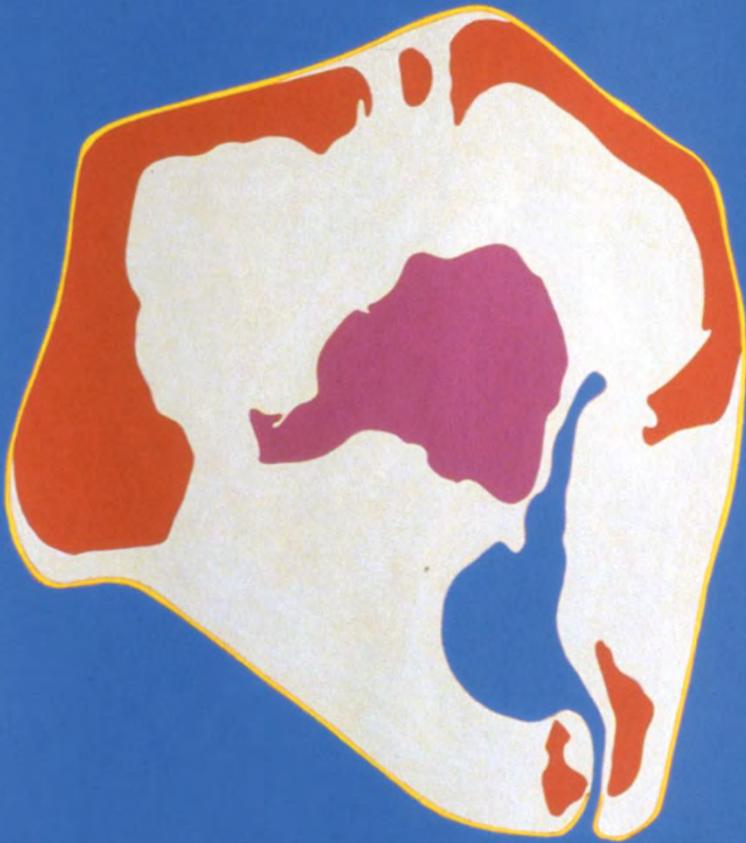


# FEAR



BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU



FEAR

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai by Santikaro

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« *The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.* » (Dhp 354)

## *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 Buddhadāsa 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 world upon earth.

from

*Buddhadāsa Indapañño*

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2530

# Contents

<i>Anumodanā</i> .....	
Contents .....	
Fear .....	1
Fear & Learning .....	24
About the Author .....	I
About the Translator .....	II
Recommended Reading (Books) .....	III
Online Resources .....	IV
Kevala Retreat (Liberation Park) .....	V
Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives .....	V

# Fear

*A talk given to monks on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1969  
at Suan Mokkh's Spiritual Theater*

I call this style of talk *Dhamma-Paṭimokha*. You are accustomed to *paṭimokha* being about the monastic discipline (*vinaya*). In fact, it means the important gist of a subject summarized point by point in a concise, easy-to-remember form. *Paṭimokha* are the main topics that must be spoken, remembered, and practiced. A prominent example of this is the Buddha's *Ovāda-Paṭimokha*, which summarizes his teaching in three aspects, four central reminders, and six fundamental practices. First, the three aspects of all the Buddhas' teachings:

*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ*

Never doing the least evil.

*Kusalassūpasampadā*

In virtue always fulfilled,

*Sacitta pariyodapanaṃ*

Purifying one's own heart:

*Etaṃ buddhānasānaṃ*

These are the teachings of all Buddhas.

Next, reminders of four central principles:

*Khantī paramaṃ tapo tītikkhā*

Patience is the supreme crucible of *kilesa*.

*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā*

All Awakened Ones say Nibbāna is Supreme.

*Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī*

Those who harm are not truly gone forth;

*Samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto*

Those who oppress others are not yet calmed.

Then, fundamental principles to be learned and acted upon:

*Anūpavādo anūpaghāto*

Not speaking evil, not doing harm,

*Pātimokkhe ca saṃvaro*

Restraint within the Training Discipline,

*Mattaññūtā ca bhattasmiṃ*

Knowing what is proper in taking food,

*Pantañca sayanāsanaṃ*

Sleeping and sitting in solitary places,

*Adhicitte ca āyogo*

Devoted in training the mind ever higher:

*Etaṃ buddhānasāsaṃ*

These are the teachings of all Buddhas.

