

IDAPPACCAYATA

The Buddhist Law of Nature



Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Cover: “Grandpa and Grandma’s Beans and Sesame: A Thai Folktale on
Dependent Origination” painting (details) at the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives,
Bangkok

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Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles
Series - No. 1

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IDAPPACCA^ṬATĀ The Buddhist Law of Nature

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai by Dhammavidu Bhikkhu

อิทัปปัจจยตาในฐานะสิ่งสูงสุดแห่งพระพุทธศาสนา

The original translation was previously uploaded to the
Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage website.

This electronic edition published by Buddhadāsa Foundation
& Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives
February 2015

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Anumodanā

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, aging, 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 long-lasting.

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 word upon earth.

from

Buddhādāsa Indapañño

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2 November 2530

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu)

Anumodanā

Dhammavidū (Kenneth Croston) is an Englishman, who, after ordaining as a Buddhist monk, lived for, altogether, seventeen years in the Dhammadūta Hermitage of Suan Mokkh Nanachat (International). He became interested in and subsequently studied the Thai language until able to read it well enough. In particular he devoted his time to the study of Buddhādāsa's work, of which the Dhammaghosana (Dhamma Proclamation) series of books particularly attracted his attention. Having read extensively from the series, he realized the value of the Dhamma revealed by Ajahn Buddhādāsa as something not often met with and of real benefit. Anyone willing to read the Ajahn's work and put into practice what they read will be able to solve their problems, that is, to practice for the ending of *dukkha*. Dhammavidū thus decided to translate what he could of Buddhādāsa's work into the English language. At this time several translations have been completed, some of which have been published, while others are awaiting publication. The Buddhādāsa Foundation considers this Dhammaghosana series of books (*Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles*) ought to be speedily printed, containing, as they do, discourses on many important topics, such as *idappaccayatā*, *suññatā* and so on.

I, as President of The Buddhādāsa Foundation thus would like to thank and *anumodanā* Dhammavidū, who is, with faith and diligence, working to translate these books into the English language.

I hope that these publications will be enduring of use, of value, and of benefit to the readers.

Dhamma, Blessings, and Metta

Buddhadhammo Bhikkhu

21 April 2558 (2015)

Translator's Foreword

Idappaccayatā, conditionality, the Buddhist Law of Nature, is, says Buddhadāsa, the heart of the Buddhist system, and yet it's simplicity itself: *when this is, this can come to be; when this isn't, this can't come to be*; that's it!

In reality, life is a stream of conditionality, a stream of *idappaccayatā*, of ever-changing conditions producing ever-changing results both mentally and physically. Buddhadāsa points out, among other things, that because this is so, then life can be manipulated, providing we know how. If we don't know how, then the world we have to experience through the senses will manipulate us, and all the time so that we'll never, or very rarely, experience any real peace of mind. However, if we can acquire the necessary skill, then we can exercise some degree of control, we can manipulate the flow of conditions by practising to control our responses to the world we live in, thereby enabling life to become a very different experience.

In this discourse, Buddhadāsa looks into this little known but important subject and ventures into some strange, but always interesting, places as he goes about rendering it understandable.

Dhammavidu Bhikkhu
January 2558 (2015)

IDAPPACCAYATĀ

The Buddhist Law of Nature

*A Dhamma lecture presented on 3 July 2525 (1982)
at Suan Mokkhabalārāma*

In this first talk we'll concern ourselves with '*idappaccayatā*,' the highest, the most important aspect of the Buddhist religion, and attempt to explain just why we think it is so.

It's observable that, although it's the heart of the religion, we've never yet shown much interest in it, and, what's more, in its 'dependent origination' mode it's talked about in such a way that results in misunderstanding and argument. It's as if there's not enough disagreement around already that we have to argue about this too, which is damaging. Hence, we should take a look at this subject and try to come to a proper understanding. So, be interested, pay attention and we'll concern ourselves with this unusual word '*idappaccayatā*,' unusual even for Buddhists, albeit Buddhists who don't yet know the heart of their religion.

Now, this is a wide-ranging matter, something that concerns the whole world, even the entire universe.

The first point to deal with is that of *idappaccayatā* as being the Buddhist God. Some will immediately object to

this and point out that the Buddhist religion doesn't have a God. They say this because they don't really know what God is, for one thing, and because they're still ignorant of the heart of the religion for another. 'God' can be simply defined as the highest, as the ultimate. People are accustomed to God as defined in everyday speech: God with this or that appearance, dwelling here or there, the creator, the controller of the world who made all the many and various things, who rewards when pleased, etc. People without proper knowledge pray to God for help, to make things be this or that way. So, for now, we'll take the word 'God' to mean the highest thing, the ultimate.

