



TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE

DHARMIC LANGUAGE

Language of One who knows

HUMAN LANGUAGE

Language of One who knows not

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu



In the past centuries there have been many learned Teachers who have been laid down various paths to show the Truth. Among these, Buddhism is one, and according to it my opinion is that except for the differences in the names and forms of the various religions the Ultimate Truth is the same.

The Dalai Lama

from :- News Letter (Dharmsala)

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INTRODUCTION

Every field of human knowledge has its own specialized vocabulary. The layman reading a textbook on physics is at first baffled by the strange jargon used. Some of the terms he encounters are brand new to him; others, such as "mass" and "work," are quite familiar to him as ordinary everyday words but are obviously being used in the scientific context with rather different and specialized meanings.

Religion also has a special language of its own, which has to be learnt before there can be any communication of ideas on the subject. In this special language of religion, just as in the jargon of science, some of the words are brand new, coined just for the purpose, and others are old familiar terms used in new ways.

The talk recorded in this booklet deals in particular with the special language which the Buddha, Gotama, used in teaching. The author has called this the Language of Dhamma. But since the Higher Truth or Dhamma is constant, independent of time, place, and teacher, the language in which it is discussed is to a large extent international. The language which the Buddha used in expounding the Dhamma has a lot in common with that which Jesus Christ used in teaching that same Dhamma. So though this talk was intended specifically for a Buddhist audience, much of it is equally relevant and to the point in the context of Christianity or any other religion.

If we are to understand the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha or any other great teacher, we must first become familiar with the special terminology used. We must first learn the Language of Dhamma. It is in the belief that it will serve as a useful guide to distinguishing everyday language from Dhamma (Dharmic) language that this little booklet has been printed.

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TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE

To-day's talk is rather special.

Time and time again I have noticed that, regardless of how the subject is explained, there are a great many aspects of the more profound teaching that the majority of people don't understand at all. People hear things explained many times over and still don't understand. Why is this?

If we look into it, we discover the reason: Most of us are familiar only with everyday language, the language spoken by the ordinary person, ordinary worldly language. We fail to realize the existence of another quite different and very special language, the language of religion, the language of Dhamma.

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

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

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

The point now is that if we know only the everyday language we are in no position to understand true Dhamma when we hear it. *If we don't know the language of Dhamma, then we cannot understand Dhamma, the supramundane Truth that could really liberate us from this unsatisfactory worldly condition (dukkha).* The reason we don't understand Dhamma is that we know only Everyday language and are not familiar with Dhamma language.

It is essential always to interpret the Buddha's teaching in terms of Dhamma language as well as in terms of everyday language. *Both* meanings must be considered. Please take good note of the passages I am about to quote:

“Appamatto ubho atthe adhigāhāti paṇḍito.”

(A wise man is one familiar with both modes of speaking.)

“Atthābhisamayādhiro paṇḍitoti pavuccati.”

(He who is familiar with the various modes of speaking is a wise man.)

This is a general principle to be applied when studying Dhamma, whether at high or at low level. It is also applicable in verbal discussion. The passages cited contain the unambiguous expression “*ubho atthe*” that is, “both meanings,” or “both modes of speaking.” A discerning person must consider *both* meanings or modes of speaking, and not just either one of them alone.

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

We shall now consider some examples of what I mean.

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

However, considered in terms of Dhamma language the word "Buddha" refers to the Truth which the historical Buddha realized and taught, the Dhamma itself. The Buddha said: "He who sees the Dhamma sees the Enlightened One. He who sees the Enlightened One sees the Dhamma. One who sees not the Dhamma, though he grasp at the robe of the Enlightened One, cannot be said to have *seen* the Enlightened One." Now the Dhamma is something intangible. It is not something physical, certainly not flesh and bones. Yet

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

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

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

physical man; the “Buddha” of Dhamma language is the Dhamma itself, which made him Buddha.

Now we consider the word “Dhamma” or “Dharma”. At the lowest level of everyday language this word is understood as referring to the actual books containing the scriptures, the “Dhamma” in the bookcase. Or it may be understood as referring to the spoken word used in expounding the Teaching. This is the meaning of the word “Dhamma” in everyday language, the language of a deluded person who has not yet *seen* the Dhamma.

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

1. Nature itself
2. The laws of Nature
3. Man’s duty to act in accordance with the laws of Nature
4. The benefits to be derived from this acting in accordance with the laws of Nature.

This is the wide range of meaning covered by the word "Dhamma". It does not refer simply to books, or palm-leaf manuscripts, or the voice of the preacher. The word "Dhamma" as used in Dhamma language refers to something non-physical. This Dhamma is all-embracing, it is profound, it includes all things, some difficult to understand, some not so difficult.

