

# **BUDDHISM**



**IN 15 MINUTES**

**Buddhathas Bhikku**



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*(In this essay certain Pali and Sanskrit terms have been transliterated, for the most part in such a way as to approximate the pronunciation used in Thai. A few terms used in Thai in the Pali form are here presented in the Sanskrit form, because they have become familiar in English in that form.)*



## **PREFACE**

The writer of this remarkable essay firmly believes that the gist of Buddhism can be presented in brief compass; one does not need a long and complicated statement that few can understand. Here he presents the heart of the Buddhist message in its philosophical and psychological aspects.

He does not deal with certain other sides of Buddhism that one might like to know about: its rites and ceremonies, merit making, ethical ideals, the order of monks, lay participation, and so on.

But if one wishes to understand the heart of Buddhist thought as presented by one of its incisive Thai spokesmen, this essay is well worth more than fifteen minutes of one's time.





From the time when the empty world began to be a world of man many hundreds of thousands of years ago, in every age man has used his brain in a progressive search for happiness for himself. Thus there arose teachers who taught principles of happiness in varying ways. These teachers were called *sasada* (*founder of a religion*); their teaching was called *sasana* (*a religion*); and those who followed the teaching were called *sasanik* (*adherents of a religion*). Every aspect gradually changed for the better. As for teaching on the level of the world, or behavior, every religion taught the same principles. As is generally known, these principles were: Do not do evil. Do good, both to yourself and to others. But that part of the teaching which was on a higher level, having to do with greater spiritual happiness, this differed. The religions had the same aim, but some were higher than others.

Every founder of a religion except the Lord Buddha taught that one should hold to a certain Something, which the disciples could not prove, saying it was the Highest and Holiest Thing, the creator of the world and the giver of happiness to the creatures of the world, upon whom one depended. Such leaders taught that one should revere and

worship this Thing strictly, without any sort of proof. Beginning with the age of the worship of spirits, fire, the sun, the moon and the stars, and on down to the age of the worship of gods, such as Narayana and Brahma of Hinduism, Jehovah of Christianity and Judaism, Allah of Islam, each severally taught that one should put one's faith in one or another of these gods.

Over 2,000 years ago, after the gods of Brahmanism, before Christ of the Europeans and Mohammed of the Arabs, the Lord Buddha came into being. He taught dependence upon oneself, and the highest of spiritual truths, different from all other religions, namely:

## The Principle of Karma

The substance of his teaching on this was that happiness and suffering<sup>1</sup> are the results of their own causes, that is, the person's deeds. The results of any person's actions must fall on that person with certainty and justice. No one can mix up the doer and the receiver, or have power over this law. This is called the *principle of Karma*. It can be stated in short propositions thus: All creatures have their own *karma*, and

their lives turn in response to their old *karma*. At the same time they are making new *karma* in addition, which in turn will become old *karma*, interacting as both cause and effect. This goes on endlessly, in a overlapping, chainlike effect, without a break. We call this relationship *sangsarawatt* (*the Wheel of Rebirths*) or *saikam* (*the Karma Chain*). In it there is a connection or overlapping between this minute and the next, or this hour and the next, this day and the next, this month and the next, this year and the next—and between this life and the next, all mixed and involved until it is hard to know for sure what is the cause of what. If one takes a casual look, it appears as though someone were causing it all. The karmic chain of any one individual differs from that of another. Therefore each person is according to his own *karma*, no two are the same. *Karma* is the cause, happiness and suffering are the results arising from *karma*.

## The Non - self Principle

The Buddha taught that there is no Creator God. There is nothing that one should call the self. All things have no crea-

tor. They came into being on account of natural causes, through gradual, successive changes in accord with the laws of nature, without the control of anyone. This process is called *anatta* (*without self*). The principle of *anatta* is found only in Buddhism. It is not found in other religions, which teach that God created everything in the form of real entities, which are under the power of God, who is lord of all such entities.