Now, the story goes that the Buddha-to-be donned the yellow robe and practised assiduously for a long time until finally becoming perfectly awakened. He was seeking for the fundamental truth: *idappaccayatā*. It was during the night of his awakening that he sought thus: What does *dukkha* (dis-ease, distress, suffering) come from? Then he realized that it came from *jāti* (birth). *Jāti* (birth), what does birth come from? Birth comes from *bhava* (becoming). Becoming arises from *upādāna* (clinging). Clinging comes from *taṇhā* (craving, ignorant desire). Craving comes from the *vedanā* (feeling). Feeling comes from *phassa* (contact). Contact comes from the *āyatana* (the senses). The senses come from *nāma-rūpa* (name and form). Name and form comes from *viññāṇa* (consciousness). Consciousness comes from *saṅkhāra* (the power of concocting). The power of concocting comes from *avijjā* (ignorance). He investigated and reviewed this business back and forth, back and forth during the night. What he investigated and reviewed was the arising and

quenching of dukkha, which process is more usually referred to as *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). Paṭiccasamuppāda and idappaccayatā are really one and the same, in truth there's only one Law of Nature, but if we're dealing with human dukkha in particular, then it's called paṭiccasamuppāda; if it's the general form of dukkha that attracts our attention, then it's called idappaccayatā. Anyway, he finally broke through to the deepest truth of paṭiccasamuppāda/idappaccayatā and became enlightened. At about the same time, it occurred to him that, knowing this truth, who was there left for him to look up to, because he couldn't live reverencing nothing, so he revered the Dhamma he had awakened to: he would 'enter into and dwell within it,' that is, he would take it as his refuge.

Now, consider: that which the Buddha discovered and revered, should that be called 'God,' or not? Well, should we do that, it would be a God unlike any of those in other systems. Idappaccayatā isn't any sort of a person, so it can't be the same as those gods who talk, feel, like, and dislike, who experience love and anger just like people do – who even have homes to live in. People-type gods are that way. But idappaccayatā isn't a person, it's a law, the Law of Nature. But why shouldn't we call it 'God'? After all, it's the ultimate, it creates and controls everything, and exists in everything, thus performing precisely the same duties as the gods of any religious system we care to mention. It is believed that God can do anything – creating, controlling, destroying – and that God dwells everywhere, knows everything, has power over everything, and so on, but it's not perceived that it's really the equivalent of God, the 'God' idappaccayatā, that actually has those attributes

and does all of those things.

This is the beginning of the understanding that the Buddhist religion has something that can do all the duties of a God but which isn't a person, or anything like a person. We can have gods of both kinds, those that are people-like and that which isn't – which would be better? Well, a God that's actually the Law of Nature would, for instance, be acceptable to the scientist, because it would have a scientific basis, and, as the Buddha taught that nothing escapes *idappaccayatā* – happiness, distress, and all that changes and transforms, in fact everything in the world operates according to, and is intertwined with this law – then it makes for a scientifically credible kind of God.

Idappaccayatā can be understood as the God of the Buddhist religion in the same way as those other gods: Jehovah, the God of the Jews and Christians, Allah of the Moslems, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva etc., of the Hindus, and so on. Whatever the religion, it will have an ultimate, a highest thing, a God. The Buddhist religion has a God too, but one which is more so, more skilful, more capable, a truer sort of a God. So, to begin with, be willing to allow that the Buddhist religion has a God just as other religions do, the difference being that those other gods are people-like, whereas the Buddhist God is the Law of Nature.

This is the first point for Buddhists to know, that their religion has a God, has a deity, but that it's not a person-type God. Hence don't bother with those who say that Buddhism doesn't have a God, those people who arrange all religions into two types, those with gods, the 'theistic,' and those without, the 'atheistic,' and who then label the Buddhist religion as 'atheistic,' God-less – and

who then stir things up even more by saying that if there's no God, there's no religion either, so that the Buddhist religion becomes a philosophical system and not a religion at all. However, if we follow what they themselves say, then a religion is a system of practice which allows mankind to reach the ultimate, a system of practice which allows mankind to enter into relations with the highest. If it's put in that way, then the Buddhist religion *is* a religion because it has a system of practice which, when properly developed, puts human beings into relation with the highest thing, with Nibbāna, and, as Nibbāna is the ultimate, beyond anything else, then it follows that the Buddhist religion is more of a religion than any other.

Anyway, that's something that we should be aware of, that the Buddhist religion does have a God, namely, the Law of Nature, the ultimate, the highest thing, and is thus a religion in the fullest sense, not just a philosophical system as some claim. This, then, is the first point to acknowledge, that Buddhism has a God, a God called idappaccayatā, the Law of Nature, a God with scientific credentials.

