



# ***DISADHAMMA***

## **MANKIND'S PATHWAY DHAMMA**

***Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu***



***Translated by***

***Mongkol Dejnakarindra***

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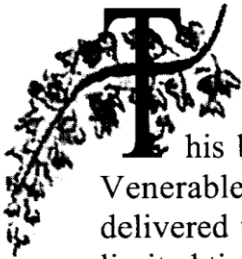
by **Buddhaḍasa Bhikkhu**

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## FOREWORD FROM THE FIRST THAI EDITION



his book presents a series of special discourses by Venerable Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. The discourses were delivered to his student-monks, who were ordained for a limited time. They were somewhat like the last instruction for the monks, before their returning to laity, to take along dhammic concepts and to rightly conduct themselves in the surrounding society. This would bring them peace and harmony with the world. The title of the lecture was *Disadhamma*, which means the pathway dhamma for mankind.

Actually *disadhamma* is present in various textbooks for Thai students in general. But this particular book, *Disadhamma*, will describe what is beyond the scope of the textbooks, something different from what most people think of as householders' affairs. Try to read and understand a chapter of it, and you would know that *Disadhamma* contains important issues and compiles all of the knowledge necessary for dhammic intellectuals who are associated with society. All of the issues are what everyone need to know in order to have a successful life, since they involve people in their daily life.

The author said that some people might not agree to what he presented for the monks to think about the *disas*. But the presentation was just a suggestion. If the monks liked the ideas,

they might take them for experimentation. The author's presentation was intended for the audience to know how to do the best and how to get the best benefit from the practice. This would make every facet of life a lesson, so that one's life can be problem-free and perfected.

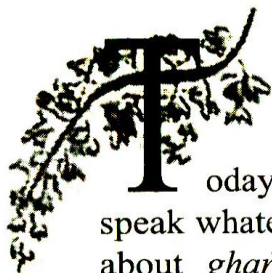
We hope that this book would be something like a manual for one's living as a householder, making his or her life tend to real peace and earning him or her the best thing that a human being should get with meritorious intention.

With best wishes  
The publisher

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## DISADHAMMA: DIRECTIONS FOR MANKIND



oday we will have a special lecture. I shall speak whatever I can think of. Particularly I will talk about *gharāvāsas* (householders) or *gahatṭhas* (laymen).

First of all, I would like to discuss whether discourses on householders' practice were really given by the Buddha. To verify the fact we have to rely on an established rule in Buddhism: when it is doubtful whether the Buddha did say something or not, we use the *Mahāpadesa* (the Dhamma-vinaya Conformity Rule), which is a key principle of our religion, to decide it. If it agrees with the Sutta (the Discourses) or the Vinaya (the Discipline), then we can believe that it was said by the Buddha. It is not right to decide that the Buddha say something just because it is present in the Tipiṭaka. The Buddha Himself forbade this kind of judgment.

Discourses on householders do exist in the Tipiṭaka. There is a long *sutta* which specilaizes on householders' matters. Some people suspect why the *sutta* is so long.

The longest *suttas* are collected together in the *Dīghanikāya*, the first main division of the Sutta Piṭaka. These *suttas*, which include the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna* Sutta, are so long

as to seem unbelievable that the Buddha said them in one session. It's beyond belief that He delivered all such long discourses in one session. Therefore, people suppose that the *suttas* were gathered, edited into verses, and put into the Tipiṭaka during its later rectifications.

This does not mean that we should never take the *suttas* for principles. We should abide by the rule that, if they agree in essence, principle, or purpose with other *suttas* and the *Vinaya* — even though these latter do not mention the same sayings — then we can take them as said by the Buddha. The important point is that, even if we heard something directly from the Buddha Himself, we should not believe Him outright. First of all we have to scrutinize His words, examining them with all the reasons we can come up with and trying them in practice; and later on we can believe them.

We can see that such a long *sutta* on householders has principles which agree with the essence of Buddhism, particularly with other *suttas* and the *Vinaya*. For example, there is a mentioning in the beginning of the *sutta* that there were people who worshiped geographical *disas* (directions) in a conventionally taught manner. However, the Buddha said that the *ariyapuggalas* (noble ones) do it differently in a noble manner. He then elaborated on the practice by pointing out the six directions and how to venerate them in accordance with the way the noble ones did.

In this respect it is obvious that the Buddha's way is more appropriate, better illuminating and better enlightening. It also agrees with the Buddhistic principle that the Buddha is the Enlightened One, the Awakened One, and the Bloomed One. Therefore, the way to venerate the *disas* as the Buddha taught us is a Buddhistic way, or that of intelligent persons. But the worshiping of the geographical north, south, east, and

west is just a long-practiced tradition. It may have a hidden meaning, but the worshipers are ignorant about it. They do it just because they think it would bestow good luck upon them. This is stupidity. But when we do it in an intelligent, scholarly, knowledgeable, reasonable, and truthful way, it agrees with the *Sutta* and the *Vinaya* of Buddhism and leads to wisdom.

Having interpreted the meaning of *disas*, or directions, as mentioned above, we will inherently have wisdom and reason that the *sutta* comes, directly or indirectly, from discourses delivered by the Buddha. An indirect way to test whether a *sutta* comes from the Buddha's words is to ask what He would say on the matter. If the answer is that He would say something similar to what is in the *sutta*, judged from all possible reasons, then the *sutta* pertains to the Buddha. This does not require that the *sutta* contains the exact words He said.

This is the rule to be accepted generally for judging that a *sutta* is really, or with best likelihood, said by the Buddha. It does not matter even if it is also said by someone else. This is why *suttas* which are so long as to be doubtful as the direct words from the Buddha are accepted and put into the Tipiṭaka.

Now let's discuss the content of the associated *sutta*, namely, the *Siṅgālovādasutta*, in the *Pāṭikavagga* of *Dīghanikāya*. The *sutta* includes the principle or system of householders' conducts that is complete within itself. There may be some minor points found in other *suttas*, but they are not different from what is in the *Siṅgālovādasutta* and can be considered as already included in this *sutta*. Since it encompasses all the essential rules of householders' conduct, that is, the Six *Disas*, we can justify that it particularly is the *sutta* of the Buddha's discourses on lay matters.



A remaining problem may be that we take as a principle that the Buddha talked about nothing else but non-attachment, *suññatā* (voidness of self), and *anattā* (not-self). Don't forget that such principles emphasize the heart or essence of Buddhism. But minor matters may be seen as supplements or accessories of these main themes. Or it can be considered as normal for the founder of whatever religion to have the duty of answering all kinds of questions anyone asks. This means that the master has innate wisdom for answering, in the way he feels proper, whatever is asked. Even for other religious masters outside Buddhism, such as Confucius and Lao-tzu, who taught certain main themes, when they were asked about minor matters concerning lay people, they were able to answer by relying on the main themes as guidelines.

Lao-tzu taught a principle so profound as to border on not-self just like that in Buddhism: he pointed out the illusion of things that spellbind earthlings. This is Lao-tzu's best, and most acclaimed, principle. Now if he were to answer laymen's questions about their families, he would be able to do it; and this would have a benefit which can be profound and in accordance with his best principle.

Buddhism propounds non-attachment to anything and can also answer questions about family, children, spouse, and the like. Evidences abound that certain *suttas*, most of which are in the *Saṅgīyuttanikāya*, describe events in which laymen themselves asked the Buddha about practical guidelines for them. The Buddha taught them *suññatā* and non-attachment as principles that lay people should know and practice. Therefore, we have to consider that the questions and the answers are relevant and not contradictory. The *suttas* in the *Saṅgīyuttanikāya* taught lay people about *suññatā*, but the



Singālovādasutta in the Dīghanikāya teaches family matters. This means that those who have already understood *suññatā* still have to properly practice lay matters or householders' matters. This is then in agreement with the main principle of *suññatā* : those who have known this principle still have a duty to properly treat their parents, spouses, and children.

So please don't think that mundane matters and supramundane ones are antagonists, or enemies without intention of compromise. I used to talk in other lectures that laymen themselves must have a principle to attain nibbāna, although the process may be slow because of the burden they have to carry. Laymen or householders are different from monks in that they have many things to take care of. But such things are the outer shell of human beings. The inner core, the spiritual part, is the same for both laymen and monks: they both have to progress rightly to nibbāna. It is proper for this present lecture that we use the word *disa* as the title because this word means direction to be followed. There are six *disas* to be discussed here.

