Deliverance, together with the Noble Eightfold Path, make up the Ten States of Rightness (ten *sammatta*). The ten *sammatta* are mentioned in the scriptures frequently. They are the Sublime Way of Life (*brahmacariya*) in both its causes and its effects. If we speak only of the Noble Eightfold Path, that’s just the causal aspect of the Sublime Life, only the practice of cutting through

the defilements. But once there is *sammā-ñāṇa* (correct knowledge) and *sammā-vimutti* (correct release and deliverance), then the fruition aspect of the Sublime Life has arisen as well. Then the Sublime Life is complete in both causes and results, and extinguishes *dukkhā* perfectly.

The Ten States of Rightness—the Noble Eightfold Path, plus Right Knowledge and Right Deliverance—is the perfection of the Sublime Way of Life. All the necessary causes and effects are there. When all ten factors are fulfilled, the Buddha said that it is perfect. It is a cathartic (*virecana*) that evacuates the self; once taken it purges the self. Beings possessed of birth will be released from birth, beings possessed of old age will go beyond old age, beings possessed of disease will transcend disease, and beings possessed of death will be delivered from death. This comes about by taking the purgative known as the ten *sammatta*. Sometimes they're called a vomitory (*vamana*) that causes the self to be heaved and thrown up. Other times they're known as *dhovana* (holy water that washes away sins), but this “holy water” washes away the self. The Ten States of Rightness are the perfect cure for the disease of self.

We've used these materialistic metaphors because they're easy to remember. Once the self is finished, what is born? What grows old? What falls ill? What dies? We can see that there is hope for us to not be born, not grow old, not fall ill, and not die. There's hope when we take this cathartic, when we take this vomitory, and when we bathe with this “holy water.” But no one talks of this! But now the time has come—it's most urgent and is getting closer and closer—to be

interested in this matter. So please help each other. Help work together to perfect this world with nuclear age *samatha-vipassanā*. Everyone must join in and not waste any time doing so. Hurry! The matter will be over when we all help to perfect the world through *samatha-vipassanā* that is appropriate for and in this nuclear age. We must work quickly.

The time for this lecture is up. Before finishing, allow me to express the wish that you all will get moving, that you will get active in causing these things to arise gradually, or immediately, so that you can be released from the dangers of this nuclear age. It's time to stop talking now. Our time is up. Get moving!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Buddhadāsa 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 Mokkhabalārāma (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 *vipassanā* (mental cultivation leading to “seeing clearly” into reality) in Southern Thailand. Word of Buddhadāsa 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 Buddhadāsa 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 broad-mindedness 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

—meetings among Buddhists from around the world to discuss and agree upon the **Heart of Buddhism**”

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

## *ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR*

Rod Bucknell first became seriously interested in Buddhism in the mid-1960's, when, during a visit to Thailand, he was introduced to the techniques of insight meditation. After spending a year in various Thai meditation centres and monasteries, he took ordination as a *bhikkhu* (monk) under the guidance of Ajahn Paññānanda of Wat Chalapratana Rangsarit. He soon became interested also in the teachings of Ajahn Buddhādāsa, and, recognizing their potential value to westerners, began translating some of the Ajahn's more important works into English. During the four years he spent in the Sangha, he translated altogether six works of varying length, usually in close consultation with the Ajahn in order to ensure accuracy in the rendering of key concepts. Despite his return to lay life, he maintains a close interest—both scholarly and practical—in Ajahn Buddhādāsa's teachings, and has published several related articles in religious studies journals. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland, Australia.

## ***ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR***

Santikaro Bhikkhu has lived at Suan Mokkh since 1985. Having arrived with a Thai language background from four years of service in the U.S. Peace Corps, he was soon put to work translating. When Ajahn Buddhādāsa began giving lectures to foreign retreatants, Santikaro Bhikkhu was trained to render these lectures into English. His ability to do so was aided by Ajahn Buddhādāsa's advice and support. The Venerable Ajahn found this kind of practice and service beneficial for himself after he founded Suan Mokkh, so he encouraged others to try it. He frequently discussed the mechanics of translating and the subtleties of English with the translator, in addition to clarifying Dhamma points about which the translator was unsure. Santikaro Bhikkhu is now acting Abbot of Suan Atammayatārāma.



## OTHER BOOKS BY BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

*Mindfulness with Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life  
Handbook for Mankind*

*Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*

*Buddha-Dhamma for Students*

*The Buddha's Doctrine of Anattā*

*Messages of Truth from Suan Mokkh*

*Paṭicca-Samupāda: Practical Dependent Origination  
A Buddhist Charter*

*No Religion*

*The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*

*Dhammic Socialism*

*The Prison of Life* and other small booklets, pamphlets,  
& numerous tapes

For more information, please contact:

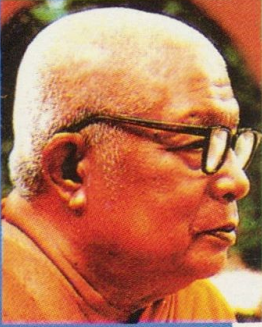
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<http://www.suanmokkh.org>



# DHAMMA !



BUDDHADĀSA  
BHIKKHU

DHAMMA HAS MANY MEANINGS, but its essence is the duty which is performed correctly regarding the practitioner's situation, according to the law of Nature, leading to peace for everyone, no matter the time or place.

DHAMMA IS THE CORRECT SYSTEM OF PRACTICE FOR ONE'S HUMANITY, every step and stage of one's evolution, from birth until death, both for one's own benefit and the benefit of others. In short, Dhamma is duty, the True God which helps save us all.

DHAMMA EXISTS TO HELP US LIVE IN THE WORLD VICTORIOUSLY ABOVE THE WORLD. It's not for us to flee from the world, but to be above any influence of the world, so that we no longer drown in the world.

"KEYS TO NATURAL TRUTH"

The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.