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

The Sangha of everyday language is the monks themselves. The Sangha of Dhamma language is those high qualities in the minds of the monks. The Sangha proper consists of these four: the Stream-enterer (Sotāpanna), the Once-returner (Sakadāgāmi), the Non-returner (Anāgāmi), and the fully perfected man or Arahant (Arahat). These terms too refer to mental rather than physical qualities—because as to physical frame these men are no different from anyone else.

Where they do differ is in mental qualities. This is what makes a man a Stream-enterer, Once-returner, Non-returner, or Arahant. This is how the word "Sangha" is to be understood in Dhamma language.

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

In Dhamma language the word "religion" refers to the genuine Dhamma which can really serve man as a point of support. The Dhamma which can really be for man a point of support, which can really bring about the end of this unsatisfactory condition (*dukkha*), *that* Dhamma is the Religion. This is the meaning of "religion" as that term is used in Dhamma language. So to say that the religion is thriving is to say that that very special something with the power to put an end to the unsatisfactory condition is spreading and expanding among men. To say that the religion is thriving does not by any means imply progress in terms of yellow robes. The religion in everyday language is temples, monastery buildings, pagodas, yellow robes, and so on; the religion in Dhamma language is the Truth which can really serve man as a point of support.

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

In terms of Dhamma language the religion is the Life of Renunciation (*brahmacariya*), that is to say, actually living one's life in accordance with Dhamma. It is this life of renunciation, which is "glorious in its beginning, middle, and end." By "life of renunciation" the Buddha meant the way of practice that can really put an end to this unsatisfactory condition. The glory of its beginning is study and learning, the glory of its middle is the practice, the glory of its end is the real reward that comes from the practice. This is the genuine life of renunciation, the religion of Dhamma language.

Taken as everyday language "religion" means at best the teaching; taken as Dhamma language it means the life of renunciation, glorious in its beginning, middle, and end. So the two meanings are very different.

Looking now more closely at things, we shall examine a word that relates to our day-to-day life, the word "work". In everyday language the word "work"

refers to the earning of a living. It is something we can't avoid. We have to work in order to eat, to fill the belly, and also in part in order to get the things we desire. This unavoidable chore of earning a living is what is meant by the word "work" taken as everyday language. Taken as Dhamma language "work" refers to mind training (*kammaṭṭhāna*), that is, the practice of Dhamma. The actual practice of Dhamma is The Work.

The average person, the man who has not seen Dhamma, works out of necessity, in order to provide himself with food and the things he desires. But for the genuine aspirant, the man who has caught a glimpse of Dhamma, work consists in putting the Dhamma into practice. This kind of work has to be done sincerely, earnestly, and diligently, with perseverance and discernment. Many kinds of high qualities must be present if it is to be completed successfully.

The work of everyday language can be considered at a higher level. Though our work may be of a worldly nature, if we do it the right way, then ultimately that work will *teach* us. It will bring us to an understanding of the true nature of the mental life, it will enable us to recognize impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*), it will bring us to the Truth without our making any conscious effort in that direction. So in Dhamma language "work" refers to the practice that leads to the Truth to be found right

in one's own mind. Even the job of keeping the body in a fit and clean condition, even this is a kind of Dhamma practice, in so far as it has to be done with a good discerning mind, a mind that is diligent and industrious.

Summing up, "work" in everyday language means earning a living out of necessity; "work" in Dhamma language means putting the Teaching into practice. The word "*Kammattthāna*" (mind training) means work, good solid Dhamma practice. This is the meaning of "work" in Dhamma language.

Let us say something more about "the life of renunciation." In everyday language, the language of the average person who knows nothing of Dhamma, the word "renunciation" (*brahmacariya*) means no more than abstaining from adultery. But in Dhamma language "life of renunciation" refers to any kind of purposeful giving up of a mental defilement (*kilesa*), any form of abstinence rigorously adhered to. Regardless of what kind of practice we undertake, if we stick to it earnestly and strictly and without backsliding, then we are living the life of renunciation. Renunciation doesn't mean simply abstaining from adultery. This is how everyday language and Dhamma language differ in this case.

Now we make a big jump to the word "Nirvana" (*Nibbāna*). In the everyday language of the ordinary

man Nirvana is a place, a city. This is because preachers often speak of "Nirvana the city of immortality," or "This wonder-city of Nirvana." People hearing this misunderstand it. They take it that Nirvana is an actual city or town. What is more, they even believe that it is a place abounding in all sorts of good things, a place where one's every wish is fulfilled and everything one wants is immediately available. They want to get to Nirvana because it is the place where all wishes are granted. This is Nirvana in the everyday language of foolish people, people who know nothing of Dhamma. Yet this kind of talk can be heard all over the place, not excluding temples.