These are essential Dhamma teachings that must be remembered.

Here in these talks, we speak only of Dhamma essentials. We repeat and emphasize them over and over, especially matters concerning Ego and Mine.<sup>1</sup> We summarize in terms of Ego and Mine for the convenience of ordinary people in memorizing, studying, and practicing. In fact, the entirety of Buddhism can be summarized in many ways. However, the most concise is the Buddha's single sentence, 'All things ought not to be clung to.' This clinging brings up Ego and Mine; if there's no clinging, Ego and Mine don't occur. Therefore, we take the subject of Ego and Mine as being the most concise summary of the Buddha's words. On the suffering side are matters of Ego and Mine. On the side of no suffering are matters without Ego and Mine.

Matters of suffering are spread out over many topics. Here, we constantly discuss the *dukkha* of Ego and Mine. We also discuss the quenching of Ego and Mine all the time. Consequently, here we don't talk about anything other than Ego and Mine in one aspect or another for the sake of increasingly clear understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tuakoo* and *khongkoo* are central terms in Ajahn Buddhadasa's teaching. I've tried various translations over the years and am now using Ego and Mine, capitalized to distinguish from ordinary meanings of the words and to convey intensity. *Koo* is an old Thai first person pronoun that came to be considered coarse in modern times. *Tuakoo* (Ego) is the sense of subjectivity and self assumed to exist independently and that constellates self-centeredness. *Khongkoo* (Mine) is everything appropriated by this self-centered Ego. *Tuakoo* and *khongkoo* inevitably are connected with the frequent references to *kilesa* (defilements) – the ignorant, reactive, selfish, and destructive ego-states that are central to Buddhist understanding of *dukkha*.

## **Fear, a Greatly Disturbing Suffering**

In today's discussion of Ego and Mine, I'd like to discuss fear. Fear is a form of suffering that hugely disturbs human well-being. Some of that fear ought not to be so disruptive, but is. Yet, we mostly hear about lust and greed (*rāga* and *lobha*), anger and hatred (*kodha* and *dosa*), when discussing the sources of suffering. Delusion (*moha*), with its broad boundaries, gets less attention.

### **Fear Falls under the *Moha* Category of *Kilesa***

Here, we will consider fear as a variety of delusion. You should situate it correctly within the three kinds of *kilesa*, the defilements that obscure and pollute mind's natural freedom and purity. Fear isn't a form of greed or hatred, which means it's a form of *moha* (delusion), of stupidity and blindness, of non-understanding. Not understanding something, we can be afraid of it continually. Clearly, greed, lust, anger, and hatred are matters of Ego and Mine. Loving something, we pull on it. Angry or hating, we push away or destroy. Both cases are rooted in Ego and Mine. Greed and lust insist on having or getting; anger and hatred are offended or obstructed. Delusion is foolish. It neither wants something nor wants to harm or destroy. In the case of fear, the foolishness is afraid of losing something one has.

Know how to distinguish among these three categories of *kilesa*: *rāga* and *lobha*, *dosa* and *kodha*, and *moha*. The *rāga* and *lobha* (lust and greed) bunch wants to have what it likes or is in love with

whatever it already has. The *dosa* and *kodha* (hatred and anger) bunch is different. They want to harm or destroy what they're involved with. Greed pulls towards and anger pushes away. Delusion is, again, different. *Moha* is confused, unsure whether to like something or dislike. For example, instead of loving or hating, it's afraid of losing what it loves or of being unable to fight off what it doesn't like or destroy its enemies.

On reflection, we can see that all fear depends on fear of death. This requires attention and examination. Whatever we may be afraid of, the fear comes down to being afraid of losing life. Whatever we fear, whatever is frightening for us – creatures such as tigers, immediately threatening dangers, even thunder and lightning – are because we're afraid they will endanger our lives.<sup>2</sup> This phenomena applies to little things like geckos and millipedes, too. They all have their roots in the fear that they might endanger our lives. Then we hate them. Our fear is mixed with strong aversion. Still, the essence is fear that they are a threat in one way or another. We can't bear to face them or to associate with them. This habit goes so far as to fear things we cannot see, such as spirits, as well as things that we don't know what they are and yet fear that they may harm our lives. When

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<sup>2</sup> In this talk, tigers and snakes are not simply metaphorical. Before the massive environmental destruction that came with rapid economic development, tigers and leopards lived in the forests near Suan Mokkh, occasionally wandering into the monastery, and crocodiles were common around Pum Rieng where Ajahn Buddhādāsa grew up. Cobras and kraits are still common.

we say we're afraid of being spooked by ghosts, the meaning is that they might kill us or deprive us of something important.