I would like to talk a little bit more about the word *disa*, considering its root. In essence this word means "seen" or "appear." What has to be seen is unavoidable. When it is being seen or has been seen, that means it appears before us. So the *disas* are separated into different directions, namely, east, west, north, and south. Each of them is a direction that appears and has been known to man since he began to see the sun. In the morning the sun rises in one direction, and in the evening it sets in another direction. Facing the sun, man observes two more directions to his sides: the left and the right. Even when these four cardinal directions are subdivided into many more directions, they still retain the meaning of *disas* – seen or appear.

In brief, the word *disa* has a meaning of appearance or being seen; and, geographically, there are four of them: east, west, north, and south. In our religious context, two more—the upward and the downward—are added, making a total of six directions altogether. But sometimes they are put into three groups: the upward, the downward, and the lateral directions. There are Pali terms for these, indicating emphasis on the three main directions. The lateral directions include the east, west, north, and south directions.

Think about them and you will see that our lateral matters—those on our east, west, north, and south sides—are about equal in importance. But the most important are seemingly those above and below us. It's all right to count up to six directions, namely, one above, one below, and four around. The last four may be subdivided into eight or sixteen subdirections, but here we consider only four as important: front, back, left, and right. See this as natural division, or a result of our natural perception, because it's normal for us to look around and count up the six directions. Therefore, consider the division as in tune with a good rule.

If we know matters on these six directions, then it means we know all what should be known about what one has to get involved with. Matters on the upward direction may go as far as nibbāna, those on the downward directions may go as far as hell, and those on the sides are whatever there are. These are what all of us have to unavoidably associate with. They are *disas*.

For those of us who have been ordained only to later return to laity, it is extremely proper, and necessary, to know all about *disas* because they would be able to play the full, complete, and unshortened role of human beings. The role involves all of the *disas* and demands full effort. So they

should be well-versed in this matter and rightly treat all *disas*.

In the Thai language there is an amusing word, namely, *thid* or *thit*. This word comes from an Indian word, *pundit*, which is used to identify those who have graduated from an *ashram* (school). The master of the *ashram* say to them, "You have graduated," and the graduates are then call *pundits*. These graduates then return to lead their lives in their families. They have intended since the beginning to study in the *ashram* and return to their families. This tradition has been practiced since an ancient time. Today it is still practiced, and the grauadtes from an *ashram* are still called *pundits*.

Many traditions in the Thai culture are derived from those of the Indian. This is unarguable. The cultural and religious traditions which the Thai people adopted from India cover nearly every facets including the high-class language used among the royal family, high-class society, and religious circle. Therefore, noble words in the Thai language are mostly those from languages used in India, particularly Pali and Sanskrit. The scholastic system in India is also adopted into the Thai culture. We Thai call college graduates by the word *bundit*. Thai men who have been ordained and returned to laity are also called by this word, which differs slightly from the original word, *pundit*, in Pali and Sanskrit. The root word of pundit is *punda* or *pundā*, which has the same meaning as *paññā* (knowledge or wisdom). The suffix -it or -ita means having reached or having possessed. Therefore, pundit means one who has reached or possessed *pundā* or knowledge and become self-delivering.

Since pronunciation in the Thai language differs from that in the source language, the consonant p and d in Pali become b and th in some Thai words. For example, *pundit*

was adopted as *bundit* or *bunthit*. The latter was later shortened to just *thit* or *thid*. These words, as adaptations from *bundit*, were satisfactory and acceptable for some time among ideological institutions. In the past, parents were happy to let their daughter marry a *thit*. Later on *thits* became corrupted more and more because opportunistic, and sometimes mentally unfit, men were ordained as monks just to return to laity as *thids*. Then the word had a negative connotation and was used to call those who acted like bumpkins. This is why Thai words for *pundit* are both *thit* and *thid*. The former, with a *t* at the end, has the correct meaning of *pundit*, but the latter, with a *d* at the end, has a rather teasing or down-putting meaning. Therefore, monks should return to laity as *thits* or *pundits*, not as *thids* or bumpkins.

To be a good *thit*, or a *pundit*, one has to rightly practice the Six Disas. It is a fluke or whatsoever that the Pali word *disa* is transcribed into a Thai word which is, incidentally, also pronounced *thit*. So one knows all about *thits* (*disas*) to become a good *thit* (*pundit*). The words *disa* and *thit* are spelled differently, but when pronounced in Thai they become homonyms. Therefore, those monks who are to return to laity should rightly know the Six Disas and practice them well.

Now I would elaborate on the Six Disas. First I would like all of us to note in accordance with the natural principle, or natural science, also. According to the Pali scripture of the Singālovādasutta, the sequencing of the *disas* begins with the east direction. This is followed by the other lateral directions: south, west, and north, just like what most people commonly describe. Then come the upward and the downward directions. This method is all

right, for it depends on the principle that one starts from the east and moves clockwise until he passes all of the four lateral directions. We may abide by it, but if we use a natural principle, which can easily be memorized, we should use the following sequence: front, back, left, right, top, and bottom. Even children can understand this. This new sequence is then east, west, north, south, upward, and downward, instead of what is commonly described.

In the Pali Canon, the *disa* sequence starts out as east, south, west, and north in abidance by the established, and seemingly rather sacred, clockwise principle before ending with the upward and the downward for a total of six directions. But by common, or even in childlike, sense, we should start with the front and the back; then, based on our hands, move to the left and the right; and finally move upward to our head before going downward to our feet.

As all the directions have been accounted for, we will now come to know what is symbolically represented by each of them.

The Pali Canon starts with the east or the front direction. The direction we face to is considered most important. So we place our parents there, in front of us. The position behind you should then be where you place those who are less important than you, or those you pull along, namely, your children and wives. The Sutta talks about children and wives but does not mention husbands because the Buddha was talking to young men. As a general principle, we should also take husbands into account. Now for the left and right, the left side means our friends and relatives; and the right side represents our teachers. These two directions have different meanings. After parents, children, friends, and teachers, we look upward to see the monastics

and look downward to see the subordinates, laborers, slaves, servants, and employees. This is evidently a good and complete principle for householders. If someone happens to ask about where we place our nation, then you have to use your intelligence to decide it.

You must first remember that the Sutta being discussed is about discourses given to individuals, not to the society or the whole nation. So it is rather about personal matters within a family or within an individual's circle. However, we should not neglect to recognize our nation, which is the underpinning for all individuals and the society. At least the nation should be on all sides of us, that is, all directions around us. The whole lateral sides altogether are the nation, which includes the mentioned four directions and must be recognized. But if we bluntly narrow the scope, we may say that the nation is in the same group as friends and relatives, namely, on our left side. This is because our compatriots are actually our friends and relatives.

Some may feel that this is too little honor for the nation. But I would say that people on our left side — our friends and relatives — constitute our nation. To have a nation we must live together in unity as friends and relatives. If you cannot accept this, you can combine all of the four lateral sides to make the nation. Or if you would like to add spiritual matters to it, you may also include both the upward and downward directions in it. What I mean is that, if the Scripture does not say anything about the nation, you may have to interpret or explain the matter like I have said. Don't exclude the nation from the Six Disas, because that would make the Buddha seem unomniscient, that is, not all-knowing or not circumspect.



If you have a problem like this, consider it as your own inability to interpret the matter. You may not have to bluntly say that the Buddha was not a nationalist, did not talk about a nation, or did not take a nation's side. It is all right if you say so, for we are now talking only about dhammic matters, not worldly ones. Even as we talk about the world, children, and wives, we concern ourselves only with their dhammic aspects, without evoking defilements or nationalism. Explanation like this is acceptable.

But don't forget that nationalism must still be mentioned, also in a dhammic manner. However, if we are to have nationalism, our perception of a nation must be right in accordance with dhammic principles. The more we are dhammically nationalistic, the better we will be. This is because we will have responsibility for our humanity, being citizens of a nation and working for the best results. This is nationalism in its good meaning. Those monks who would return to laity as *thits* or *pundits* cannot avoid it, for they are in a world where they have to affiliate with a nation and take responsibility. We must have responsibility as a main principle. Without responsibility, we cannot be civilized human beings. Don't forget that even Stone Age men began to know and have responsibility. To indicate their civilized humanity, present-day people should be more responsible for the nation, religion, His Majesty the King, and the constitution because all these are the underpinning of individuals.