Now, point number two: idappaccayatā isn't restricted to being just the God of the Buddhists, it's also God of the universe, the whole universe. Notwithstanding that, the law of idappaccayatā is simplicity itself: *when there is this thing, then there is this thing too; because this arises, this can arise also; when this thing isn't, then this thing isn't either; when this quenches, then this quenches too.* This is the essence of the matter, that there isn't anything that's self-existent. There's mutual dependence, cause and effect, that is, everything is a condition for something else. All things operate in dependence on conditions. The law of

‘conditionality’ is the highest of laws, the law that makes everything work, and this we call idappaccayatā. We’re surely all familiar with the term ‘universe,’ how vast it is, and so on. Well, we can have as many universes as we like, but every one, and the numberless stars and worlds that group together to form one, will all be composed of tiny parts called particles, and those particles will group together into atoms, the atoms into elements, and the elements into systems, one example of which is the system of the body and mind. Beasts, people, plants, and trees, they’re all formed from atoms grouping together, and in every atom will dwell the law of idappaccayatā. There’s no need to just believe. Take a look at this through the eyes of knowledge. Recognise that every atom coming together to form a world, to form a universe, is controlled and created by the Law of Nature. Idappaccayatā is present in every atom of every thing that comes together as a universe. Think about that: every universe, and every atom in every universe is under the control of that which the Buddha discovered, immediately felt reverence towards, and taught about from that time onwards – the Law of Nature, the law of idappaccayatā. This is so because the law of idappaccayatā existed before anything else, before everything. If someone should ask about Nature, for instance – where does it come from? – we could say, without having to think too much, that Nature comes from the Law of Nature which has the power to make natural things arise, and we must then be aware that the Law of Nature must pre-exist Nature itself. Idappaccayatā then is the pre-existing Law of Nature. Pre-existing from precisely when? Well, who could say? That’s impossible

to know given our current knowledge. At present, we don't know with any certainty when the solar system first arose, so when all systems whatsoever first came into being, this no one knows, let alone when the Law itself originated.

So, the Law of Nature, *idappaccayatā*, pre-exists all things in the universe and is the reason for the existence of the universe itself. That being so, can we, or can't we look on *idappaccayatā* as being the 'creator'? In the theistic religions, they say that it's God who creates. We say that the God *idappaccayatā* is the creator, the preserver, and destroyer of everything, is what causes all things to arise, to persist for a time, and then to cease: arising, persisting, ceasing; arising, persisting, ceasing, this is the power of *idappaccayatā*. This is Nature: arising, persisting, ceasing; arising, persisting, ceasing. There isn't anything that doesn't behave in this way. *Idappaccayatā* causes everything, every universe that ever exists, to arise, undergo change and transformation, and then to disappear, to cease. So, as everything is under the power of *idappaccayatā*, we feel that we can call it the universal God possessing the triple characteristics of *omnipresence*: existing everywhere in every single atom wherever it may be; of *omnipotence*: as exercising supreme power over everything; of *omniscience*: of being all-knowing – because everything arises from and through this law, therefore it must be all-knowing concerning the birth of the sun, the moon, the world, of the elements of earth, water, fire, and air, of everything that mankind has knowledge of. These days we brag about going to the moon and so on, but the level of knowledge involved in that sort of thing is trifling, not even remotely equal to the all-knowing of *idappaccayatā*. Behold,

idappaccayatā, the Law of Nature, the ‘Lord’ of the universe, the universal ‘God.’

We’ve looked at two points: idappaccayatā as the universal God, and as the God of the Buddhist religion – the idappaccayatā that ignorant Buddhists don’t know about even though it’s in their scriptures, because they’ve never taken much of an interest in it. They hear it as something odd, strange, as if we’re talking about something from the Zen discipline, from the Mahāyāna. But in truth, it’s textual, it’s in the scriptures, so we talk about it.

To summarize: the Buddha sought after one thing until he found what he was looking for and was enlightened by his discovery. Once he had found what he was looking for, he then taught about it so that others could understand and practise for the final quenching of dukkha too. Dukkha can be quenched if we can live harmoniously with Nature by paying attention to the law of idappaccayatā: because dukkha arises in accord with this law, then it follows that it must be quenched by the same means. We feel bold enough to say that all of humankind, no matter what – Chinese, Indian, or Westerner – whatever nationality, whatever religion we adhere to, dukkha must be quenched according to the principles of the Law of Nature. As mentioned, it’s a matter of dependent origination, so don’t go wrong at the moment of sense contact and dukkha won’t happen. If there’s dukkha, it’s because there’s been carelessness at that moment. Now, there are those who believe in life after death and those who don’t, but both sides of that argument will have to quench dukkha according to the principle of idappaccayatā. People can believe whatever they want, but whatever their beliefs,

they'll still have to quench dukkha in accordance with the principle of idappaccayatā. There is no other way.

The third point to look at is the actual meaning of 'idappaccayatā.' Idappaccayatā means 'conditionality,' that is, *with this as condition, this arises; because there is this thing, this thing arises*. Things without sentient life, like a stone, some cement, some metal, some wood, how do they come to be? They depend on the supporting conditions being available: *because there is this as condition, this arises*; this applies to all of the multitude of things in this world that aren't sentient. So, we sit down somewhere and say, *because this is a condition, this comes to be*, and perhaps we can then come to realize that everything around us is, in a sense, 'flowing.' We observe that 'everything flows.' A Greek philosopher contemporary with the Buddha (Heraclitus by name) uttered wise words when he said that, "*Everything flows.*" 'Pantarhei' is Greek for 'everything flows.' That man saw the truth but didn't say anything more than that, only that 'everything flows.' This is the Buddhist understanding too, it's the meaning of *aniccam*, that everything changes, 'everything flows.' Now, we have to say that, if Buddhists don't see this too, then they're less wise than that Greek gentleman. That 'everything flows' is the essence of idappaccayatā: because there is this as condition, this arises, and then becomes the condition for something else to arise, and so on, and so on.