The Buddha taught that there is no abiding, lasting entity. One thing arises from another, and that thing arises in succession from still another. This process began, how long ago no one can say, nor can one predict with certainty how long it will go on in the future. This law applies both to things that have *winyan* (*consciousness*) and to things that do not. As for those things without *winyan*, we will not deal with them, because they have nothing to do with the question of happiness and suffering. As for the things that have *winyan*, such as man and animals in general, these we should learn about, because they have to do with happiness and suffering in life. We human beings arise from the union of physical and mental elements, which have a natural existence in this world. When these two sorts of elements

cannot come together in the right proportions, then a human being cannot as yet be born. When they are assembled in the proper proportions, then a human being comes into existence, just as in the case of a plant which depends on earth, sky, and air, and the germ in its seed, and grows to be a great tree. But the physical element and the mental element arise from the union of other things, which have united in successive stages until the proper time for coming together in a new form. The physical element making up the human body—for example, vegetable matter and the flesh of animals, which depend on other things—came into being in many stages, until it became that which nourishes the body, giving being and nourishment to its smallest part (*i.e., the cell*), which becomes flesh, skin, bone, hair, nails, teeth, blood, etc., in our bodies. The element air which arises from other parts of nature is used for breath that maintains the blood and various parts of the body; blood is the cause of body warmth. This is enough to show that the process is one of orderly, successive dependence. This is the arising, mixing, and altering of nature on the side of the physical element.

As for the mental element, it is all the

more refined and subtle. The mental element resides only in physical elements which have been combined in just the right way, and has the function of governing both the physical element and itself, causing it to hold up or to be in this or that condition throughout the time that the unity of the organism is maintained. It is fitting to compare the matter with a dynamo. The various pieces of metal that go into the dynamo arose, before being assembled, from the elements—how many hundreds of thousands of years ago no one knows—until men combined them into various forms. There was still no electricity produced. But when they were brought together in the proper proportions, and then there was a turning action, strong electric force appeared. A part of the electricity produced by the turning of the dynamo may be used to aid in the turning process. If there were only the pieces of metal, or only the natural electric current found in the world, so that these things had not come together, then there would be no new current generated. Thus the physical element, or the body, may be compared with a dynamo, and the mental element with electricity: they have their existence in interdependence. Each must depend on the meeting of the constituent parts, which arise from other things

in many stages. The mental element arises from the mental element group, in dependence on the physical element. When the two come together, we hypostatize the person or creature, giving this name or that, for the sake of convenience in speaking, just as we call the various pieces of metal and material a dynamo of this or that make. The mutual relationship of things as cause and effect, which gives rise to this inquiry, is a profound and subtle question, which the Buddha penetrated in a definitive way in the evening of the night he was enlightened at Buddhagaya: It is called *Patickasamupbat (Dependent Origination)*.

This knowledge gave him a good understanding of the world, so that he was able to go on to solve the second problem, namely, what men should do in order to fit into a world with a nature like this, or to be happy in a world with such a nature or condition as this. The solution of this second problem resulted in the formulation of a number of principles which he used in teaching the companies of the faithful in the time that followed. They may be briefly summed up thus: Things that arise from other things that are impermanent, together with the actions that are connected with them, are impermanent. How can they be

permanent? They are restless, in motion, changing all the time. Things that change, that do not abide, bring about a condition of a sort that is hard to endure. That is, they cause the one concerned to be dissatisfied, to be sorry, and sorrowful. When there is change and sorrow such as this, man ought not to go against nature and take on himself this suffering by claiming that he himself is master of his body and other bodies. They are not ours. They are not in our possession. One can see this in that they are not in our power. We did not create them. Only from the natural power of *name* and *form*<sup>2</sup> did they arise. As for the person who becomes attached to things, whether things within or without himself, holding that they are things which will always be in accord with his wishes, for that person these things will become an agonizing problem, dark beyond clearing up. So the Buddha taught that one should sever connection with things, by not clinging to them with mind or heart, even though we must by nature depend on these things to live. That is to say, let us do what is right with regard to these things and let it go at that.