We now arrive at another principle that Buddhism emphasizes movement of smaller units of society, which is an analytical philosophy. Individuals, instead of the whole mass, are required to do good. If all individuals do good, there will be no problems about the whole people not doing so. It is more practical to ask individuals to behave themselves;

it's difficult to force the mass to do the same. But if everyone contentedly does good, then the result is automatically the same as when all do so in unity. This is why we are talking about the Six Disas in individual's sense. If everybody rightly practices the Six Disas, it will be good for the whole people and the nation. So we all should set out to practice the Six Disas well; then there will be no problems.

The explanation just given is for newcomers to the Buddha's *ashram* who will return as *pundits*, or *thits*. They have to rightly practices the Six Disas in order to make up for their three-month leave of absence from their normal duty. This is the purpose for young men who traditionally get ordained as monks for a three-month rains-retreat, more or less. But actually it is not the original purpose of the Buddhists.

In the countries of serious Buddhists, such as Burma or Sri Lanka, monks are not supposed to leave monkhood. They, since the beginning, have no tradition of returning to laity. Thailand probably did not have that tradition either. But later on we allowed a rule, tradition, or convention for monks to be able to disrobe. The original purpose was then changed to that young men get ordained to learn about how to be good housholders. After a rains-retreat period or two in the monkhood, they return as wise laymen who can lead their good life spiritually. In the past we had no educational institutes for worldly matters other than monasteries. Therefore, people of the old days came to monasteries to get education in both spiritual and mundane subjects. Everything, including vocational practice, was taught in monasteries. Let alone dhamma, *Magga* (the Noble Path), *phala* (consequence of the Noble Path) and nibbāna, which were already taught and learned there.



To get ordained as a monk in a monastery is to get education on both worldly and spiritual sides. It is therefore proper for men to get ordained for a time and later on return to laity. This is a wise, not stupid, practice. It is a wisdom in the Thai culture for men to do so, although this is not the particular purpose or the original tradition of Buddhism, which means to ordain people who have been satisfied with worldly matters and want to get higher spiritual happiness. But as there is a special case for this particular time that men should learn everything needed for easily following the normal path of householders, they have to learn it; and this has become a new tradition in Thai Buddhism.

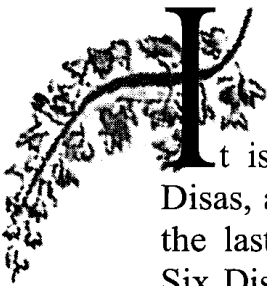
Some people could not get ordained while they were young because they had to work as government or private company employees. To compensate for this, they get ordained later on. This case is similar to what has just been mentioned: they want to learn what they have not known. We should not consider their ordination as a way to take advantage of others, or to get a vacation, or the like. The reason is that there are more to learn than what we can acquire in our remaining time. However, three months during a rains-retreat is enough for new monks to study mostly the general dhammic principles in Buddhism. They have a chance to learn about householders' matters without conflicting the main principle of the religion. Therefore, they can return to laity as good Buddhist followers. It is a promotion for themselves, the nation, and the religion at the same time. And this is the general purpose or perspective for the temporarily ordained. Everybody who is leaving the monkhood please see this point.

For this first session of the lecture, we have time only for a general view of what we have to do as people who were

born under Buddhism. Even people outside the Buddhist circle would still have to do the same. This is a matter that we can challenge other people to prove by themselves. Dhamma in Buddhism is *ehi passiko*, that is, verification-inviting. We can ask everybody in the world, every follower of any religion, to come to see that this dhamma of ours is good and right — impossible for anyone to prove it otherwise. We have this kind of verification-inviting dhamma for both householders and non-householders. So those who are leaving monkhood should take it along, as what you get from a temporary ordination.

On other days we will talk about all the *disas* in detail. Today we only have a general view of them as an introduction, and our time is up.

## THE MEANINGS OF THE SIX DISAS



It is now time to talk further about the Six Disas, as continuation from the previous day. In the last session, I described the meaning of the Six Disas as a whole; today I shall describe each of them in detail.

Every word has many meanings in vastly different layers. People can see them more or less profoundly depending on their education or intelligence. Today we will discuss the profound meanings of what we call the Six Disas, namely, parents, children and wife, teachers, friends and relatives, monks, and servants. These are the main *disas* in ethical sense. Suppose that the position we are standing at is the center of observation. Then we will see the front, back, left, right, upward, and downward directions, which are situated around us. We have to see them and get the results from treating them rightly. But how deeply or shallowly we see them depends on our intelligence or lack of it. So first we have to understand our and other people's ignorance or knowledge about this matter.

I have said that a word has many meanings. This depends on the viewpoint or standpoint. From a materialistic

viewpoint you see one thing, and from an abstract or spiritual viewpoint you see another. Or if you look for a worldly benefit, the word has one meaning; but if you look for a profoundly dhammic benefit, it has another meaning.

Now let's look broadly at each of the words to see what its philosophy is. We will try to find out what it is all about the philosophy of the words parents, children and wife, for example. When we are asked, "What does that word mean?," we have to consider what viewpoint the question is asked from.

First of all, we will look from a materialistic viewpoint, for example, a biological one about material objects. Biologically, human parents are gene pools or baby makers just like animals and plants, which reproduce and create newer generations. There are male and female sides which contribute to new, genetically combined entities. For animals and plants, biological parents are nothing more than that. In this aspect, there is no ethical, cultural, or spiritual issue to consider. It leads to materialistic values and benefits and overlooks parental benevolence. There have been some people who look from this viewpoint and believe that parents are simply baby makers. Some go so far as to suggest that parents make babies just for fun.

King Mahavajiravudh, the Sixth Reign of Thailand's Chakri Dynasty, composed a verse which I remember reading a long time ago. I cannot recall the name of the book and the exact wording of the verse, but it most likely goes like this: "They gave us our lives in no meritorious manner and, as a common rule, this cannot be counted as wonder." The quotation was spoken to a crowd by a devilish character in the tale associated with the verse. Its meaning is that parents' bearing of children is unlike gift giving because there

are neither givers nor receivers; it is a natural and normal rule of reproduction. So the devilish character suggested that we do not pay respect to our parents. Don't see this as an old, outdated tale because a viewpoint like this existed in the past and still has an impact up to now.

There is a real-life story which I like to tell people although it is rather unexalting: There was a female foreign-educated graduate who, when coming back to Thailand, treated her mother like a slave, to the extent that her mother could not bear it. One day, after having tolerated her daughter's abuse to the breaking point, the mother complained that her daughter did not recognize parental generosity. The daughter shouted back that the mother herself did not recognize the daughter's benevolence in going to study abroad and bringing back honor to the mother. So you will see how contrary they are. This real-life story took place in Bangkok. It should be frequently told but, to prevent irritation, names of those involved should not be mentioned.

The story goes well with the said quotation: "They gave us our lives in no meritorious manner and, as a common rule, this cannot be counted as wonder." This is because some people take a purely biological viewpoint that parents are just baby makers; and this involves no ethical or idealistic issue. Materialistic view like this can exist in many more forms.

A second viewpoint, which is more elevated, is that socially or anthropologically — what exact terms to be used I am not so sure — parents are those who take responsibility for their offsprings. Children are socially under parental care. Parents have to be responsible for their children, dutifully taking a good care of them as is generally established in the society. This is better than the biological viewpoint, which is purely materialistic, because there is a binding duty that

must be performed well. The society will benefit from dutiful parents who bring up real good children.

In a third viewpoint, we will see the meaning from the spiritual, dhammic, religious, or ultimately idealistic perspective. Let's say that this is a spiritual ideal. According to this viewpoint in Buddhism, parents are their children's *Brahma*, first teachers, and *arahats* (perfected ones). These are higher than what is socially accepted in general. The ultimate meaning is that parents are life givers; our lives are given by our parents; we cannot be born by ourselves; and other similar descriptions. Parents create bodily entities which later become persons. However, a fool or a lesser mind sees it one way whereas a *pundit* or a profoundly intelligent mind sees it differently.

So we have laid a rule for what the meaning is when considered from a biological viewpoint, a sociological one, and an idealistically spiritual one. You may remember the following example about a Buddha image. Materially, a small Buddha image is worth a few cans of sardines. Socially, it is not so. People consider it as an object more beneficial than its face value. Idealistically, it represents the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. So actually a Buddha image is not worth just a few cans of sardines. You may use this fact for comparison of various things in different aspects so that you may choose one of the aspects that is most beneficial.