The animal instinct that doesn't want to die and wants to survive doesn't require thought or decision. There's no reasoning involved because it's inborn. We instinctively don't want to lose our lives, we don't want to die. As soon as something has a hint of death or of killing us, we're afraid. This makes fear a form of selfishness, of being centered on Ego and Mine. Such Ego and Mine can be intense. The survival and self-preservation instinct is the essence of Ego and Mine. Consequently, there is no way for this selfishness to escape having to suffer.

### **Fear Is Both Root Cause and Suffering Itself**

From these reflections we can see that fear is a root cause of *dukkha* (suffering). We also can say that it is itself suffering. The terms 'dukkha' and 'root cause of *dukkha*' can be separated verbally and conceptually but not in experience and practice. There's no time to separate them; as soon as there's the root cause of suffering, it's already suffering. The things that bring *dukkha* are already *dukkha*. Fear is the same. As soon as there's fear, it's *dukkha* right then. Consequently, we can say that fear brings suffering and that it is suffering. The experiential moments are so closely connected that they can't really be separated. In short, fear is suffering.

Fear is a problem about which we need always to be careful. If you compare opportunities for love and greed, opportunities for

hatred and anger, and opportunities for fear, you will find there's at least as much opportunity for fear as there is for the others. Love and anger, if we look carefully, are also matters of fear. We fear not getting what we love and also fear losing what we love. Thus, wherever love occurs, fear will also happen there. Once we have something we love, there will be concern and worry of losing the beloved. Also, before we have it, we fear not getting it.

Consequently, the whole time there is hope of getting what is loved, it will be full of fear or mixed with fear. The fear of not getting will oppress and burn the mind. For just this reason, fear can burn up anything. The whole time there is fear of not getting the loved, that love will burn. Once acquiring something loved, the fear of losing it will burn. If fear can be removed from love, it won't have any toxicity.

Anger is the same. To be even a little angry at something, there must be fear that it is a danger to us, is our competitor, or is our enemy. Therefore, we don't like it. We don't like how it looks; we dislike even just seeing it, maybe hate it. When we are on fire with anger at somebody, the root cause must be that this person endangered us. We're afraid we will die. Or we fear that something beloved of ours will be damaged or harmed, or that we'll lose something we cherish. Consequently, we hate it or are angry about it from the get-go, in advance. Once there's any demonstration of actual harm to our life or our beloved stuff, our anger goes through the roof. This is how anger and hatred are connected with fear of

losing life or beloved things. Both matters of liking and disliking, loving and anger, have fear thoroughly implicated and acting to destroy our well-being.

As for fear by itself, such as being afraid of the dark, of ghosts, or whatever, it's based in believing or wondering or worrying that 'This is dangerous. It will harm me. It's a danger for me.' That's how we fear things we cannot see or touch. On the other hand, there are things that are real and clearly dangerous, such as a leopard approaching. We are afraid of tigers and leopards because we have knowledge that they are dangerous. Even if we have never seen one personally, we have seen pictures and heard stories that lead us to believe they truly are dangerous. Our fear of them is complete, even before we've met a real live tiger or leopard. We can dream of them and be afraid. This is how fear can happen all the time, whether occasions of love, of anger, of hatred, or of fear all by itself.

In our current world of materialism and consumerism, we are afraid of losing our material and consumer pleasures. Thus, we strongly protect against such eventualities, to the extent of fighting and killing. Those who've accumulated lots of material goods fear those who lack them. For example, the investors and capitalists fear that the laborers will seize their property. Laborers don't have as much to fear. We can say that whoever clings the most will have the most fear. Whoever has a lot of Ego and Mine will have a lot to fear. This is why the capitalists have trouble sleeping – they have a lot of Ego and Mine, and thus a lot of fear. The laborers have very little fear

and sleep more soundly. This is significant in the current war between capitalists and laborers.