When we are not attached to a thing, that thing is not our heart's master, making us to desire, be angry, hate, fear, be dejected,



or long for the thing. We live in a blessed state. When the heart and mind have become free, then nothing can cause us to be in a state of suffering again throughout life. The sustained thinking directed toward solving this problem, until the heart and mind become free, is called *wipasanakamatan*. And when our minds are not willing to think seriously and deeply, because of the distracting power of love, anger, fear, laziness, or whatever, then one must discipline one's heart and mind to free them from these hindrances first. This sort of discipline we call *samatakamatan* ("making one's mind quiet"). If these hindrances did not exist, then *samatakamatan* would not be necessary except for entering a trance to attain the bliss of a Phra Ariya (*one who has attained a special degree of the Truth*). Like sleeping it is a blissful rest, for members of our group. But most of the Buddha's teachings have to do with *wipasanakamatan*.

## Attachment or Upatan

We can see clearly that the condition of *dukkha* (*suffering*) does indeed exist in the

world, but there are no persons to receive *dukkha*, if only they do not take it upon themselves through the mistaken understanding that those things are happiness, and desire to get them or keep them, so that there arises attachment to them; or mistakenly understand that both the things and they themselves are real entities which are in their power, and that they can have everything they wish. When one thinks of it, it is both incomparably funny and tragic that we assume the reality of things of which the Buddha said, "There is nothing there"—and so we make our own hearts have desire, and plant confusion and trouble in the heart: love and anger, hate and fear of the changing stage of those things which are, in fact, ever "without substance", just as the Buddha said.

The words "without substance" mean here, having no substantial reality which can make the affirmation to us, "Take it thus and so." For every sort of thing has other things composing and supporting it in stages, and so has its existence, accompanied by gradual change. Thus things which are made up of components are without substance, having no weight, no independence. How can one take a solid pledge from these things, when both that which takes and that

which gives pledge are not sovereign nor substantial selves? As for those who defy this principle and make a pledge or cling to a pledge, this is tantamount to emptiness being bound to emptiness—from what may one get any satisfying result? This clinging to the unsubstantial as real we call *upatan*. The materials which are the basis of this clinging we call *upatankhanta* (*upatan aggregates or groups*). There are five of them: form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness. Therefore the Buddha said that the Five Aggregates are the basis of the clinging which leads to suffering.

## The Great Truths

We may learn these truths from “school”—that is, our body—any one’s will serve the purpose. One must rely on the body in the search for the truth, for in this body are the characteristics—together with causes and effects—sufficient for study in the search for knowledge, and enough to give assurance in our knowledge. The Buddha said,

“Look now! In this body two yards long, which has both perception and mind, I establish the world (*that is, suffering*), the cause of the world (*that is, the cause*

*of suffering), the total extinguishing of the world (that is, the total extinguishing of suffering), and the action needed for the total extinguishing of the world (that is, of suffering)."*

Here the Buddha called our natural condition, which is full of suffering, the world; he called the desires of the world's creatures, which arise from clinging and misunderstanding, the cause of the world; he called the extinguishing of desire and the peace which comes from not clinging and from a right understanding of things, the extinguishing of the world; and he called the Eightfold Path the way to the extinguishing of the world. This is what every creature should make its life duty. In line with this we may say:

THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLE OF BUDDHISM IS THIS: IT TEACHES TO EXTINGUISH SUFFERING IN MIND AND HEART THROUGH THE STUDIOUS SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH, IN ONE'S BODY, AND THROUGH LEARNING THE TRUE NATURE OF THINGS AND PERSONS AROUND ONE, AVOIDING, OUT OF REGARD FOR THE LAW OF NON-SELF, THE ATTACHMENT THAT PRODUCES SUFFERING, AND SO HAVING A MIND FREE AND AT EASE.