In Dhamma language the word "Nirvana" refers to the complete and absolute extinction of every kind of defilement and unsatisfactory condition. At any time when there is freedom from defilements (*kilesa*) and the unsatisfactory condition (*dukkha*) then there is Nirvana. If defilements have been eradicated completely, it is permanent Nirvana. It is the extinguishing and growing cool of the fire of defilements and the unsatisfactory condition. This is Nirvana in Dhamma language. In everyday language Nirvana is a dream-city; in Dhamma language Nirvana is the complete and utter extinction of unsatisfactoriness, a state which can come about right *here and now*. Think about it. In which of these two ways is Nirvana understood by most people, in particular by the old folk who come to listen to sermons in temples?

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

But in Dhamma language “Path and Fruit” refers to the ability to make an end of the unsatisfactory condition and to destroy the defilements giving rise to that condition. To do this in the right manner, in accordance with the true nature of things, step by step—this is the meaning of “Path and Fruit” in Dhamma language. People are much given to using the expression “Path and Fruit” in everyday speech. To distinguish this everyday usage from the special usage of Dhamma language we have to be very careful.

Now, a rather strange word, the word “Māra,” the tempter, the devil. Māra in everyday language is a kind of monster with body, face, and eyes of repulsive and terrifying appearance. This is Māra in everyday language. Māra in Dhamma language is not a living creature but rather a kind of mental state opposed to the good and wholesome, opposed to progress towards the cessation of the unsatisfactory condition. That

which opposes and obstructs progress is called Māra. We may think of Māra as a living being if we wish as long as we understand what he really stands for.

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

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

Now we shall say something about the word “world.” In everyday language the word “world” refers to the Earth, this physical world, flat or round or

however you will. The “world” as the physical Earth is Everyday language.

But in Dhamma language the word “world” refers to the worldly (*lokiya*) mental state, the worldly stage in the scale of mental development, that is to say, the unsatisfactory condition. The condition that is impermanent, changing, unsatisfactory—this is the worldly condition of the mind. And this is what is meant by “the world” in Dhamma language. Hence it is said that the world is the unsatisfactory condition; the unsatisfactory condition is the world. And when the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*) he sometimes used the term “world” and sometimes the term “unsatisfactory condition” (*dukkha*). They are one and the same. For instance he spoke of :

- the world
- the cause of the arising of the world
- the extinction of the world
- the method that brings about the extinction of the world.

What he meant was :

- the unsatisfactory condition
- the cause of the unsatisfactory condition
- the extinction of the unsatisfactory condition
- the method that brings about the extinction of the unsatisfactory condition.

So in the language of the Buddha, the language of Dhamma, the word "world" refers to the unsatisfactory condition. The unsatisfactory condition and the world are one and the same.

Taken another way, the word "world" refers to something low, shallow, lacking depth, something that falls short of the highest. For instance we speak of such and such a thing as worldly, meaning that it is not Dhamma. This is another meaning of the word "world" in Dhamma language. "World" does not always refer simply to this earth as in everyday language.

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

In Dhamma language the word "birth" refers to the birth of the idea of "I," "me," any time it arises in the mind from day to day. In this sense the ordinary person is born very often, time and time again; a more developed person is born less frequently; a person well advanced in practice (*ariyan* or *Ariya-puggala*) is born less frequently still, and ultimately ceases being re-born altogether. Each arising in the mind of the idea of "I" in one form or another is called a "birth".

So birth can take place many times over in a single day. As soon as anyone starts thinking like an animal, he is born as an animal in that same moment. To think like a human being is to be born a human being. To think like a celestial being is to be born a celestial being. Life, the individuality, pleasure and pain, and the rest—all these were identified by the Buddha as simply momentary states of consciousness. So the word “birth” means in Dhamma language the arising of the idea of “I,” “me,” and *not*, as in everyday language, physical birth from the mother’s womb.

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

Now, the word “death.” “Death” in everyday language means that event which necessitates putting in a coffin and cremating or burying. But in Dhamma language the word “death” refers to the cessation of the idea mentioned just a moment ago, the idea of “I,”

“me.” The ceasing of this idea is what is meant by “death” in Dhamma language.

Let us talk about the word “life.” This word in everyday language, the language of immature people, applies to anything that is not yet dead, that can still exist and move about and walk and eat. In the more precise language of biology it means the normal functioning of the protoplasm, of the cell and nucleus. The normal functioning and development of these is referred to as “life.” This is an even more materialistic kind of everyday language.