So much for that without sentient life, now we can take a look at that with sentience – ourselves. We can divide our physical selves into hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, and so on, into many, many parts, and see conditionality in every thing: because there is this as condition, then that

which hair is composed of arises as hair. It must do so, and then something else will arise from the hair, because hair is the condition for something else, even if it's only a nest of lice. *Because there is this, this can arise*: hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, everything material, everything that is a *rūpa-dhamma* (physical), comes to be in this way. That which is mental (*nāma-dhamma*) is the same, whether it be the mind, consciousness, mind-contact, feeling, or whatever. If you can really see this, then you'll know that in the body and mind everything is flowing, spinning in a way which is quite amazing: *there is this, hence this can arise; because there is this, this can come to be*. It's possible to divide the body into many hundreds of parts, but they'll all exhibit the condition of flowing on according to conditions, of changing and flowing, which is worth a twinge of fear actually. But it's the same for all creation: the beasts, the animals – the pigs, the dogs, the crows, the chickens – all are like this; trees are like this; everything that has life is like this; everything that doesn't have life is like this too. This is idappaccayatā, the Law of Nature, that which makes things work, which controls the entirety of Nature. All of the many and various things that exist are the fruit, the produce of the law of idappaccayatā which we, here, call 'God,' the God of the Buddhist religion, the God of the universe.

Now, idappaccayatā is, as mentioned, the law behind all things, behind everything, but where it concerns people, and especially when it's a matter of the dukkha of human beings, we change the name and call it *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or, to give its full title, *idappaccayatā-paṭiccasamuppādo*. If we just say 'idappaccayatā,' it applies to everything without exception that either has or doesn't have life, to everything

that is concocted, conditioned, but if we're only concerned with people, and particularly with the arising and quenching of their dukkha, then we change the title and call it 'paṭiccasamuppāda.' The Buddha often used the longer version, but we won't, we'll stick with paṭiccasamuppāda.

So, we know that idappaccayatā is the general Law of Nature, covering everything that happens, while paṭiccasamuppāda is the Law of Nature where it concerns humans and their dukkha.

The essential import of paṭiccasamuppāda is: *in dependence on this, this arises*, thus 'dependent arising,' or 'dependent co-arising'; paṭiccasamuppāda means 'dependent co-arising,' or 'dependent co-origination.' *Paṭicca* means 'dependent,' *samuppāda* means 'arising' or 'origination,' thus 'dependent arising' or 'dependent co-arising.' Idappaccayatā means *because this is a condition, this arises*. Paṭiccasamuppāda means *in dependence on this, this arises*. The meaning is much the same, but there's a difference in the breadth of meaning.

There's always a cause for the arising of any new thing. This characteristic is very important, anyone who doesn't see this isn't really a follower of the Buddha. Buddhists ought to recognize this basic characteristic common to all things – people, dogs, cats, trees, whatever, we ought to see this in everything: *because there is this, this arises; because there is this thing, this thing can arise*. True Buddhists are those who know this, who are awake to it, who dispel ignorance when they 'see' it. When 'seeing' in this way, it's called seeing according to the truth of Nature, and seeing the truth of Nature is to see *tathatā*. 'Tathatā' means 'just like that.' In the Pāli texts, there

are three forms of this word: ‘*tathā*,’ meaning ‘like that,’ ‘*tathatā*’ meaning ‘just like that,’ and ‘*tathātā*’ which means ‘just like that’ too – all of which makes it easy to remember: ‘like that!’ ‘just like that!’ ‘just like that!’ If we’re ignorant, we won’t see everything as being ‘just like that’; if we’re wise enough, then we will. Look into hair and see that it’s really ‘just like that,’ consider body hair, nails, teeth, skin, bones, see each of these as being just what they are, as being ‘just like that.’ Contemplate *vedanā* (feelings) as ‘just like that,’ see perception (*saññā*) as being ‘just like that,’ experience happiness as ‘just like that,’ distress as ‘just like that,’ pain as ‘just like that,’ death as being ‘just like that,’ and so on. If someone is wise to this truth in any one thing, then they’ll know everything else in the same way. This is ‘seeing’ *idappaccayatā*, or ‘seeing’ *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or, as it comes to the same thing, seeing *tathatā* – seeing things as being ‘just like that.’ Supposing a husband doesn’t love his wife, then it’s not a matter for crying over, it’s ‘just like that.’ If the husband goes and takes a new wife, it’s ‘just like that’ – or, perhaps the wife has a lover, then the husband says it’s ‘just like that.’ No one needs to kill anybody, and no one needs to get angry, to be surprised or puzzled, even over those kinds of things. ‘Seeing’ in this way is seeing *idappaccayatā*, seeing the highest God. We see ‘just like that,’ we see *idappaccayatā* in all things.