Parents are not just baby makers; they are many things near and far, even *arahats* of the family, if you consider them from the Buddhist ideal. Remember that parents are sources of merits for their children. The word *arahat* is intended for use in this meaning. **Children can get merits from their parents by respectfully and gratefully treating their parents. This means that parents are bases for reception of gratitude.** Now let's review what I have said.

Biologically, parents are baby makers just like breeding buffalos or oxen or plants; sociologically, parents are those who take care of their children; and idealistically or spiritually for Buddhists, parents are *arahats* of the family.

So the first *disa*, the front direction representing parents, has many meanings as just described. We must consider parents as being in front of us, preceding us and more important than us. Always keep them there in front of us. When you get married, don't become so nonsensical as to place your wife in front and put your parents behind you. Be cautious to prevent this from happening. Don't let what fascinates or interests you, which is in tune with your defilements, come in front of you. To be righteous, we must let what in fact is right and dhammic do so.

Now we will look all the way throughout the remaining *disas*, for this will be better and easier to understand. The backward direction is children and wife. In the Pali scripture, the word 'children' comes before the word 'wife.' Similarly in the Thai language, we say 'children and wife,' not the other way around. Therefore, we will consider children first. In a simple materialistic or biological sense, children are results from reproduction just like offsprings of animals and plants. They are just these, nothing other than responses to a natural law. This then goes well again with the saying quoted above: "They gave us our lives in no meritorious manner and, as a common rule, this cannot be counted as wonder." Materially, children are only lumps of flesh and blood from parents' reproduction.

In the ethical sense of the society, which has been adopted since ancient times, or in a natural, worldly sense, children are parents' objects of happiness. When a baby is born, or even before that, it becomes an object of promise and gratification for its parents. Instinctively, human parents

are pleased with their child just as animals are with their offspring. But human beings are more intelligent than animals. Therefore, a human baby brings more happiness than does an animal offspring to its associated parents. A human baby should have a meaning in accordance with the Pali word *putta* or the Sanskrit word *putra*. These two Indian words, which have been in use since an ancient time, give the meaning of a child as **one who would liberate his parents from hell**. The hell here means all kinds of unhappiness. When a pair of parents has a child, their unhappiness or hell is lifted from them; they are pleased with their receiving what they want most, one who would carry on their genes and dedicate merits to them after their death. This is how a child becomes a source of happiness, a quencher of unhappiness, or an eliminator of hell for his parents.

In an ordinary society, people see children as progenies. This is a self-centered view. People set up families because they want descendants. They have properties which they do not want to give to anybody else; so they give them to their children. They hope that their children would preserve their pedigree. Now situation seems to worsen: children become merchandises. This is absurd. In Thailand daughters have a high price; in India sons are expensive. It depends on values, tradition, and culture, but people take good care of their young only to sell them at high prices. Speaking frankly like this may sound vulgar, but social perception like this is rather morally low.

From a third viewpoint, which is an idealistically spiritual one, children are more than those who lift their parents from hell: **they are supposed to continue human's journey toward Nibbāna or God**. Natural evolution means improvement of nature. Spiritual evolution similarly means improvement toward Nibbāna or unification with God. As



people cannot reach this goal in one lifetime, they leave behind children to continue the journey until a human being can one day achieve it.

Therefore, if one would like to have a child in the idealistic sense, he should not think low morally but should rather think of promoting his child to move up spiritually until reaching Nibbāna or God. If you yourselves cannot reach the goal in this life, then your children, your grandchildren, or your great grandchildren should make it to the goal. You should rather think like this so that you would not be stressful but would be happy and make progress.

Thinking it over, you will see that, materialistically a child is the result from reproduction of his parents; sociologically or anthropologically, their genetic successor and pleaser; and idealistically in Buddhism or similar religions, their heir for the journey toward Nibbāna or God. This is what we see in the long run, what children should be in accordance with the profound aspect of life.

Now we come to the trailing word "wife." A question arises about what wife is. Materialistically or biologically, a wife is the female side of the reproductive human parents, just like those in animals and plants. We may not talk much about this aspect of a wife. Sociologically or anthropologically, a wife is beneficial for the husband, being his companion through thick and thin times making a living together. This is the good meaning of a wife. But now it gets so low that a wife becomes an object for obsession, a show-off, or a status symbol. A man works terribly hard to complete his study just to find a wife who is rich, beautiful, or whatever quality it may be, for showing off. In this way, a woman becomes a toy-like object or something exploited by a man. This is not idealistic. It follows common perception under defilements and causes women to get obsessed with bodily beautification

and think of nothing more than that. They make a living by using their beauty, which may be considered a kind of fraud. If wives are under a situation like this, then humanity is very deluded and very foolish. But if a wife is considered as the better half of the married couple, one who contributes to progress of the family, then the situation is good.

In a more profound sense, free from control of defilements and spiritually idealistic, husband and wife are companions for the journey toward nibbāna. We have much to talk about this, but for short we can say that every human being is born to make a journey to nibbāna because that's where the story ends. To get there you have to do well in worldly matters, which unavoidably include having a wife and children. This means that you have to be a good husband with a good wife, both being well-versed in spiritual matter and really knowing what life, household, and family are, to the extent that you get tired of them and become unaffected by them. If you pass the worldly test not so well, you are not tired of it and still are affected by it. Therefore, good husband and wife have to help each other so that both are spiritually illuminated, getting no delusion here in this world. A wife should be a good companion for her husband toward nibbāna; the same applies for a husband with his wife.

The Buddha's words in the *sutta* are about children and wife but not about husband. This is because He talked to an audience which was all men. Generally we should talk about children, wife, and husband. Although young men nowadays think of a wife as whom he will have bodily enjoyment with, this should be temporary. They should know all the meaning of natural evolution that humanity must go to nibbāna as the ultimate destination. So to have a wife or a husband means to have a cooperating companion

for the journey toward nibbāna. Don't get stuck here in this world because that will be shameful and make human beings no better than animals or plants. As we are mentally and spiritually superior to them, we should go farther than they do.

You may see that I have gone so far as to say that even children have to continue the journey toward nibbāna, and that husband and wife are companions who go toward nibbāna together instead of getting stuck here in this world. But you should rather look at this in the ultimately idealistic way.

It's enough to talk about only three levels of the meaning of each *disa*; more than this would complicate the matter. Materialistically or biologically, parents, spouses, and children mean certain things. Sociologically or anthropologically, they mean some other things. Idealistically or spiritually, their meanings go farther to human's ultimate destination, that is, Nibbāna or God.

The other *disas*, namely, teachers, friends and relatives, monks, and servants, have meanings that go beyond materialistic concept. Teachers as the right *disa* have no meaning in the materialistic or biological sense. So we will not talk about the meaning at this level but will consider it at the next level: a sociological or socially standard one. **In this aspect teachers are often seen as employees for the teaching job**, those who take up teaching as their profession. At most teachers are considered as consultants for various problems, getting material benefit among themselves and their students. But when we look at a higher level, that is, on an idealistically spiritual one, we should say out loud that **teachers are spiritual leaders**, those who raise our spiritual level in the earlier time of our lives. This is because teachers who teach in towns and countrysides alike are those who

give basic education to students and foremostly oversee their good manners and morality. They should be looked up to as spiritual leaders, not just teaching employees.

**Almost all young people nowadays see teachers as employees for their parents or for the government, which is supported by their parents' tax money, thereby indirectly being students' teaching employees. So they do not pay respect to teachers as their venerable persons.** In the long past, people taught their children to consider teachers as venerable and most generous persons, not as employees. But western culture does not teach like this; instead it teaches that teachers are just students' friends, which are not so venerable. So the world is in turmoil because of such a silly culture. We Thai Buddhists must consider teachers as those who are ranked among the most venerable persons, those who raise our spiritual level in the beginning of our lives. And this is the meaning of the right *disa*.