If free of Ego and Mine, life is at ease. There's no fear. But people say it can't be done. They claim it's impossible to have no fear, just like they say free-empty mind is impossible. Everybody cries out that it cannot be done. If free-empty mind can't be done, they'll have to settle for taking *dukkha* instead. It's the same with fear. A life without fear is impossible, they say. That they can't have such a life is true in that ordinarily it can't be done. Usually, people can't let go of Ego and Mine. Will they carry on being ordinary people like this forever?

If we are to settle for being such ordinary people continually, it means we settle for suffering over and over again. We would choose to be commoners, fools, and weaklings continually. If we don't want to be such continually ordinary people, we must uplift ourselves to the level of doing what we've claimed can't be done. Everything we thought we couldn't do can and must be uplifted, for example, destroying clinging so that mind is empty and free of Ego. Just this is what must become doable.

### **Fear Is Because of Foolishness**

Being afraid is something that doesn't require much investment. The question, 'Why don't we live without fear?' is well worth pondering. Is it possible, can we live without fear bothering us? It must be possible because people have done it. In particular, *arahants* have

done it.<sup>3</sup> In them fear has disappeared completely and unequivocally. For those of us who aren't *arahants*, do we take it that we can't do it at all, or, rather, that we can do it in some aspects according to our ability?

We might think, using our common sense reasoning, that fear is a version of stupidity, as was said earlier. Such fear can't be other than foolish. Fear of ghosts, fear of things with no substance, fear of the dark, fear of things that aren't real, is very foolish. Even fear of things that actually exist, such as a tiger walking towards us, is still stupid. Think about it.

First of all, fear of ghosts is stupid because we were taught to be stupid from childhood. Dogs and cats aren't afraid of *phii* because nothing taught them to be.<sup>4</sup> They actually can bite and devour things people say are ghosts. They go into the charnel grounds and dig up *phii* (corpses) to feast on them. Why aren't they afraid? When people see even a little piece of bone, they're afraid, so afraid their hearts tremble. This is a stupidity animals don't have. The skeleton hanging in the old Dhamma Hall is a good example. Some people were afraid at first, but then smartened up and lost their fear. At first, everyone is afraid of it.

Let me tell you about when we first hung the skeleton there. When people heard about it, they came to look. A teacher brought

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<sup>3</sup> 'Worthy Ones' who are free of egoism, greed, hatred, and delusion.

<sup>4</sup> *Phii* generally refers to various spirits and ghosts, mostly malicious. It is also a popular term for corpses.

thirty or forty students, who varied a lot in their reactions. Two or three of them hugged the post at the bottom of the stairs and wouldn't go up. They stayed there hugging and shaking, truly afraid. But still, their eyes wanted to look. Most of the students went up but kept their distance. Only a few students went up close. Two, no more than three, students dared to touch it. Just a single student dared to put his head into the skeleton and be hugged by it. That's how different the children were in their fear. The very same skeleton provoked disparate reactions. The two or three who clung to the bottom of the stairs went home and were feverish all night. One bunch of them wasn't affected very much and some weren't affected at all. Although the skeleton was the same, because of the different levels of stupidity, the reactions were on different levels.

These children couldn't do basic addition. If they had the thinking ability, they could figure out that within themselves a full skeleton also existed. Whatever was in the skeleton hanging in the Dhamma Hall also exists in each of us. Yet, in us there is much more that the skeleton lacks, such as blood, flesh, heart, liver, and lungs. We contain much that the skeleton doesn't have. And if we imagine that the skeleton is inhabited by a spirit, then we also are inhabited by a spirit. Our spirit is better and stronger. If we are to fight, we will be better because we have muscles, sinews, blood vessels, and much more. We would certainly win the struggle day or night. If they could only count and add, these children would have nothing to fear. This

is how it is if we speak directly and reasonably. There's nothing to fear.

Nowadays, it's only stupidity that makes us afraid. Many people have been willing to listen and ponder carefully until their fear is reduced. If we aren't diligent in thinking through this perspective, we won't be able to overcome the fear that lingers in the mind. Thus, it's necessary to think, reflect, and contemplate constantly in order to eradicate fear.

Concerning things that don't actually exist, it's apparently rather easy to destroy fear. Concerning things that actually exist in front of us, such as our fears of tigers, snakes, and lightning that might kill us, it will be more difficult to get rid of fear when they are facing us. The strength of the fear will be stronger. Even so, we can observe in the same way that we are still being foolish. Fear makes the situation more difficult. Wouldn't lack of fear be better? No matter what were to happen, wouldn't fearlessness be better?