To refrain from the clinging to self that causes selfishness is beneficial both to oneself and to others, or to the whole world: that is, one's self will have great blessedness and tranquility; as for others, besides not being oppressed, they may conduct themselves like the first, and so receive the same kind of blessedness. The fires of suffering in the world will be completely extinguished. The various principles of the doctrine, though they may be variously called, all come down to one principle, namely, the total extinction of suffering. This kind of knowledge brings about deep compassion and pity for one's fellows who are found in the sea of continual rebirth. Therefore it is not necessary to say that compassion is another important principle of Buddhism.

## **Of the World and Transcending The World**

He who takes empty things to be reality is one who misunderstands or, to put it another way, is one who makes himself a storehouse of suffering, and this is the usual thing with human beings everywhere, who are, as we say, still in the way of the world, not transcending the world, not by will free from the world.

In some ages and some matters those who seek and get much sorrow for themselves have received praise and respect. This is because people have been enamored of what they really do not know, and so have regard for the things of the world. Most poor people are very desirous of the rich man's money. But the rich man has little feeling or desire with respect to his own money—his ambition is for more than he already has! As for anxiety, if one would compare them, then all, both rich and poor, would be alike in this. It is in proportion to the degree that one assumes what is empty to be substantial reality. He who assumes much to be thus real must bear the greater, heavier burden! The Lord Buddha himself once shouldered this heavy stone, but then he shook it off!! For he discovered that it is suffering, for him who misunderstands and clings fast to the unreal: it is an abomination. On the other hand, it is light as a feather for him who does not cling, who has cast it away. We say that the Buddha discovered *lokuttaratam* (*the Truth that releases from the world*). Therefore Buddhism is the teaching that one should cast off suffering, get beyond suffering, the one thing one can count on in the world, and so not create and bear suffering. Buddhism does not make one weakly cry

out for happiness, while not knowing suffering nor shaking it off by knowing that it is the condition of being without suffering which is happiness. Indeed, it is making life free from things which exist naturally, and entice the heart in the world, after we in our great stupidity have yielded ourselves as slaves throughout long cycles of existence that cannot end until our knowledge catches up with the nature of life in the world. The mind that thus transcends the world is called *lokuttarchit*, and the condition of being thus is called *lokuttaratam*, *lokuttarawisai*, or *lokuttarapum*.

In other religions, when the faithful are about to die, they call out, "Heaven! God!" But the true Buddhist will call out, "The extinguishing of suffering without remnant!" This shows that those others still desire to be in the world—the world of heaven, or the world of God. As for the Buddhist, his goal is the extinguishing of suffering without remnant. So there is transcendence of the world in Buddhism alone!

When mankind was still primitive, the highest happiness he knew was just to get enough of good things to eat to fill himself for the moment. But man's thought did not remain static in the search for greater happiness. In time his views gradually

changed to something higher, until he recognized and desired wealth and territory, desired sensual pleasures up to and including heaven, the ultimate in sensual pleasure. Much later there was a group of sophisticated thinkers who saw that sensual happiness is in reality a thing that pierces the heart in proportion to its sweetness, and so they sought a still higher happiness, and laid hold of the principle that having and being that are without sensual pleasure are the apex of happiness: that is, achieving perfect unity and peace of mind (*the ecstatic condition which is the goal of meditation*). And they promulgated the doctrine that the life of such undisturbed peace of mind is *nirvana*. The word *nirvana*, which means literally "without piercing (*i. e., without pain or suffering*)" came into use from that time.