There are several words we can use instead of *idappaccayatā*: *tathātā* (just like that), *avitathatā* (not different from that), *anaññathatā* (not other than, or again, not different from that), and *dhammaṭṭhitatā* (established according to the norm – which is a fancy way of saying ‘just like that’ too), while *dhammānīyāmatā* is another word

for the Law of Nature. *Anattā* means that there isn't an abiding 'self' in anything, only a flow of conditions, only that which is 'just like that,' only a flow of *idappaccayatā*. The body and the mind are no more than a stream of conditions of *idappaccayatā*. The Buddha said that all *dhammas*, all things are *anattā*, are without anything that could be called an abiding 'self.' A more elevated designation would be *suññatā*, which means free, or void of self, that there isn't anything that could be called a 'self.' If there's anything at all, it's just the flow of *idappaccayatā*, the endless flow of concocting, within which there isn't anything that abides – hence it's said to be 'void,' or 'free.' 'Void' here doesn't mean nothing at all, rather it means that all things are flowing on according to the Law of Nature, so are void, free of any *abiding* essence, of a self, or anything that could be clung to as being a self.

Now, the Buddha had said that whether there are Buddhas or not that Dhamma element exists; 'that Dhamma element' is *idappaccayatā*. The law of *idappaccayatā* simply is, whether the Buddha arises or doesn't arise isn't a problem. This law exists before anything. Something that pre-exists all else is the rule in every religion, as in the Christian religion, although there it's not called 'God' it's called the 'Word': "*In the beginning was the Word.*" In the Christian religion, they put it like this, and then they say that the Word was 'with God,' and subsequently that the Word 'was God.' The Word and God are the same thing here, so let's just say 'God,' in the end we're left with God. In the Indian scriptures, in the belief system of the Sikhs, it's much the same: "*In the beginning was the Word.*" They use the Sanskrit version of 'word,' but whichever

language is used, the Word was first. As for us, the law of idappaccayatā becomes the Word, or, if we prefer, the ‘command,’ or the ‘commander.’ Christian, Sikh, or Buddhist, in the very beginning the Word was.

Now, to sum matters up: idappaccayatā is something that we hardly know anything about, that some people won’t even accept as being a basic truth of the Buddhist religion, while others, because it sounds strange, look on it as coming from outside the religion. People in this world can hold to any religion they like, but they really should know about idappaccayatā – they should know about it because it is them, it’s what controls them. Idappaccayatā is the law through which all things arise and operate.

Before going on, here’s a little light relief: usually the deity is called ‘God,’ but we call it ‘*got*’ (that being the Romanized version of the Thai word for ‘law,’ as in ‘Law’ of Nature). Some friends of ours, Christians, came here and discussed this matter with us, and we told them that the Buddhists have a God just as they do, but that in our language the word ‘God’ is pronounced as *got*. It’s amusing, and entirely accidental that in the Thai language the word ‘*got*’ can be understood in such a way that it corresponds to the English word ‘God.’

Anyway, to continue: idappaccayatā is the second of the four meanings of Dhamma (Dhamma here refers to the ultimate truth, or the way things really are, hence it’s spelt with a capital ‘D’). Dhamma has four meanings: Nature itself; the Law of Nature; the duty to be done according to the Law; and the fruit, or result arising from doing or not doing that duty. If we want to understand Dhamma in its fullest sense, then we should see it in these four ways.

The first meaning is as ‘Nature.’ There isn’t anything that isn’t Nature, whether physical or mental. All there is of us, for instance, is Nature. The second meaning is the ‘Law of Nature,’ that which controls all those natures. We are Nature completely under the control of the Law of Nature: we develop, undergo change, that is, we’re born, we grow up, and we perform the various functions of life as we grow – we eat, bathe, excrete, etc. etc. – all under the power of the Law of Nature. Because there is the Law of Nature controlling us, we pass through the stages of life: youth, old age, and death all happen according to the Law. The third meaning of Dhamma is ‘duty.’ We need to understand this point, that is, the necessity of doing our ‘duty,’ of living correctly as befits human beings, otherwise the Law of Nature will present us with endless problems. The fourth meaning is concerned with that, with the results arising from how our duty is performed: if it’s done wrongly, then the result will be wrong too; if correctly, then the fruit will also be correct. Hence, Dhamma has these four meanings: Nature, the Law of Nature, duty, and fruit, or result. The second meaning, the Law of Nature, is *idappaccayatā* itself, but *idappaccayatā* is intertwined with the other three meanings too, in-as-much as Nature itself is under the control of the Law of Nature, and duty, no matter how performed, plus the results or fruits arising out of performance also come forth in accordance with this law.