Fear usually exceeds whatever cause triggered the fear. In seeing something we're afraid of, there's fear. Sometimes, we're thinking ahead to make ourselves afraid, and there may be no actual existing danger. Imagine if you saw a fake tiger placed somewhere you believe tigers to be by someone wishing to deceive you. You'd be just as afraid as with a real tiger. Deceitful appearances can cause fears and fevers just the same. This means that fear doesn't come from the real thing, as people think. Instead, it comes from the

stupidity of what we're creating. With the fake tiger that we think is real, we create a real tiger in our minds and then experience fear.

### **Imagining Things Can Make Us Afraid**

Creating mental pictures, what we call 'imagination,' is the real culprit. Imagination is the main factor in creating fear. If we destroy this, fear won't exist. It could not exist. If we saw a tiger, we would have to imagine that it would attack us. We can imagine that even a fake tiger will attack us. Seeing a real tiger that doesn't attack or harm anyone doesn't cause fear. Actually, tigers don't automatically attack everyone, but we imagine that they always do. This is a crucial fact of the things we fear. It creates the image that makes us afraid automatically, all by itself, without any intention on our part. Then it dominates our minds so that there's no room for intelligence at that time. Fear is the result.

Whoever has a big ego will be especially afraid of dying. Whoever really loves themselves, or really loves their property and wealth, will be really afraid of dying. Whoever really loves their spouse and children will be really afraid of dying. Whoever doesn't have so much of such loves won't be so afraid of dying. Seeing a tiger, they won't be all that afraid compared to those who really love themselves. Some people are terrified, others barely have any fear at all. Hunters who go into the jungle regularly have very little fear of it. Further, instead of being afraid, they only think of shooting the tiger and forget to fear the tiger. In this way, the fundamental imagination

is suppressed and doesn't manifest. There's only 'I will shoot you' and nobody is afraid.

*Arahants* aren't afraid because there's no sense of Ego. Without the feeling that something is Me or Mine, they aren't afraid. There's absolutely no fear because there's no *upādāna* (clinging) to Ego. There's no subject to be harmed or destroyed – that is, there's no Ego to be attacked by the tiger. There's nothing to be afraid. When fear doesn't take over, the mind is full of awareness and intelligence, enough to know what to do. Should one stand still or calmly walk away? What is most fitting in the circumstances? It isn't that complicated. If the tiger actually approaches, there's no need to flee. It will eat us anyway. If we can avoid being eaten, then do so appropriately without excess.

This brings us to a question concerning the difference between ordinary humans and *arahants*. *Arahants* aren't afraid to die because there's no clinging to Ego and Mine. For ordinary folks to not fear death, to some degree, they need something to cover up this clinging. For example, if strong enough, recklessness can conceal this clinging and not fear death. If a hunter is to shoot a tiger, he can't let himself be afraid. He needs another feeling to suppress this clinging so that it can't function and induce fear. Certain insane people don't feel fear either and can be reckless, even wanting to box or wrestle with the tiger to show off to others. Such lack of fear is possible.

Therefore, fearlessness depends on the principle that clinging to Ego and Mine doesn't function, either because there's no clinging left

or it temporarily cannot function. If clinging remains, but it doesn't have the opportunity to act, fear doesn't occur. In the absence of clinging, such as with *arahants'* fearlessness, clinging cannot function because it doesn't exist. Sometimes an insane person or a vicious criminal can act seemingly like *arahants*, such as when not fearing death.

Now, it's best to focus on ordinary people, such as ourselves, who are in the process of uplifting themselves. Don't let fear dominate, oppress, and tyrannize to the degree allowed in the past. It's better to diminish and weaken it progressively. And there's no other way to do so than study the details and subtleties of the *arahants* in order to follow their footsteps. That is, weaken clinging and steadily replace *upādāna* with awareness and wisdom, until clinging is destroyed.

Do you get this? The self-oriented clinging makes one afraid when seeing a tiger. With mindful intelligence we don't let that happen; clear comprehension takes its place. Wise thinking is better because there's less fear and less suffering. In meeting a tiger, we needn't let fear take over until we can't do anything right: trembling with fear, fainting with fear, unable to function at all because of fear. Instead, we create aware, wise experience.