In Dhamma language “life” refers to the truly deathless state, the unconditioned, Nirvana, the life everlasting. This is Life. If we are speaking everyday language, “life” has the ordinary familiar meaning. If we are speaking Dhamma language, “life” refers to the deathless state. *When there is no birth there is also no death. And this state is the unconditioned.* It is what we call Nirvana, and what in other religion is often spoken of as the life everlasting. It is life that never again comes to an end. It is life in God, or whatever one cares to call it. This is the real life, life as understood in Dhamma language.

Now we come closer to home. We come to the word “man.” We think nothing of using the word “man, man, man,” all the time. Everyone is a man. But we ought to be careful here, because the word

“man” has two different meanings. In everyday language “man” refers to a creature with a body of so-called human form.

But in Dhamma language the word “man” refers to certain special qualities implied in the word “human,” certain high mental qualities. This is not so difficult to understand. If someone criticises a friend saying “You’re not a man!” what does he mean? The person criticised has a human body just as does the person criticising. Why then is he accused of not being a man? The point is that he lacks the special qualities implied in the word “human.” Lacking these, he is accused of not being a man.

So the word “man” has two different meanings. In everyday language it refers to a creature of human form; in Dhamma language it refers to the higher qualities implied in the word “human”.

Now we consider the word “God”. In everyday language “God” refers to a celestial being with various creative powers. This is the “God” of everyday language. The “God” of Dhamma language is rather different. It is a profound and hidden power, which is neither human being, nor celestial being, nor any other kind of being. It is Nature, and is intangible. For instance, what we call the Laws of Nature are what are responsible for creation and for the coming into existence of all things. Natural law governs all things. Natural law has power over all things.

So in Dhamma language the word “God” means, among other things, the Laws of Nature, what Buddhists call “Dhamma.” In the Pali language the Laws of Nature were referred to simply as “Dhamma.” Just “Dhamma,” that one single word, implies all the Laws of Nature. So Dhamma is the Buddhist God.

Now let us direct our gaze downwards. Let us look at the “four woeful states” (*apāya*). The “woeful states” are the “nether worlds.” Normally four of them are recognized: Hell (*naraka*), the realm of the beasts, the realm of the hungry ghosts (*peta*), and the realm of the frightened ghosts (*asura* or *asurakāya*). These four taken together are called the four woeful states. They are vividly depicted in murals in temples. Hell, the beasts, the hungry ghosts, and the *asuras* are all depicted as they are traditionally imagined to be. And all four are thought of as attained only *after* death. In other words, the four woeful states as understood in everyday language are interpreted materialistically. The denizens of hell, the beasts, and so on are thought of in this way as actual lowly creatures.

In everyday language hell is a region under the earth. It is ruled over by the god of death, who carries off people and subjects them to all sorts of punishments. It is a place where one may go after death. Contrast this with hell as understood in Dhamma language. Here hell is *anxiety*, anxiety which burns us just like a fire. Whenever anxiety afflicts us, burning us up like a

fire, then we are in hell, the hell of Dhamma language. Anyone who burns himself with anxiety, just as he might burn himself with fire, is said to fall into hell in that same moment. And just as anxiety is of various kinds, so we recognize various kinds of corresponding hells.

Now to the realm of beasts (*tiracchāna*). Birth as a beast means in everyday language actual physical birth as a pig, a dog, or some other actual animal. Rebirth after death as some kind of lower animal is the everyday meaning of rebirth into the realm of the beasts. In Dhamma language it has a different meaning. At any moment when one is stupid, just like a dumb animal, then at that moment one is born into the realm of beasts. It happens right here and now. One may be born as a beast many times over in a single day. So in Dhamma language birth as a beast means stupidity.

The term “hungry ghost” (*peta*) in everyday language refers to a creature supposed to have a tiny mouth and an enormous belly. He can never manage to eat enough and so is chronically hungry. This is another possible form in which we may be reborn after death. These are the hungry ghosts of everyday language. The hungry ghosts of Dhamma language are purely mental states. Ambition based on craving, worry based on craving—to be afflicted with these is to be born a hungry ghost. These symptoms are just like those that result from having a mouth the size of a needle’s eye and a belly

the size of a mountain. Anyone suffering from a too intense craving, a pathological thirst, anyone who worries and frets excessively has the same symptoms as a hungry ghost. He can be said to have been reborn a hungry ghost right here and now. It is not something that happens only after death.