A long time later the Lord Buddha arose and discovered that the condition of peace of mind by way of the trance is not enduring—it changes and disappears just as do lesser things. Thus it cannot be called *nirvana*. It still has refined pain, for it still has the understanding that the self exists, and so the heart is pained when it (*the self*) disintegrates and vanishes, because there is still desire in such fashion that, though there is to be sure no sen-



suality, there is still craving. So the Buddha promulgated as the true *nirvana* the extinguishing without remnant of anything to hold to as the self. This is the highest possible bliss. Thus the transcendence of the world, or *nirvana*, is found only in Buddhism. Apart from this all are in the realm of the world and differ only in name—some are the world of men, some the world of gods, some the world of Brahma (*i.e., the Absolute, Peace, Unity, etc.*)

## Buddhism and Science

The principles of Buddhism are different from those of other religions: it is a religion of knowledge which stands up when tested by anyone. As the Buddha said, "The truth in Buddhism stands up against testing. That is, it challenges each and all to test everything, until the tester gives up and, changing his mind, is willing to revere Buddhism." The expression that people use: Buddhism is the same as science, or is in harmony with science—there are those who base this on the ground that Buddhism analyses the component parts of the body in the search for the truth, just as modern science separates various ele-

ments in the search for subtle properties— I think this statement does not do justice to the real, highest worth of Buddhism. For if one speaks as they do, then anatomy or medicine, which has to do with the examination of parts of the body would become a part of Buddhism. What should in fact be said is that they are alike in that scientific principles can stand proof—one may provide the proof himself for others to see, or be willing to let anyone scrutinize, test, and cross question as he wishes, and it bears up until no further testing can be done and he must believe. Truth does not die! The word science here means every sort of true knowledge, not just the analysis of elements (*chemistry*) only. Even mathematics is science as here understood. If you doubt whether arithmetic or mathematics, like Buddhism, can stand in the face of proving, then consider simply, for example, how true is the formula  $2+3=5$ . Who can prove that 2 plus 3 is anything other than 5? By whatever method, however many hundreds or thousands of times one may test the formula, 2 plus 3 is always 5. This is a principle stronger than a stone mountain—the mountain can be shaken by nature or the weather. Just as these scientific principles of truth are solid, so Buddhism also has firm and solid principles of truth. Though

one should bring in the analysis of elements and pursue testing using what is called the new science as the means of testing, there would be no way of discrediting Buddhism at all as being a way of sorrow. Only let no one take the outside shell of Buddhism—various rites, for example—and test them as being Buddhism. Truth or Buddhism will endure as long as the world. It is ageless, eternal, for it is the study and knowledge of nature, in order to overcome nature with the truth. Thus, is there not a clear indication how Buddhism goes by nature with science, which the modern world everywhere honors? And the most important point is: When Buddhism alone is one with the world's science, then which religion is fit to be the religion of the whole world, besides Buddhism?

*NOTE: To be sure, the religions have the same aim, that is, happiness. If one were to fit them snugly together, they would come down to one religion. If only they were willing to be what they are, greater or less according to what they have attained, arranged according to relative maturity like brothers, then there would be one religion in the world! Only let no one have regard for self over against the other fellow, to the point that he seeks to destroy his fellow of another religion for advantage to himself by "secret attack" in one way or another. The principles of other religions include only matters relating to the world, with no getting beyond the world. Buddhism another. The principles of other religions include only matters relating to the world, with no getting beyond the world. Buddhism goes higher, to transcendence over the world: it has both sorts, and one may choose what he wishes. It is the principle of transcendence of the world, or which has to do with transcendence of the world, that Buddhism has in a way that other religions do not, and so it embraces and surpasses all other religions.*

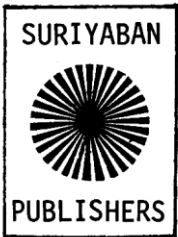
**FOOTNOTES**

*1Translator's note: "Happiness" and "suffering" are common renderings of the terms here, but they are imperfect ones. In English "happiness" and "suffering" there is stress on the subjective aspect, that is, on how one feels. This aspect may be present in the Pali-Thai terms, yet in some contexts the emphasis may be as much on a condition of life or a quality of existence. Thus, in some cases "blessedness" might be a better rendering than "happiness" and "ill" (that is, what is evil and vain in life), better than "suffering".*

*2Technical terms for the non-physical and physical constituents, respectively, of living beings.*







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