Why be afraid when meeting a tiger? We ought to use our intelligence instead of such fear to consider what we ought to do. If we should run, then we run. If we ought to climb a tree, then we climb. If we should hide, duck, or whatever, we do it without fear. If we run

with fear, we will fall down. If we try to climb a tree while afraid, we either can't get up or slip and fall down. At each attempt to climb, we slip and fall. All of these allow the tiger to eat us. The tiger always has the advantage.

Without fear, we can run to the best of our ability or we can climb a tree skillfully. Whatever escape we prepare, we are able to do it well. If we run out of escape routes, or there are no trees to climb, and we must face the tiger – don't be afraid. Turn and face the tiger without fear because there is nothing better to do. There is still a chance we can fight off the tiger with our bare hands and do so without fear. This is better than someone who only knows to be afraid. Maybe we have the intelligence to use judo or whatever is at hand. We won't suffer and might even enjoy the challenge.

### **Know How to Quench without Remainder and Become *Arahant***

What of situations where we're not able to fight off the tiger, the tiger has already bitten, or the tiger is chewing on us? There's no need to fear. There's still hope of being the *jīvitasamasī* kind of *arahant*, that is, awakened and liberated at mind's extinguishing (at physical death). If unafraid until consciousness dissolves, it's *jīvitasamasī*. Someone who has studied remainderless quenching deeply, has already committed to remainderless quenching, and is still intent on remainderless quenching right now becomes a *jīvitasamasī*

*arahant* in the tiger's mouth at the last second.<sup>5</sup> If one must die, this end is better than any other.

I've been using the excellent example of a tiger because people fear them a lot. If we want to uplift ourselves and stop being overly foolish and thick-skulled, I'm using tigers to discuss how we should be when facing dangers and death.

There's a story told in the commentary to the *Great Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness* that fits the situation I've discussed here. A certain monk, not an *arahant*, just an ordinary monk, was in the forest striving in meditation for the sake of *arahantship*, when a tiger attacked. He cultivated the contemplation of *vedanā* as an establishment of mindfulness, seeing that *vedanā*, the feeling tone of the experience, was nothing more than a natural mechanism occurring with the mind through causes and conditions, according to natural law. It isn't self, ego, person, us, them, or anything of that sort. He took the painful *vedanā* of the tiger's bite as the object for establishing mindfulness and investigated. The tiger chewed and ate. This monk increased the mind's strength enough to sustain the contemplation despite intense *vedanā*. He contemplated while the tiger ate him, until the last second when the tiger's feasting killed him. He was *arahant* just the same, of the *jīvitasamasī* variety.

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<sup>5</sup> With 'remainderless quenching' Tan Ajahn's emphasizes the cooling and 'going out' that doesn't reignite. *Nirodha* is translated in Thai as *dab*, which commonly is used for lights and fires going out, yet liable to come back on or reignite. To avoid misunderstanding, Tan Ajahn emphasizes quenching without any remainder left to reignite.

If we must confront something we've been afraid of or that is a serious threat to life, we ought to be unafraid, at least less so than other people. Take this opportunity to become *arahant*. Have the strength to become *arahant* simultaneously with dying. This is better than never being *arahant*. If afraid-afraid-afraid, nothing one does is right and one dies unnaturally and badly. It serves us fools right. To die unnaturally is to die while not wanting to die. So just about everyone dies unnaturally because they die trying to avoid it. Yet when something makes death inevitable, without clear awareness and understanding they die unnaturally, even violently.

We can prevent unnatural deaths by being unafraid. Don't let death happen while afraid of dying. Don't be mixed up in not wanting to die although death is happening anyway. As soon as something deadly starts to happen, be immediately mindful, clear, and comprehending, even in the case of accidents and unexpected occurrences, such as a bomb exploding or a train wreck. We can master our mindfulness. If death is unavoidable, then we die mindfully, rather than uselessly and unnaturally. In large train wrecks, people don't want to die and are terrorized, thus they die violently and unnaturally. We, however, won't let ourselves die like that. With mindfulness and insight, as the various aspects of life come to an end, we take these endings as our object for remainderless quenching and not being born further. In this way, we might be *arahant* without even knowing it. This isn't something all that difficult, if we train well.