Continuing on with the understanding that *idappaccayatā* is the Buddhist God, as mentioned, in the Buddhist religion there’s a highest thing which accords with the meaning of God in other religions, but it isn’t a person, it’s the Law of Nature. As is their wont,

people will usually see God as being some sort of a person, but the Buddhist religion has something able to do the duties of that sort of God and in just the same manner, but it's a law – the law of *idappaccayatā* is the God of the Buddhist religion. Let's finish with this matter by saying that things that can sense, that is, things that have life, mind, that can think, will always feel that there's some highest thing: ants, insects, crabs, fish, or whatever, will certainly feel this. It would seem that this God concept arises from an instinctual feeling that there is a 'something,' a highest, an ultimate something that we should respect, should fear. Thus, everything that has life and can think will feel that there is a God, whether it be of the base, childish sort, of the more exalted, or of the most high, the ultimate kind, everything that has life and can think will feel that there is a God. Buddhists, through developing wisdom, recognize in the law of *idappaccayatā* a God of the highest sort, which is, because it dwells in every atom that comes together to form it, the God of the universe.

To continue: it's also the scientist's God. Supposing some scientific person has *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and the right kind of knowledge) then, in searching for the ultimate, they'll finally arrive at the Law of Nature, *idappaccayatā*. Thus, *idappaccayatā* is the sort of God that could be accepted by science. Some of today's scientific community will be unable to believe in the gods of the ancient scriptures, but they could straightway accept one that doesn't conflict with scientific principles. *Idappaccayatā* is such a God, one that is discoverable and observable by science.

Now, consider carefully: idappaccayatā orders the world; this world operates according to the law of idappaccayatā – wrong or right activities happen, and must happen, in accordance with this law. For example: at present, education is misguided and encourages the defilements, the mental pollutions, so the world is a bad place, almost at the point of calamity. Are you aware of this? Education is mismanaged and the result of that is a world of defilement, a bad and violent place. This too happens in accord with the Law of Nature; there must be this result because the conditions that support it are in place. Whenever things are managed correctly, then, as a result of that, there will be an enduring peace, because then the conditions for that will be in place. At present, this isn't the case because we're foolish and mismanage everything.

Thus, idappaccayatā is that which the human population ought to venerate as the ultimate. The word 'venerate,' or even a phrase like 'make an offering to' can be used in connection with idappaccayatā. In religious language, they might call it 'worshipping,' as in the Christians 'worshipping' their God. Buddhists, however, say that they don't have a God so they don't need to do any worshipping. We should apologise for the ignorance of those who say that. Having a God of the idappaccayatā sort, then some kind of worship is required, therefore we should try our best to behave correctly in accordance with the precepts, which would fulfil the requirement.

Now, the Buddha introduced idappaccayatā as the '*ādibrahmacariya*.' Ādibrahmacariya is the well-spring from which the *Brahmacariya* (the Holy Life) comes, it's

the source from which the religion for the quenching of all dukkha arises. It's said that the Buddha would recite the *dhamma* called idappaccayatā to himself – in much the same way that we would sing or repeat anything in order to memorize it, as in the way that children do when they memorize the multiplication table for instance. The Buddha is said to have used this method with idappaccayatā. It has it in the Pāli texts that one day the Buddha was sitting alone reciting the law of idappaccayatā, thus: “*When the eye meets a form eye consciousness rises, the meeting together of these three is contact (phassa); contact conditions feeling (vedanā); feeling conditions craving (taṇhā); craving conditions clinging (upādāna); clinging conditions becoming (bhava); becoming conditions birth (jāti); birth conditions ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair, etc.*” He began with the eye, and then recited in the same way for the other senses. The Buddha was sitting alone reciting, and, on turning around, saw that a monk had crept in and was standing behind him, listening. The Buddha then told the monk that it was a good thing that he had come there, that what he was reciting was the ādibrahmacariya, and that he, the monk, should take it, learn it, and put it into practise. Now, ‘ādibrahmacariya,’ according to the books, means the basics, the rudiments, the fundamentals of the Brahmachariya, but in truth it's not quite like that, it's actually the origin, the source from which the Brahmachariya comes, and, as such, is always complete within itself from the beginning to the end of time. Idappaccayatā is the same thing, being the fundamental dhamma forming the starting point for anything and everything, and which is then ever-present

until the very end, or, in the human case, until the attainment of Nibbāna occurs, which also happens by way of it. Idappaccayatā is thus comparable to the ABCs of the Buddhist religion. So study the ABCs, learn everything about the ABCs, because, although we may be experts in some other way, we perhaps still won't be beyond the ABC stage in this matter. Get to know idappaccayatā as the ādibrahmacariya.