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

These are the four woeful states as understood in Dhamma language. They are rather different from the woeful states of everyday language. Now there is a point worth thinking about in this connection. If we don't fall into the woeful states of Dhamma language, then we are sure not to fall into the woeful states of

everyday language. For instance, if we avoid making mistakes and becoming afflicted with anxiety, then we avoid falling into hell in this life. At the same time we need have no fear of falling into hell in some later lifetime after death. Again, if we avoid being stupid like the beasts, hungry like the hungry ghosts, and frightened like the *asuras*, then we are free of the kinds of unskillful attitudes that might cause us to be reborn after death as beasts, hungry ghosts, or *asuras*.

So it behoves us to interest ourselves only in the hungry ghosts and so on of the kind that we stand in danger of becoming right here and now. The kind that we may become after death can be put on one side. There is no need for us to concern ourselves with them. If we avoid right here and now the hungry ghosts and so on of Dhamma language, then no matter how we may die later on, we are certain not to become the hungry ghosts and so on of everyday language. If we live and practise properly we avoid falling into the woeful states here and now, and we are certain not to fall into the woeful states supposed to follow death.

Most people recognize that heaven and hell are simply states of mind. Why then are they so foolish as to misunderstand the meaning of the four woeful states, which are so much a part of life? True enough, the heaven and hell of everyday language are realms *out* side — though don't ask me where — and they are attained after death. But the heaven and hell of

Dhamma language are to be found in the mind and may be attained any time at all depending on one's mental make-up. This is how the woeful states of Dhamma language differ from those of everyday language.

“Heaven” in everyday language means some wonderful, highly attractive celestial realm up above. Spend such and such an amount in merit making and you're entitled to one mansion in heaven. Angels are there by the hundred. In Dhamma language “heaven” refers first of all to infatuating sensual bliss of the highest order. This is the lower heaven, the heaven of sensuality. Higher up is the heaven called the *Brahmaloka*. This is *absence* of any object of sensuality. It is a state of mental well-being resulting from absence of any disturbing object of sensuality. It is as if a certain man with a hunger for sense objects had indulged and satiated himself and become thoroughly fed up with sense objects. He would then want only to remain quite empty, still, untouched. This is the state of freedom from sensuality, the condition of the *brahmas*, the *Brahmaloka*. So the ordinary kind of heaven is full up with sensuality, the highest of these, the *Paranimmitavasavatti* heaven being completely full of sensuality. The heavens of the *Brahmaloka* are devoid of disturbance from sensuality, though the “Self,” the “I,” is still there.

Now let us discuss the word “ambrosia.” Ambrosia is the elixir of immortality. In everyday language ambrosia is a kind of liquor that the celestial

beings imbibe to make themselves invulnerable before going out once again to slaughter and cause general havoc. This is the ambrosia of everyday language. The ambrosia of Dhamma language is Dhamma at its highest, the truth of non-selfhood (*anattā*) or emptiness (*suññatā*). This highest Dhamma, the truth of non-selfhood or emptiness, makes a man immortal because it makes him free of the “self”-idea. When there is no “self” how can there be death? So in Dhamma language the elixir of life is the truth of non-selfhood or emptiness. As for the liquor which is traditionally supposed to confer eternal life on whoever drinks it, that is the ambrosia of everyday language, the language of uninformed people, the language of people who have not perceived or penetrated to the Truth.

A moment ago we mentioned the word “emptiness” or “*suññatā*.” Let us now have a closer look at it. “*Suññatā*” is a Pali word. “*Suñña*” means “empty,” “-*tā*” is the equivalent of “-ness.” *Suññatā* is emptiness. In the everyday language of people who have not seen or penetrated to the Truth emptiness means simply absence of any content whatsoever, void, vacuum. This is emptiness in everyday language. Emptiness or *suññatā* in Dhamma language is quite different. Here everything of every kind and variety may be present in any quantity—everything, that is, with the single exception of the idea of “me” and “mine.” Everything may be present, everything of every sort and kind you can think of, the lot, both

physical and mental, with just this one exception: there is no idea of "me" and "mine." No "me," no "mine." That is emptiness as it is understood in Dhamma language, the language of the Buddha.

The world is empty. Empty of what? Empty of "self" and "belonging to self." With this single exception everything may be present—as long as it is not regarded as "me" or "mine." This is the emptiness of Dhamma language. When the Buddha spoke of emptiness, he was speaking Dhamma language. Foolish people understand this as everyday language and take it that there is nothing in the world at all, just a vacuum! If the word "emptiness" is misinterpreted like this in terms of everyday language the Buddha's teaching of emptiness becomes meaningless. Uninformed people who hold forth on the subject of emptiness come out with some very strange assertions having nothing whatever to do with emptiness as taught by the Buddha.