These are the facts of the matter with fear. We can turn them to our advantage. The things that provoke fear and the occasions for fear can become beneficial in our Dhamma life. Conversely, they can be used to create cowards and the ghosts of those who die badly. Therefore, be careful not to waste too much in fear. Think and consider carefully. Prepare yourself well; after all, we must meet with fear all the time.

Tonight, as you walk back to your hut in the forest, if you are afraid of snakes the whole time, you'll be foolish the whole time. Or you can walk without fear. At the times you are afraid, you will find out and know what fear is like and how we are susceptible to it. You won't know it now in this place; there's nothing to be afraid of here, where everything is fine here and you all are comfortable and clever. However, when you must walk in the dark along narrow paths, even if there aren't any snakes, you'll be afraid there are snakes the whole time. Then you can know for yourself that you can't distinguish fear from your mind, if you let it happen just like everyone who doesn't understand. If we are disciples of the Buddha, we ought to have something that can distinguish the fear, or maybe not fear at all, and still have the intelligence to take precautions for the snakes.

Should you in fact be bit, you can benefit from it in many ways. The method is the same: understand the facts of nature, life, world, body, and conditions. This doesn't mean I'm teaching you to go find a tiger or snake to bite you. I only wish for things to go naturally according to causes and conditions and that you have the knowledge,

mindfulness, and intelligence to observe and study, taking every occasion as a lesson to increase wisdom. Measure yourself constantly. Know yourself continually. Uplift yourself steadily in terms of freedom from *kilesa*.

When fear can be diminished, other *kilesas* will diminish accordingly. Love and anger will diminish because they all come from the same taproot – clinging to Ego and Mine. They will weaken together. If we eradicate one kind of defilement, whether *rāga*, *dosa*, or *moha*, doing so will shake the taproot in Ego and Mine. The question is which *kilesa* disturbs our peace and happiness the most; we should focus on that one. If fear disturbs all the time, then tackle it first. For a start, at least, attack the little fears that you carry, such as fear of the dark, ghosts, snakes, and the like.

We take real life stuff as our lessons in how to practice. Don't lie around dreaming of things that aren't real; such fantasies of practice will all look wonderful and perfect. We must work with real things that have actual power to take over our minds. Do you have the fiber and strength to take them on? Give it a go. Don't be so afraid of them that you don't dare do anything about them. Be careful, before long, you won't dare do anything real. Can you understand this?

### **The Epidemic of Fear and Testing Yourself**

If you allow your fears to expand and spread, you won't dare do anything. You'll be afraid to eat almsfood from this village where the food isn't clean and there's typhoid, dysentery, and other bacteria.

You might be afraid to eat anything here, which is the sort of thing that can get carried away. In this case, what I'm saying is true; I'm not trying to trick you. It's a fact that villages like this aren't able to practice the sanitation required to eradicate such bacteria.

It used to be much worse. The first day I stayed here, I had dysentery. With time and familiarity, my body developed immunity. We ought to be grateful to these bacteria – typhoid, dysentery, whichever – that create immunity in us once we are exposed. Eventually, we can eat more and tolerate more of these germs. This is a better way to consider such things. If we afraid of things, you need not bother eating. Or, you will eat with difficulty and trepidation. Your health will deteriorate and eventually you would die.

An actual case like this happened to a judge in Ban Don, the provincial seat, decades ago. Everything had to be perfectly clean. Even the big water storage jars and stairs were washed and scrubbed over and over, steamed and boiled over and over. All had to be thoroughly cleaned. He didn't last very long. He had no immunity in him and one little infection killed him. This story illustrates that we must know the limitations of fear. To be afraid like that, what do you think, was he a fool or was he intelligent?

This is why we ought to be grateful for the things that make us afraid. We should thank them for making us increasingly intelligent and skillful. We will get the greatest benefit from the things people are afraid of if we have the intelligence to receive them with the skills

of the Buddha. Such intelligence considers them lessons for knowing that this *vedanā* is merely *vedanā*, this experience and how it feels is just *vedanā*, and not a separate being, individual person, lasting self, us, or them.

There are many ways of speaking about *arahants*, such as, *ajjhambhī* (never startled) and *anuttarāsī* (not frightened). Their hairs never stand on end, they have nothing to do with fear, and they are always calm and composed because they've given up regarding Ego and Mine. With no more Ego and Mine experienced or ready to be born, fear is finished.