At present, some, according to their tastes, don't study idappaccayatā, they study the Buddhist religion but they don't bother with the ABCs. They start to study the history of India, the philosophies of India, or whatever, spend half a lifetime in study of that kind, but don't bother with idappaccayatā or its partner, paṭiccasamuppāda. They study *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha from another angle, not from the point of view of idappaccayatā, so they don't really know the Buddhist religion. They don't know about the heart of the religion so they can't really understand it. But, still, they write a lot of books, and there are serious mistakes in every one, especially where *kamma* and 'rebirth' are concerned. 'Rebirth' is Hinduism; while *kamma* taught as 'do good, get good; do bad, get bad' means that one is unable to make use of the law of idappaccayatā to live above the concepts of 'good' and 'bad.' Some people understand the Buddhist approach to *kamma* only as 'do good, get good; do bad, get bad,' and aren't aware that idappaccayatā, when well comprehended, would enable us to live above the good and the bad, to escape from, to cancel out good and bad *kamma* completely. Studying the *Buddhasāsanā* (which literally means 'the message of the Buddha') in a half-baked way,

seeing kamma as ‘do good, get good; do bad, get bad’ means that there’s no understanding of how to dwell above it, and then writing about swimming around in death and birth after the Brahman fashion, seemingly unaware that we don’t have a ‘self’ to swim around in anything. This sort of thing occurs in one or two chapters of certain kinds of Buddhist books, so be aware that some books on the Buddhist religion will have these problems, but, apart from that, they’ll be fine, good enough, and we can use them.

To continue: idappaccayatā forms the universal basis for the quenching of dukkha. ‘Universal’ means that, be they *devas*, human beings, *Brahmas*, whatever – or, in this world, be they Chinese, Indian, European, adhering to the Christian, Islamic, or whatever tradition – the work of truly quenching dukkha must be a matter of idappaccayatā, that is, through knowing directly how it is that dukkha arises and how to operate so that it doesn’t arise. Thus, no matter who it may be, whatever belief they may have, whatever ideology they may adhere to, the arising and quenching of dukkha must happen in accord with this law: dukkha must arise if ignorance is in control at the moment of sense contact. There’s no way to stop it other than by behaving correctly when such contact is taking place, thus not allowing foolish feeling, desire and attachment to occur. No matter what religion we prefer, the arising and quenching of dukkha must happen in this way. There is no other way to quench dukkha other than by doing the right thing at the moment of sense contact.

Further: the law of idappaccayatā, this highest law of Nature, is the true meaning of *Amitāyu* and *Amitābha*. Some people won’t understand this point: in the

Mahāyāna lineage, or some branch of it, they prescribe the highest thing, the Buddhas Amitābha and Amitāyu, as being the source of the ordinary Buddha, the Buddha of mankind. ‘Amitāyu’ means infinite age, age beyond measure, beyond calculation, that is, the ‘eternal.’ ‘Amitābha’ has the meaning of infinite light, or infinite wisdom, thus the ‘all-knowing.’ One who holds to this form of Mahāyāna religion will recite the mantra ‘*Namo Amitābha, Namō Amitābha,*’ repeating it over and over, how many tens of thousands of times no one knows, in order to be certain of going to Nibbāna. It’s as if they recite and recite and recite until they realize that which is all-knowing and eternal. One who does this will come to know the ultimate according to that form of Buddhism, that is, Amitābha and Amitāyu. We say that idappaccayatā is the same as Amitāyu and Amitābha.

Now, looking at idappaccayatā or, as some would say, Amitābha and Amitāyu, as being ever-present and in all things. The most important characteristic of God is that, if it’s to be a true God, it must really be found in all things at all times. Idappaccayatā fulfils this requirement because it’s to be found in every atom that goes to form everything. Everything operates, that is, everything arises, persists, and ceases in accordance with this law. Idappaccayatā is thus ever-present in every atom, in every particle of a human being. It controls every atom of everyone who’s ever been born, of everyone who will ever be born. Now, those scriptural gods, are they the same? The God idappaccayatā is even to be found in every atom of a pile of dog mess. Can any of those scriptural gods be found in excrement? Idappaccayatā can, it’s in everything, in every atom, even of excrement. We say that idappaccayatā is the true God,

even existing in and controlling the behaviour of a pile of excrement, which is something that can't be said of Jehovah, Brahma, Shiva, and so on. Idappaccayatā is thus a more complete, a more genuine kind of God. Know it as the one thing which dwells in and has power over every single atom of everything in the universe.

We can continue by dividing things into the material and the mental, thus: every atom that goes to create materiality does so according to this law, hence all the material elements in the universe operate according to the law of idappaccayatā, the controller of material things – all the laws of materiality, the laws of physics, of chemistry, of technology, or whatever, all those laws derive from the law of idappaccayatā. Everything non-material, everything 'mental' also arises through the law of idappaccayatā. Thus, any state of mind will be the handiwork of this law, any consciousness arising at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or the mind, any contact, feeling, perception, any thought of whatever kind, all of this will be the fruit of idappaccayatā; craving, desire and the subsequent clinging also happens according to this law. Everything psychological falls under the power of idappaccayatā, operates according to the Law of Nature. Now, concerning that which is a problem for us, for everyone in the world, the matters of happiness and distress (*sukha* and *dukkha*) – in this world there isn't anything as important as *sukha* and *dukkha* – both happen according to the law of idappaccayatā. The Buddha clearly taught in this way. Some people believe that the happiness and distress we have to experience now are the result of old *kamma* (that is, of deliberated activities done in some previous life) but that's a wrong understanding occurring

because they don't see that it actually happens through the law of idappaccayatā. If our happiness and suffering was the result of old kamma, it couldn't be made to cease, but right now we can use the law of idappaccayatā to put an end, to put a complete end to its results – or, we can make old kamma give its result immediately. We can, through the law of idappaccayatā, resist kamma by controlling contact, feeling, etc., so that there isn't any dukkha, so that old kamma becomes sterile old kamma. If anyone believes that sukha and dukkha are the result of old kamma, they're naïve. That sort of thing belongs in some other creed, not the Buddhist religion. In the Buddhist religion, it has to be idappaccayatā controlling the arising of happiness or distress. Dukkha comes from wrong doing at the moment of *phassa*, of ignorant sense contact within the flow of dependent origination; sukha comes from doing the right thing at *phassa*, from being wise enough in the moment of contact. Hence, the phrase 'it's the fruit of old kamma' isn't right and comes from something other than Buddhism.