So I hope you will take an interest in this and bear it well in mind. This word "empty" applied to physical things naturally means absence of any content; but in the meta-physical context it means that though every sort of thing may be present, there is utter absence of "I-ness" and "my-ness." In the physical world, the mental world, or anywhere at all *there is no such thing as "me" or "mine."* The conditions of "I-ness" and "my-ness" just are not present. Hence

the world is described as empty. It is not that the world is devoid of all content. Everything is there, and it can be made use of with discernment. Go ahead and make use of it! Just one thing, though: Don't go producing the idea of "me" and mine!

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

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

In the language of the ordinary man stopping means coming to a standstill, not moving. But in the language of the Buddha stopping means becoming empty of self. If there is no self, what is there to go running about? Why not have a think about this point. If there is no self, where is the "I" to go running about? Obviously the "I" has *stopped*. This is stopped in the language of the Buddha : absence of any self to be grasped at and clung to, absolute emptiness of selfhood.

To stop is the same as to be empty. This is what is meant by stopping in Buddha language. One may be running about and yet be said to have stopped. No "self" is left to run about. Every form of wanting and craving has stopped. There is no "I" to want anything anywhere, no "I" to go running about.

A man who still has desires goes running about looking for every kind of thing, even looking for merit and goodness. Running about, looking for this and that, here, there, and everywhere—this is *running*. But if he manages to *stop* desiring completely, to *stop* being a "self," then even though he may go flying around in an aeroplane he can still be said to have *stopped*. Learn to distinguish these two meanings of the word "stop" and understand them properly. It will help you to understand the teaching of emptiness also.

If we discuss only profound questions like this you are bound to become drowsy, so now we shall take an easy word, namely "light." Normally when we

speaking of light we are referring to lamp-light, sun-light, electric light, or some other kind. This is everyday language. In the Dhamma language of the Buddha the word "light" refers to insight, wisdom, higher knowledge (*paññā*). Even if the Buddha went and sat in a pitch dark cave, there was still light in the sense that in his mind there was the light of insight, higher knowledge. On a moonless, starless night, when all lamps have been put out, it is still possible to say there is light—if there is insight, higher knowledge, in the mind of the yogi. This is light in Dhamma language.

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

We come now to the "karma" (*kamma*). When the average person says "That's karma!" he means "Too bad!" Bad luck as punishment for sins committed is the meaning given to the word "karma" by the ordinary person. But in Dhamma language the word "karma" refers to something different. It refers to action. Bad action is called black karma; good action

is called white karma; and there is another remarkable kind of karma which is neither black nor white, a karma that serves to neutralize the other two kinds. It consists to perceive non-selfhood (*anattā*), emptiness (*suññatā*), so that the "self" is done away with. This kind of action is what we may call Buddhist karma, the real karma, the kind of karma the Buddha taught. The Buddha taught the transcending of all karma.

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

The practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is karma neither black nor white, and it is the way to wipe out all karma. This is karma in Dhamma language. It is very different from the "karma" of immature people, who exclaim "that's karma!" meaning "Too bad!" "Bad luck!" Karma understood as bad luck is the karma of everyday language.

Consider now the word "refuge" (*saraṇa*), or "support." In everyday language a refuge or support

is some person or thing outside of and other than oneself which one may depend on for help. For instance a person may depend on his boss, or on ghosts, or on good-luck omens, or on guardian angels. Anything at all or anyone at all other than oneself taken as a point of support—this is what, in everyday language, is meant by “refuge” or “support”.

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

This brings us to the expression “the essence of Buddhism”. In discussions as to what constitutes the essence of Buddhism all sorts of strange ideas are brought forward. Some people recite this or that well-known formula such as VI-SU-PA.¹ This sort of

1. VI, SU and PA are the initial letters for Vinaya, Sutta and Paramattha (= Abhidhamma), which constitute the Tipitaka. Originally these letters were meant to be used for memorizing the names of the three books of the Tipitaka. The use of initial letters was and is still common for memorizing different topics of the Dhamma. But due to the influence of Mantrayāna, VI-SU-PA and many other sets of initial letters are regarded by many as magical formulas. Each set is called ‘heart’ or ‘essence’ of the topic concerned.

“essence” is everyday language, the language of uninformed people. People with no knowledge of Dhamma will just rattle off a couple of Pali words or some other cliché and proclaim this to be the essence of Buddhism.

The essence of Buddhism, as this expression is understood in Dhamma language, as the Buddha has put it, is the realization that *nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to.*

“Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya.”