This matter of Ego and Mine is the single most important theme that everyone must study, train with, and practice. Don't assume that this can't be practiced. True, it's impossible, but only when there's refusal and unwillingness to practice.

Fear can be abandoned; it can be weakened. Therefore, we should test ourselves consistently: is this month an improvement on last month? Is this year better than the last in terms of fear and startle? Do things that used to raise our hairs no longer stimulate them? Things in the dark that we used to fear, are they no longer frightening? Really, there's nothing hiding in the dark. But something pops up and our hairs stand on end, even if it's only just a cicada. That our hairs stand up is something silly for humans, who are lower than animals in this issue.

Well, that's *dhmma-paṭimokha* in which we continuously and exclusively discuss matters concerning Ego and Mine.

And that's all the time we have today.



## Fear & Learning

*A section from Ten Years in Suan Mokkh, a memoir written in 1943*

Each morning I set out for alms round through Suan Mokkh's broad confines, along the narrow path through thickets next to the big pond. In the middle of that path I have 'wasted time' waiting for a young buck otter that has come out to roll and frolic in the sandy soil. Then after finishing its business, it gets out of my way. While I wait, it from time to time raises itself up on two legs to gaze at me. It's as if it were challenging me: 'If you dare to hit me then come on.' When it raises itself up to the height of my chest at a distance of just eight or nine meters, I am just like all of you who have never met up with this sort of problem before. Also, I am in the beginning stages of training myself in the Blessed One's highest way of Dhamma – that is, in not fighting and not protecting myself, yet not fleeing, not being afraid, and not retreating. What would you expect or what would you have me do except stand and wait for it to go away?

Another aspect of this, which ought to be considered quite special and has been a major support for me, is the love of learning that

wants to understand and wants to try things out. When mental strength and mindfulness are still with me, all I want to do is give it a try, even if it means finding out what a tiger's bite or a snake's bite or a ghost's tricks or a conversation with nasty spirits is like. These all can be taken as opportunities to study such things as well as to test my own strength, courage, and sensitivity.

It seems, however, that fortune doesn't lead in that direction. Fear turns out to be something deceptive and pointless, in other words, I've wasted my chances as befits this stupidity that has made itself afraid. Thus, if we have wisdom and reasoning sufficient for maintaining ourselves, we can hope for both safety and opportunities for more refined studies.

The things that I've been afraid of increasingly become ordinary stuff until there are times that they become objects of amusement and I find myself changing into another person. And when things carry on like this further, the fear-based obstacles that have interfered with mental stability and concentration decrease and eventually disappear. I become able to sit in quiet places outside all alone at night without any form of protection other than the robes I am wearing. Then, mind is firm and direct in its practice as intended.

I used to think that that we ought to rely upon protections such as fences and mosquito nets to help diminish the anxiety of sitting alone in scary places. However, I must confess to my fellow students that such isn't likely to be true. We will never achieve a new mind that has fully let go through that approach. That mind remains

anxious and never has sufficient strength and motivation. Once we leave aside such comforting supports, the foolishness of ordinary people returns again.





## **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 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 (Suan Mokkh).

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

## **About the Translator**

Santikaro trained as a bhikkhu under Ajahn Buddhādāsa during the final years of his life (1985-1993). During that time, Santikaro translated for Ajahn Buddhādāsa both orally during talks and interviews, as well as in printed works. Santikaro continues translation and other Dhamma work at Kevala Retreat in Wisconsin, USA, and is a close collaborator with the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives.

## Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*
- *Christianity and Buddhism*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: A Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- *No Religion*
- *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*

## Online Resources

- [www.bia.or.th](http://www.bia.or.th)
- [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org)
- [www.kevalaretreat.org](http://www.kevalaretreat.org)
- [www.liberationpark.org](http://www.liberationpark.org)
- [www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa](https://www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa)
- [www.facebook.com/suanmokkhbangkok](https://www.facebook.com/suanmokkhbangkok)

## **Kevala Retreat (Liberation Park)**

Kevala Retreat (Liberation Park) is a Dhamma refuge in the USA's Midwest inspired by Suan Mokkh. Here, Santikaro and friends work to nurture a garden of liberation along the lines taught by Ajahn Buddhādāsa, where followers of the Buddha-Dhamma Way can explore Dhamma as Nature and in the Pāli suttas.



## **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.