We could resist the consequences of old kamma, could chase them away by living correctly in accord with the law of idappaccayatā. If anything really was the result of old kamma, then we would have to put up with it, it would be useless to resist. But we don't need to put up with anything at all. We can get rid of any dukkha. We can create dukkhaless-ness, create sukha. Idappaccayatā is what brings forth dukkha and sukha in dependence on our current behaviour. Some hold that happiness and suffering are creations of a God, of Shiva. There are those who believe this, and who pray to that God, but they don't see the God idappaccayatā. This is superstition: worshiping some form of God that

isn't real. Any God can do anything they like, but if we operate correctly and encourage the form of idappaccayatā that quenches dukkha, then Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu together won't be able to make dukkha arise – it can't arise if we do our duty in accord with the Law of Nature, the God idappaccayatā. Yet others hold that happiness and suffering arise by themselves, that they don't have a prior cause, but this is sublimely stupid, to believe that something can arise without a prior cause. The law of idappaccayatā is the law of conditionality: *because there is this, this therefore arises; because there is this, this arises*. Thus, dukkha and sukha have prior causes and conditions, and if we manage the stream of conditions properly, we can attain our heart's desire. Misapprehensions such as that happiness and suffering are caused by old kamma, or are the creation of a God, of Shiva, or that they arise by themselves and don't have prior causes, come from another creed. To say that happiness and suffering are due to wrong or right action per the law of idappaccayatā, this comes from the Buddhist religion. Thus, sukha and dukkha become things that we can control, that we can manipulate, can even relinquish, let go of. This is the power of idappaccayatā, the power to bring happiness or distress into our lives.

Essentially, it's the duty of any human being to maintain life correctly. If they don't, then they must – in accord with the law of idappaccayatā – experience the result, the punishment: dukkha, ranging from being unable to sleep, to nervous disease, to deadly pain.

The last thing we need to bear in mind, need to understand, is that the human mind can evolve, can reach the path, fruit and Nibbāna by way of the law of

idappaccayatā. The ultimate goal of Buddhists is Nibbāna, to be ‘above’ suffering, ‘above’ defilement of any kind. This evolution happens through the Law of Nature: making the mind, making life prosper by living correctly with the law of idappaccayatā always in mind culminates in the attainment of Nibbāna.

Idappaccayatā existed before anything and can be found in all things. This being still the case, there can still be the attainment of Nibbāna. Practising for Nibbāna isn’t out of date, nor is it impossible, because we have the law of idappaccayatā to use in our practice. Idappaccayatā is timeless, so, regardless of time or place, we can always make use of it to bring about the mental evolution and, perhaps, attain the goal. The foregoing examples illustrate what we ought to know about the law of idappaccayatā.

Now, please, everybody, get to know the God idappaccayatā as the highest, the ultimate. Don’t let this word be unfamiliar, something alien, know it as the heart of the Buddha’s teaching, as the ‘all’ of the religion. Know it also as the starting point for Dhamma study, as the ABCs of Buddhism, that which we need to learn about first of all, and then, perhaps, we won’t waste the opportunity of having been born into the human state and of having met with the Buddha’s teaching.

About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that the noble eightfold path is available to everyone.
- Offered doctrinal support for addressing social and environmental issues, helping to foster socially engaged Buddhism in Siam.
- Shaped his forest monastery as an innovative teaching environment and Garden of Liberation.

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense.

About the Translator

Dhammavidu Bhikkhu, originally from England, ordained as a monk in 1995 and has lived at Suan Mokkh, Chaiya, in South Thailand since then. He has helped to teach meditation to foreign retreatants at Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage and Dipabhavan Meditation Center at Samui Island. As a translator, he has been particularly interested in *The Dhamma Proclamation Series*, a multivolume collection of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's major teachings.

Other Titles to be Published

(Commonly Misunderstood Buddhist Principles Series)

- 2. *Void Mind*
- 3. *Living in the Present*
- 4. *Concerning Birth*
- 5. *Concerning God*
- 6. *Nibbāna from Every Angle*
- 7. *The Whirlpool of Saṃsāra*
- 8. *The World and Dhamma*

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Mindfulness With Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *The Buddha's Doctrine of Anattā*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*

Online Resources

- www.suanmokkh.org
- www.bia.or.th
- www.suanmokkh-idh.org

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.