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

What I have said so far ought to be sufficient to enable you to realize how a single word may have two different meanings. An intelligent and discerning person will be capable of considering both modes of speaking. “A wise man is one who is careful to consider *both* modes of speaking”. “Both modes of speaking” implies both of the possible meanings of a word. One is the meaning the word has in everyday language; the other is the meaning that same word has

in Dhamma language. A discerning person must consider both meanings as we have done in the numerous examples just dealt with. But the words we have considered so far as examples are rather high-level terms. Let us now consider some more down-to-earth examples. I apologise if some of these appear a little crude.

Take the word "eating". In everyday language to eat is to take in nourishment through the mouth in the usual way. But the eating of Dhamma language can be done by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind. Think it over. What does the word "eat" refer to here? The eye sees a form, the ear hears a sound, the nose smells an odour,.... This is referred to as "eating," eating by way of eye, ear, nose, and so on. This is Dhamma language. For instance in Pali and Sanskrit the word "*kāmaabhogī*" was commonly used to refer to a person who indulged in sensuality. And literally this word means simply "sensuality-eater".

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

The Pali word "*nibbhogo*" (nothing to eat) was used in reference to the Buddha and other Arahants

(fully enlightened men), who were no longer involved in colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile stimuli, and mental images. They were above involvement in these six kinds of object and so were people with *nothing to eat*. Get to know this broad usage of the word “eat” in Dhamma language. It will make it easier to understand the more profound aspects of the teaching.

Now the word “sleeping”. When we use this word in the sense of lying down and sleeping like a dog or cat, we are speaking everyday language. But in Dhamma language it refers to absence of insight (*avijjā*). Though a person may be sitting up with eyes wide open, if he is ignorant of the true nature of things he can be said to be asleep. This is “sleeping” in Dhamma language. To live in ignorance of the true nature of things, regardless of bodily posture, is to be asleep.

To be “awake” normally means to have roused oneself from sleep. But in Dhamma language it means to be always mindful, to be always fully aware. In this condition, regardless of whether one is physically awake or asleep, one can be described as awake. A person who practises mindfulness (*sati patīḥna*) consistently is always fully aware. Even if he retires to sleep, he is immediately fully aware again the moment he wakes up. When he is awake is awake, and when he is asleep he is also awake. This is what it is to be “awake” in Dhamma language.

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

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

“Mātraṃ pitraṃ hantvā akataññūsi brahmaṇa”.

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

Our father (*avijjā*), the man responsible for our birth is lack of insight; our mother, the woman responsible for our birth is craving. The words “father and mother” in Dhamma language were given these higher meanings by the Buddha. So the “parents” (*avijjā* and *taṇhā*) have to be killed, destroyed completely, before Nirvana can be attained.

The word “friend” in worldly everyday language refers to a companion, someone with whom we get along well. But in Dhamma language “friend” or “companion” refers to the Dhamma, and in particular to that aspect of the Dhamma that enables us to free ourselves from the unsatisfactory condition (*dukkha*). The Buddha specifically mentioned the Noble Eightfold Path as man’s best friend (*kalayānamitta*). In Dhamma language “friend” means the Noble Eightfold Path, right understanding, right intention, and so on. This is what “friend” means in Dhamma language.

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

Now, last of all, what is a “putrid, foul-smelling thing”? In everyday language it may be rotten fish or something of the sort. But in Dhamma language it

is something very different. The Buddha referred to the mental defilements (*kilesa*) as putrid, foul-smelling things. For instance, excessive greed, self-centredness, obsession with the idea of “me” and “mine”—these are putrid, foul-smelling things.

All these words that we have considered are nothing but perfectly ordinary words selected in order to demonstrate the difference between everyday language and Dhamma language. If you think it over you will realize that this difference is the very reason why we fail to understand Buddha-Dhamma. We don't understand this highest of teachings, this most profound of teachings, simply because we don't know the language of Dhamma. We know only everyday language and are unable to comprehend the language of the ariyans (those well advanced in the practice).

Consider for example laughter. The Buddha once said “Laughter is the behaviour of a little child in its cot.” Think about it. We like to laugh heartily even though it is the behaviour of a little child in its cot. We don't want to give it up. We like it. We go right on laughing heartily, guffawing loudly. Why did the Buddha say “Laughter is the behaviour of a little child in its cot”? Think of a little child in its cot and the way it lies there gurgling and grinning at you.

The laughter of the ariyans is different. They laugh at all compounded things (*sankhāra*), which are

impermanent and changing, unsatisfactory, and not selves. They know, and so can laugh at compounded things and at craving, which henceforth can do them no harm. This is the right kind of laughter, the kind that has meaning and worth.