The left *disa* is relatives and friends. Relatives directly mean people who are in the same family blood line and indirectly mean people who relate dhammically, namely, those who help one another in dhammic matters or those who share the same ideology. **The key meaning of relatives is at helping one another. A blood relative who does not help others in the same family cannot dhammically counted as one. People who are not blood-related but are helpful and acquainted with one another become more meaningful relatives.**

In the Pali language, the word for 'relative' is *yāti*, which means 'know' or 'perceive' — a relative is a person whom we have to know or perceive, and the word for 'friend' is *mitta*, which means loving kindness—a friend is a person whom we kindly love. Relatives and friends have a similar core meaning, so we put them together on the same *disa*.

Unlike children, who are born from parents, they do not have a materialistic meaning, but have a sociological one: obviously they help one another and share happiness or unhappiness together. This brings satisfaction when there is a task to accomplish. We live in the world full of work and duty, which weigh us down. But the burden becomes manageable when we have friends around to help us. Things get done because of our friends' cooperation. This is what friends mean sociologically at a middle level.

At the high, idealistically spiritual level, friends are also none other than companions for the journey toward nibbāna. Therefore, real friends are those who help, advise, and support one another for progressive betterment. Friends would caution us when we are careless, remind us when we forget, and direct us when we get lost, so that we finally reach nibbāna. They may even whisper into our ears at the moment we die. These are the ideal of friends. But friends who drink liquor together or go to a brothel together are develish friends, who are not counted as ideal ones in the sense discussed here. Liquor-drinking friends and dissolute friends lead us to materialism and sensualism.

We now discuss the meaning of the upward *disa*, the *samaṇabrāhmaṇa*, or the monastics. Some of you may not have heard of the Pali word *samaṇabrāhmaṇa*, so I shall give its short definition for you to easily memorize it. A *samaṇa* is an ordained person who is celibate whereas a *brāhmaṇa* is an ordained or semi-ordained person who has a spouse and a family but still does religious work similarly to a *samaṇa*. A priest who keeps a household and leads a married life is a kind of the ordained called *brāhmaṇa*. A monk who does not keep a household, being more independent and higher morally, is called *samaṇa*. Combined together, the two kinds of the ordained are called *samaṇabrāhmaṇas*. This word is

from an Indian language. The Buddha used this word as it actually existed at that time.

A *samaṇa*, like the Buddha, belongs to the group of ordained persons who do not keep a household. So do some other groups of monastics. They all do the same work of raising people's spiritual level or help solve problems on that level. *Brāhmaṇas*, who are also householders, cannot go so far up the spiritual ladder. Maybe this is because they had misconception since the beginning in the ancient time. The spiritual height as understood by *brāhmaṇas* was reached through *yañña* (sacrifice), which they believed would send them to the highest heaven in their next lives. *Brāhmaṇas*, as spiritual leaders, were often misleading like this. In order for a king to get reborn in heaven, they performed for him various kinds of sacrifice, including one that killed humans. *Samaṇas* perform none of this. They have their own kind of *yañña*, for example, self-sacrifice or letting go of the I-mine concept to reach *nibbāna* as the ultimate destination. However, both *brāhmaṇas* and *samaṇas* have the same purpose of reaching the spiritual pinnacle; so people place them overhead as the upward *disa*.

Now let's look at the various layers of meaning. There is no meaning for *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* in the materialistic or biological sense because this *disa* involves a purely spiritual matter. However, viewing them rather pessimistically, you may say that they are beggars who take foods and other things from people without doing any real work in return, thereby exploiting others. There is a *sutta*, called *Kasisutta*, in the Pali Canon which describes something like what I have just said. The story goes like this: The Buddha went with an alms bowl to a Brahmin to rebuke him while he was plowing his rice field. The Brahmin told the Buddha to go away and not to disturb him while he was doing his work in

the field. The Brahmin said to the Buddha that He should also work for a living and should not exploit others by begging.

The Buddha told the Brahmin that actually He was also doing His rice farming in His own way, and the Brahmin should not say that He was not. The Brahmin asked how the Buddha could do it when He did not have a water-buffalo or a plow. The Buddha then said in a verse that *saddhā* (faith) was His grain for sowing, *tapa* (ascetic practice) was His water for producing the crop, *hiriottappa* (moral shame and moral fear) was His plow stick, and so on. This enlightened the Brahmin, making him rightly understand dhamma and become a noble one. But in the materialists' perception, *samaṇas* are free riders who do no farming or any other work for a living. This is what they see.

What we see as generally accepted is that the institution of *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* is venerated as sacred and on a high level. The members of this institution are supposed to perform religious rites and teach moral values to people. Or we may simply say that they are those who perform rites. In our Spiritual Theatre here at Suan Mokkh, we have a good picture with a caption saying that **people nowadays are good at showing respect with a "wai" (putting both hands together in front of the face) to monks, but when they are told to practice dhamma, they put their hands on their ears.** This means that present-day people have *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* just for paying homage to and for performing rites. They are not interested in following dhammic principles, but turn deaf when told to do so. More people in the world are becoming like this; and *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* have reduced their role to just accepting respect and performing rites.

In an idealistically spiritual sense, *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* are supposed to be spiritual leaders who help raise people's

spiritual level to the highest. So they are placed overhead in the upward *disa*. We have to see such a spiritual height like this, which all human beings should strive to achieve, then we can know the highest meaning for mankind.

The last *disa*, for servants, is downward. In the old days servants were normally commoners or slaves and were called by those words. Under democracy at present, people do not like the latter words and use them no more because of their ignorance. However, what is meant by the two words still exists because when one side has power, the opposite, or powerless, side will always fall under it, becoming an underdog. This is a meaning of a commoner or a slave. And the word 'power' does not necessarily mean only might backed by weapons or other physical instruments: there are money power, intellectual power, and many other kinds of power that can be used. When any kind of power is successfully exercised, those affected by it become its slaves. For example, Westerners may use money to bait the Thai and catch them as slaves any time.

Be careful! 'Slaves' still exist and cannot be eradicated as long as power coexists with the world. This always agrees with the Buddha's words, "*Vaso issariyam loke*," which means that power dominates the world. Women can make slaves out of men because they have beauty or prettiness as power. Men with many educational degrees tagged along like a tail may have to seek reconciliation with women who have nothing but beauty. A dhammic riddle picture shows a sword-holding man with complete magical power who finally falls for a giantess who disguises herself as a beautiful woman playing a swing under a tree. This is a mysterious power that enslaves people.

Now there are employees, laborers, and lower-rank personnel as subjects of some powerful persons. All of them



are classified as the downward *disa*. Lower-class people in whatever positions are all counted as this *disa*. We have to see it and treat it correctly.

Materialistically, slaves and servants are for use and exploitation at their bosses' disposal. This shows the primitive meaning, which is now rather outdated. In the past people were sold as slaves; and their owners could do anything with them, male or female. At present some lower-class people become servants. Higher-class people have a kind of power that makes the lower-class agree to become servants. Socially and generally people have servants for service, enhancing their status, seeking of benefits, or, in a sense, taking advantage of others. An intelligent person knows what and when to do to get things done; he knows what product can result from intelligence, when this will happen, and what individual or what group of persons should contribute labor. Servants, laborers, and slaves are under this concept. They are workhorses for the more intelligent to use in their production of goods. The general meaning of servants and the like in the sociological, anthropological, philosophical, or a similar sense goes as far as this.

In the ultimate, spiritual sense, we have to respectfully consider that servants or subordinates are necessary for those who are journeying toward nibbāna. They can be a lesson to learn from. I even would like to say that servants and subordinates are sources of merits. To be meritorious, we have to help poor people and those who cannot help themselves. Without these people, nobody can make merits. So the deprived, the disabled, and the helpless are themselves sources of merits. Even the blind and other handicapped people are in this category. When others come to you to be accepted and helped as your servants, you should consider that they come to give you a chance to make merits. So don't

oppress them or take advantage of them. Even for your employees and your subordinates, consider them like this so as to follow the spiritual ideal.

We can make merits on a low level by being generous and showing loving kindness. Merits on a higher level are for us to use to destroy our selfishness and control defilements. Servants are unavoidably subject to our emotion: we can scold and even spank them. But that would make us more defiled and more ridiculous, eventually sending us to hell. But if we have servants for a lesson or practice in controlling ourselves not to get angry with them, not to take advantage of them, and not to scold them—if we can suppress our rage for them—then we are most tolerant, for they are those generally not tolerated by anyone.