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

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

The dancing of the ariyans is *dhammanandi*. They "dance" and jeer at the defilements, proclaiming their liberation. They are not bound hand and foot, arm and leg. Their limbs are free. They can "dance" because they are not bound down by the four attachments.¹ This is how the ariyans dance.

Think it over. If we know only the language of everyday we can't possibly understand this kind of talk. The wise man says: "The bird sees not the sky," and the foolish man doesn't believe it. Why doesn't a bird see the sky? Because it is flying *in* the sky. The wise man says: "The fish sees not the water," and again the foolish man doesn't believe it. It has never occurred to him that a fish living in water cannot see the water through being in contact with it. It knows nothing about water. Likewise, an earthworm always burrowing in the earth never sees the earth. And a worm that lives in a dung-heap, is born in the dung-heap, and dies in the dung-heap, never sees the dung-heap.

Lastly, "Man sees not the world." A man, living and moving about in the world, still does not *see* the world. If he had seen the world, he certainly wouldn't stay stuck in the world. He would be sure to get right up out of the world and stay with the Truth. A man who is bogged down in the world like a worm in a dung-heap knows only worldly everyday language. He

1. For details see the "Manual for Mankind".

does not know Dhamma language. The reason he doesn't know Dhamma language is that he is stuck fast in the world like the worm in its dung-heap, the earthworm in the ground, the fish in the water, or the bird in the sky. So people don't know Dhamma language. Not knowing Dhamma language, they cannot comprehend Dhamma.

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

On the subject of talking it is said, in Dhamma language, "Talk and you will hear nothing; be silent and you will hear." This means that if the mind is well concentrated, still, quiet, the voice of Dhamma will be heard. Again it is said: "These things that can be talked about are not the real Dhamma; about the real Dhamma nothing can be said." All this that I have

been saying all this time is still not Dhamma, still not the real thing. It is nothing more than words attempting to explain how to arrive at the real thing. The real thing cannot be talked about. The more we say about Dhamma, the further it recedes from us. All we can talk about is the method which will guide us along, which will tell us what to do in order to arrive at the real thing, the genuine Dhamma. So it is best to give up talking.

This being the case we shall leave off our discussion of everyday language and Dhamma language. I suggest you think it over and decide whether or not you agree with me concerning our failure to understand Dhamma. Some of us have been listening to sermons and lectures and expositions of Dhamma for ten years, twenty years, thirty years,..... Why is it then that we still don't understand Dhamma, see Dhamma, penetrate to Dhamma? The reason we don't understand is simply that we don't listen the right way. And why don't we listen the right way? Because we are familiar only with everyday language and are not familiar with Dhamma language. We hear Dhamma language and take it as being everyday language. We are just like those foolish people who, taking the word "emptiness" in its everyday sense, misunderstand the subject completely, and then go making all sorts of ridiculous assertion about it.

These are the unhappy consequences of not being familiar with both everyday language *and* Dhamma language. A person in this position has not got his wits about him. He lacks discernment, the quality the Buddha was referring to when he said :

“He who is familiar with the various modes of speaking is a wise man.”

and “A wise man is one familiar with *both* modes of speaking.”

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Note. At page 3, the first paragraph, it is said :—

“The point now is that If we don't know the language of Dhamma, then we cannot understand Dhamma, the supramundane Truth that could really liberate us from this unsatisfactory worldly condition (*dukkha*).”

Here it should be noted that by religious language or Dhamma language is implied *only* the kind of language which is intended to guide one on the way which leads to the liberation *genuinely*. A religious man belonging to any religion should know the importance of the above meaning of the religious language. He should bear this meaning in the mind while interpreting any religious scriptures otherwise he may go astray.

Now in answer to the question what is the real liberation or salvation which is the ultimate goal of every life:—

The Christian says, “Seek ye the Kingdom of God”

The Hindu says, “Be one with the Paramātanman, the Great Soul.”

The Buddhist says, “Realize Nibbāna.”

As for Islam the single greeting word, “Peace” (Salam) is an excellent expression of ideal of life.

All these four answers while differing in letters are equally the ideal or the ultimate goal of each and every living being. The only thing is, let everyone have intuition of this goal “*in the true sense of the word.*”

Now, the question may arise how to realize this goal. The Ven. Buddhadasa has explained this point in the “Christianity and Buddhism” and “No Religion”. These two books have already been published in English.

Finally, let one not leave the realization of this goal of life (*which is genuine or unchanged*) on to the future after being laid down in the coffin. To do that will be an utter waste of time, mystical and unpractical.

May you gain intuition into the Truth *in this very life* while still breathing, and realize the ultimate goal of life *unchangedly all the time.*

V.I.

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