If we are determined not to succumb to hating temperament or selfishness of our own, then servants could play a supporting role for us to achieve our goal. They could help their masters move up spiritually, from the unmeritorious to the meritorious, and from the selfish to the selfless. If servants are used as a lesson for destroying the I-mine concept, they will be a very good one, for normally their masters are not tolerant to them. Their masters have to train themselves for tolerance and unselfishness toward the servants, starting from helping them, looking after them, and taking care of them to loving them as the masters' own children. When a servant is ill, the master has to take care of him as if he were the master's own child. This is a long-established tradition practiced since the Buddha's time.

Therefore, the slavery system in the Buddhist tradition does not have to get discontinued. Only devilish slavery has to be stopped so that democracy can survive. Dhammic slavery like that of the Buddhist does not have to, and should not, get stopped because the handicapped and the helpless

are always present in the world. We have to help them. And when we accept them under our wings, in a sense they become our slave-like subjects. It's unavoidable for a master to have servants or those he has to take care of as servants. But we can turn this into a meritorious deed.

Thus we should help the less capable in order for us to make merits. As for nowadays, we have to use some encouraging tactics like those in the Buddha's time, when millionaires took care of a large number of servants. In some instance, the whole village was supported by a single millionaire. Kings also assigned this work to millionaires. And there was no oppression. There was only harmony and unity. On Buddhist sabbath days, masters and servants went to monasteries to make merits and practice dhamma together. The servants were happy. They did not want to get free, for they were not capable of supporting themselves on their own.

In brief, those whoever come to stay as your subjects are to be seen as in the downward *disa*. You have to consider them like this, not as ones to oppress, take advantage of, or similarly -- all of which do not rightly agree with the meaning of "servants" in the idealistically spiritual sense. Instead, you have to take them as a *disa* to pay respect to, or even to pay homage to.

We have talked from the start that all the *disas* are what we have to pay homage to. A man [by the name of Siṅgāla] was paying homage to various geographical directions when the Buddha saw him. The Enlightened One told him that noble ones did not venerate *disas* as he was doing, but they did it by paying homage to their parents as the front *disa*, to their children and spouses as the back *disa*, to their teachers as the right *disa*, to their relatives and friends as the left *disa*, to *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* as the upward *disa*, and to their servants as the downward *disa*. To pay homage to the

last *disa* means that you have to respect and take care of the servants, considering them as those who would travel together with you in meritorious ways toward nibbāna. All of the *disas* mean a matter of going toward nibbāna. If we venerate them by treating them rightly, we could reach nibbāna.

Today I will not talk much, except for telling you that each *disa* has various meanings as I have said. Please recall and review them.

The word 'parents' on the lowest level means baby makers just like male and female animals or plants for breeding. On a higher level, that is, socially, parents are those who take responsibility for their children. On the idealistic level, **parents are arahats at home.**

The low-level meaning of the word 'children' is results from reproduction. A higher-level meaning of this word is what pleases the parents by continuing their lineage. Its ultimate meaning is **heirs or heiresses to their parents' journey toward nibbāna.**

The word 'wife' has a low-level meaning of being a partner in reproduction just like a female breeding animal or plant. Its social meaning is one who helps solve the husband's emotional or natural problems, one for showing off, or one as a source of worldly pleasure. But its ultimate meaning is one who helps take up the husband's burden of living and contributes to study and understanding the profound matter that would make both of them get tired of the world and want to transcend it together. A husband and his wife are not supposed to be deluded friends in this world but are companions who **help each other in order to progress to a higher spiritual level.**

'Teachers' are not employees of the teaching career or those who sell their intelligence for a living. **They are supposed to be spiritual leaders who would direct their students toward nibbāna even at the beginning of the latter's study.**

Similarly, friends and relatives are not companions for liquor drinking or other paths of ruin, neither for indulgence nor increase in defilements. They are supposed to help one another in mankind duty. **The ultimate meaning is that they continually accompany one another until they reach nibbāna.**

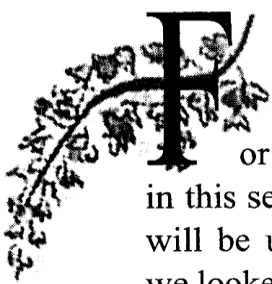
*Samaṇabrāhmaṇas* are not beggars who consume people's food for free, take advantage of others, and are social parasites as some say. The present meaning is understood more as persons for paying homage to and for performing rites. But their ultimate meaning is **those who raise the spiritual level of all people in the world — not just an individual like us—to the highest.**

Servants are not those whom we should oppress. They are for our common interest in accordance with the Buddhist saying that *kamma* classifies people, all beings are divided into castes and classes, which cannot be eliminated. Don't be so arrogant as to suggest elimination of castes and classes. You can talk foolishly about this, but in reality you cannot do it. Castes and classes of people are created naturally by *kamma*, not by people. People are born with a lot of *kamma* and demerits. Some are abnormal and mentally retarded; and this puts them into a class and makes them live differently from others. If one tries to make all people live on the same standard, he will cause dialectic materialism, communism, and the like. This is because he does not know anything about *kamma*. We should help raise others' living standard, with realization that they too have *kamma*, and help solve

their problems in a proper way. We have to respectfully help those who are born disabled and those who are born physically or mentally handicapped, just as we are paying homage to them.

These are the meanings on various levels of the terms that are represented by the *disas* to be paid homage to by all of you who will be householders or laymen. They may be more or less, heavier or lighter, than what I have said, but you have to think about them for yourselves. Any way they are unavoidable; you have to treat them, rightly of course. If you monks are afraid, don't return to laity. And if you are to become a layman, don't be afraid. You have to do it correctly; and this in itself will be your ultimate practice of dhamma while being a layman. The Buddha taught about the *disas* with a purpose like this. It's enough for today; the time is up now.

## PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE FRONT DISA: PARENTS

 or the talk about householders' issue of *disas* in this session, I shall discuss the meanings which will be used in general. In the previous session we looked at the meaning of *disa* in a broad sense and at a level so high as to involve going toward nibbāna. But people who do not perceive it that way cannot accept it. If we say that having a husband or a wife is like having a friend, or to use rather odd words, like **having a partner for a journey toward nibbāna**, then people, especially modern-day people, will laugh at us for being so obsessed with going to nibbāna. But I always preach this concept because of many reasons, the best of which is that we will maximally benefit from it. If we rely on this concept, we will get the most from it, with the best reason. There are also other reasons, but they are not so good as the one mentioned. If we know which factor would bring us most benefit, then that one is the most reasonable. This is the concept we should rely on.

About this matter of going to nibbāna, don't think that it is so religious or idealistic as to totally transcend the

world. **Consider that it is an ordinary matter following the evolution principle.** This involves not only the physical aspect but the spiritual one as well. If a person is not so ignorant, he or she would see that the physical and spiritual sides cannot be separated. If they are separable, then the associated entity cannot work. It's like having a broken leg or a blind eye. The mind without a body is comparable to a person with good eyesight and a broken leg; the body without spirit is comparable to one with good legs but without eyesight.

Dhammically, each individual is called by the term *nāmarupa* [name and form, or mentality and corporality], which does not mean two separate things but a combined one. If one succeeds in separating it, both the *nāma* and the *rupa* parts would not remain. For both to stay, they must co-exist as one unit; and this is what makes an individual. Therefore, neither purely material evolution nor purely spiritual one is possible, **because the body and the mind actually co-exist, go together, and always unite.** Evolution takes on the combined body and mind. Now which way will the body-mind evolve? To say it bluntly, or to use common people's words, it has to evolve to a higher or more advanced level. In the dhammic sense, however, the evolution is seen to approach an end or extinction.

**Evolution of whatever kind would ultimately reach an end or extinction.** As for the word "progress," dhammic people hardly consider it as important. It is a worldly matter, that of defilements. Worldly people want progress without seeing it as a kind of suffering. The highest result is actually an end, a stoppage, or an extinction of further progress. That point is what is called "**nibbāna,**" **which can occur to the body or the mind. The whole entity comes to a halt. That's where evolution ends.**



About happiness and unhappiness on a higher dhammic level, progress is not considered as synonymous with happiness, but as a kind of suffering. However, an end or a stoppage, without any more progress, is considered coolness or happiness. If our mind is still yearning for progress, struggling for it, or hungry for it, and is still unsettled, then it could not have coolness. If we want coolness here and now, we have to stop yearning for progress, stop being fanatic about progress, and stop what would torture us while we are still able to carry on our various functions in line of duty. Even being in this situation, we are not dead, but still live with proper sustenance. This is the meaning of **nibbāna here and now**.

If you want to reach nibbāna after death, then you will die again and again for a hundred or thousand times. That's too much of a fantasy. It is all right if you want to follow such a principle because you have to perform just the same duty to stop going in a circle. Therefore, husband and wife may be partners in ideology or in a study to stop all the silly matters and then to live a peaceful life together, because a married life can also be peaceful. The ideal evolution should be like this. You should not consider that to get married is just to indulge in such worldly pleasure as that from eating, sensuality, and fame. Common people know only how to enjoy eating, sensuality, and fame in the married life. This is rather a common layman's matter or a child's romantic perception, not an ideal in Buddhism.

**So take the principle that in Buddhism everything must go to nibbāna, the kind that occurs here and now or the other kind that occurs after a thousand cycles of death and rebirth, depending on whichever you perceive or like. The latter kind of nibbāna would probably lead to**

fantasy or nonsense in the end because the time is too long and the people may give up hope or lose self-confidence. But the here-and-now kind of nibbāna is certain and can be pursued more fruitfully and more hopefully because we can expect or see the result every time we follow the path to it.

**If we all think this way, do this way, and have a family principle like this, we will have coolness — temporarily, much, or little — depending on the degree of achievement.** With this kind of preaching, I am accused of being mad or abnormal, or whatever they can come up with. But I have to say it so, not something else, because I want to point out the issue most people overlook. And to get married just for indulgence in eating, sensuality, and fame is not enough for Buddhists. Householders should get the most they can possibly get. So I point out to them the ideal of the Six Disas as I did in the previous lecture.

For me myself and the audience to scuffle in a quarrel is unnecessary. Please take my suggestion and think it over. If you like it, just have it as a practical guideline. But if you don't like it, you and I don't have to get into a quarrel. You can say that I told you about how to do the best and get the most benefit. If you take the principle I suggested, you will not necessarily lose any other benefit. To follow the principle that getting married is for going to nibbāna will not make you lose your balance, benefit, or any other advantage. This is because you have to perform your duty just the same. You only make it a lesson for going to nibbāna. Think about getting a wife as having a lesson for going to nibbāna. And so is getting a husband, a child, or wealth. Don't get stuck to this world here. This is a real progress or evolution, and a dhammic advancement too, but not a materialistic one.

A Christian teaching, which I once told you, also goes so far as what I am talking about, but people do not heed it.

Neither do the Christian people themselves. A chapter of the Corinthians [in the New Testament] has a statement which goes like this: **Have a wife as if you do not have any; have possessions as though you do not have any.** Try to think about it, and you will see that the statement does not suggest you to get obsessed with your spouse or possessions. The idea for you to have a wife as if you don't have any means that you neither grasp at nor cling to indulgence in eating, sensuality, and fame, so that your mind is not subject to stress. Likewise, a wife should have a husband as if she does not have any. Everyone should have wealth as if they do not have any, and have children and grandchildren as if they do not have any.

Now a fool who hears this may interpret the meaning in a harmful way and may proceed to abandon or kill his wife. This is the way of a fool, who knows only material matters. However, an intelligent person has to look deep into spiritual matters, while realizing that his or her mind would not be subject to stress due to children or spouse. With this concept, how can we not consider it as worthwhile for householders to know and practice? In fact, it is what householders should know and practice on a high level, so that they would not waste their life as humans and Buddhists – not as just plain humans, but as humans who meet Buddhism. Because of their association with Buddhism, they would be filled with high-level ideals.

So please listen attentively to such a concept, such a way, and such a direction, and you would get the best thing a human could get, even when you are householders. This is a reason why I ask you to see all aspects of evolution, a layman life included, as destined to nibbāna. Your households should be those that would get you to nibbāna;

otherwise they would take you to hell. Wherever we are, we should strive to get to nibbāna. For householders, who may be in a cluttered and distant place, they should struggle to come out into an open space and approach the destination. Look at a layman's life in the widest scope and at the highest level like this, and everything will turn out for the expected result.

But if we see things just for indulgence in eating, sensuality, and fame, then we would go to hell or become animals. Animals also enjoy eating, sensuality, and fame. A cock, for example, raises its head and tail to show its arrogance about how popular it is. So we can see that indulgence in eating, sensuality, and fame is not the only things in the life of a human who meets Buddhism. His life should include other problems that cause unhappiness. He should put the matter of eating, sensuality, and fame under his feet. But people nowadays put this matter on top of their heads, which is the other way around. Those who do the former would stay high whereas those who do the latter would always stay low.

Try to look among people in general to see who stays low and who stays high. Also see whether our parents and earlier forebears stayed low or high. Now for us who are like new buds, in what direction are we heading, downwards or upwards? If we decide to go upwards, in keeping with our being *manussas*, namely, those who have a high spiritual level, or with our meeting Buddhism, then we have to think much. Don't be too lazy, and don't feel too tired, to think about it. I urge you to think far, wide, and high, so that you will have a good path for the best benefits.

Generally, layman practices are for non-monastics and are considered base matters. Even though the Buddha said in the *sutta* about common laymen, layman practices,

and the common results of such practices, it is not necessarily limited to just these. Keep in mind that whatever the Buddha said or taught is meant for us to liberate ourselves from suffering, or to get deliverance. Even the religious life of laymen is meant for deliverance or liberation from suffering; whatever kind of religious life has to aim at deliverance.

Practices that laymen have to do to the best of their ability, which are called "religious life of laymen," have to be followed for the best result, that is, deliverance in one sense or another. But on the whole, this means liberation from suffering or staying beyond suffering. Please don't forget what I repeat so often that some of you might have been annoyed: *sotāpannas* [holy ones on the first stage], *sakadāgāmīs* [holy ones on the second stage], and *anāgāmīs* [holy ones on the third stage] can also exist in households, not just in forests or monasteries. According to what was said back there in the Scriptures, *sotāpannas* and *sakadāgāmīs* in particular still associate with matters of eating, sensuality, and fame like householders in general. A difference is that the former two live a higher spiritual life than does the latter. Therefore, a married life of a household *sotāpanna* and a *sakadāgāmī* is different from that of a common layman who is thick with defilements. The *anāgāmī* can also keep a family, but they do it without suffering because they can transcend all worldly matters.

Take a wide view, then, so that the term "householder" can cover all of the associated meanings. Holy ones can exist in households, but can we call them householders? The Pali words *gahatṭha* and *gihi* for "householder" and "layman" can have a broad meaning. Those who have to stay in a household or have to associate with a household can be

called a householder or a layman. General householders may look similar externally, but they may differ internally in the spiritual aspect. Although *sotāpannas*, *sakadāgāmīs*, and *anāgāmīs* can be family-keeping householders, they have a higher spiritual level than do common laymen. So if we aim at the spiritual height in this sense, then we can neither be accused of being arrogant nor be blamed for hoping beyond possibility. Don't see it like others do. Householders have to always rely on the principle that they should get what is best for humans. Even when they hope for nibbāna, they are neither considered overzealous nor called by any abusive word.

So we have to consider lay practice in the manner like this. If we were to talk only about what is present in the *Navakovāda* [a well-known Thai textbook for newly ordained monks], then I don't have anything to say, for you can read from it yourselves. Each of you all have a copy of the book, so just read from it and see how to treat your parents, children and wife, and others in accordance with the associated *disas*. However, there are some other meanings hidden between the lines, without any describing words. You have to take a good look at them too.

As we dig deep into the hidden meanings like this, we unavoidably follow the path of philosophy. This is not a nonsensical philosophy, because one that is necessary for religious practice like this is not absurd. But one that is endlessly argued and goes farther away from the goal, or away from the practice toward the goal, is actually absurd. Nowadays the word "philosophy" has a connotation of rambling; it causes a lot of trouble because people use it in a new meaning that is different from the literal one used in the ancient times.

According to its literal meaning, philosophy is synonymous with wisdom, that is, knowing what should be known, which does not cause any trouble. Nowadays philosophy means wisdom to know unlimitedly and to show off endlessly. Trouble arises because people think endlessly like a fanatic. But the proper meaning of wisdom has to be limited, compact, and should point straight to practice to end suffering here and now. However, a more global meaning of philosophy is looking from the perspective of an intelligent person. So, to look at a householder's life in the way done by an intelligent person is to look at it philosophically, based on the ultimate ideal, namely, nibbāna. When we say that one has a spouse as a companion for the journey toward nibbāna, we can be considered as talking philosophy, the kind that leads to necessary practice. As the matters combine into practice, they become a religious issue, not a philosophical one, but try to look at them as a philosopher does.

To exemplify, I would like to refer to a very important word, namely, *saraṇa* or refuge, which is necessary and is wanted by everyone. Now the matter concerning the Six Disas is about a refuge or making a refuge, otherwise you don't have to venerate the *disas*. When we salute the six directions, we pay homage to them. Why do we do so? We do so because they are a refuge. Before meeting with the Buddha, the ignorant young man, Siṅgāla, saluted the various *disas* as he had been tutored to do by his ancestors. He did this for a refuge and his survival. But after he had met with the Buddha and had been taught to venerate the six *disas* in a new manner, so that the *disas* could be his refuge, he followed what the Buddha taught and thereby promoting the refuge to a higher level.

So the six *disas* mean what can be our refuge if we treat them right. To salute them by a *wai* does not only

mean that you place your hands palm to palm and raise them toward your face but also mean that you treat them right. And why do we use the word *wai*? It's because we pay complete attention to them, care for them, want to know about them, and sacrifice ourselves to know them fully. This is respect we pay to them. Just as we do it to our teachers, we show our respect not only by a physical or bodily *wai* but also by the best attention and care.

The Pali word *gāraṇa*, which means the same as the English word 'respect,' has an idealistic or profound meaning of complete attention: we pay complete attention to those persons or things that we respect. Respect is shown physically by a *wai*, bowing of the body, or prostration, or whatever is proper. See for yourselves which way of showing respect would be more beneficial. The same applies in the case of paying respect to the *disas*. You can do it in a conventional way by performing the *wai* to all the directions around you, the upward direction and the downward direction. In a better sense, however, you can perform it by paying complete attention to the east, west, and other *disas*. This is in accord with what we are discussing, that is, just making our own refuge.

The front *disa*, which represents the parents, can be an ultimate refuge if we treat it right. When we were born, we were helpless; and our parents were all the refuge we had until we reach boyhood and adolescence. They were our refuge for education, protection, and supervision, thereby becoming our front *disa*.

For the back *disa*, that is, children and wife, don't look at them with contempt, for they can also be a refuge — a backward one. They are a man's supporters who help push him forward. I would like to say this even though I



don't have a wife. Those of you who have one can take your wife for encouragement. You probably do many things for your wife more than you do for others. If your wife inspires you to work hard, then she is your mental refuge, pushing you from behind. Therefore, those of you monks who are returning to laity and planning to get married should be mindful of this: you unavoidably need support from your wife.

For the right *disa*, or teachers, how it can be a refuge almost needs no explanation now. They are our spiritual and intellectual refuge whereas our parents are our life-giving, physical refuge. Even if they are our teachers for worldly matters, they are considered our spiritual refuge on the worldly level.

For the left *disa*, namely, friends and relatives, they are our social refuge. We have friends and relatives for socializing or for living and succeeding in the society. The reason why they are our social refuge is that, when we need help in our task or business, they can provide us with it; and we can finish a difficult task in a short time.

The upward *disa*—monastics—is our spiritual refuge on the highest level.

The downward *disa*—those under our rule, namely, servants—is also a refuge, as a source of labor. A brain without labor cannot achieve much. Troublesome ideologies in the present world are concerned with labor. Capitalism depends on labor from laborers, who do not want capitalists to take advantage of them. World crises arise from issues like this, for capitalists do not respect laborers, let alone considering them as a refuge. If a capitalist is a real Buddhist, he would respect and care for laborers; and no troubles

commonly encountered nowadays would occur. Due to mistreatment of the downward *disa*, the world is in turmoil, which is absolutely not trivial.

So take the word 'refuge' for careful consideration and use it in a correct and beneficial way. Then there will be no problem. Everything around us can be a refuge in one way or another. For example, our house has a roof; the roof is a refuge because it protects us from rain. If we stay outside the roof, trees can be our refuge because they can somewhat protect us from rain.

Intelligent people know that everything is helpful to everything else, and both are refuges for one another, or else the world would not survive. If, for instance, the world is without termites, ants or insects, it would not remain as it is now. Termites help dispose of fallen leaves; bacteria help get rid of some substances that can be troublesome. So termites and bacteria are also refuges for the world because they work and help us for our survival. Since life forms as low as these are beneficial and can be considered our refuges, then it's unnecessary to talk about other things more beneficial.

So we should eliminate our ignorance about this and get rid of the arrogance that we can live alone in this world. We should have a sound understanding that each of us alone cannot survive; we have to cooperate with other people in all directions, the most important of which are those closest to us —the six *disas*. Everything far from us can also be considered as included in the six *disas*. Those who rank below us are in the downward *disa*; those who rank above us are in the upward *disa*; other are around us. If we behave ourselves so that our environment is helpful in all directions, then won't that be wonderful?

Knowledge about the six *disas* is for a purpose: we can be in an environment that is helpful all around. So let's treat all the *disas* well so that we achieve this purpose. From a single word just mentioned—refuge—you can see that everything we rightly get involve with can be a refuge, more or less in proportion to its characteristics. We have to treat all the *disas* as I have said, and with a purpose as described.

Now I will discuss each of the *disas* again, but on a modest level and without considering the ultimate ideal of nibbāna, for it is understood. I will also talk about right and proper practice, which will lead us to nibbāna just the same. First, we should know the position of parents in relation to children. The overly high ideal that to have a child is for him to reach nibbāna may seem remote and may need no immediate implementation. But let's practice as I have said before, namely, treat our parents as those persons who gave us life. Without their giving, we would not have had life, nor could we appear in this world.

Therefore, we should submit our body and life to our parents, considering that they are life givers. Don't do anything that will upset them. Instead, honor their wishes as having the top priority. If there is a conflict, let our parents win. Some children may protest that, if they always follow their parents' wishes, they would have no chance, for example, to go abroad or study abroad and improve their status. This is a childish perception without any ideal as we have talked about. A way to compromise is to hold a bargain. Parents themselves usually want their children to have the best possible opportunity, without any limit. For instance, some of them who are poor mortgage their lands to send their children to study in Bangkok. Think about what

parents hope for. For only some exceptional cases that are really unable to settle does the conflict occur.

If there is disagreement, we should yield to the parents, letting them be household *brāhmas* or *arahats* in response to their giving life to us. Even if in our whole life we could not enjoy ourselves abroad and have to farm the land here, we should be able to do it. I myself chose to stay on this side of yielding to the parents' wishes.

I would like to take myself as an example. Please don't see this as personal. If I did not honor my mother's wish, I would not have been ordained, nor would I see you all here in this situation. When I was a youth, I didn't want to get ordained. I did not see ordination as important; neither did I know how the monastic life can be helpful. But since it was my mother's wish, I had to abide by it.

So abiding our parents' wishes would not be so bad or sinful after all. There is no chance for this to be bad or sinful; rather, it would lead to good or virtuous things in a dhammic way. At least we could be considered as those who respect parents, even though we could neither go abroad nor get promotion or fame. Respecting parents is a difficult but noblest thing to do. Therefore, let's know our parents as the household *brāhmas* and *arahats*, life givers, and those whom Mother Nature creates to bear children for the journey toward nibbāna or an ever higher spiritual level.

I hope that those of you who are returning to laity would love your parents and respect them more than before. If you would honor your parents' wishes more than you did before you got ordained, then you get the merit of ordination and know how to venerate the associated *disa*. It is said in the *Navagovāda* that parents are the front *disa*. We have to

realize that, since our parents have looked after us, we have a duty to look after them in return, carry on their work, maintain their lineage, behave befittingly as an heir, and dedicate merits to them after they have passed away. This duty is assigned to small children; and this would have been realized by the boy Siṅgāla when he was told of it by the Buddha. This is proper for children; and it's enough for them to have a general principle like this to live in this world.

**To look after the parents in return:** You have to have a good understanding of this. It does not mean just that you give them food and drink, or let them have a share of you salary, but you have to take care of their mental welfare too.

**To carry on their work:** You have to know what your parents want. If they are on a high spiritual level and want something, then that thing is what you have to carry on. The word 'work' here does not only mean duty or business but also means taste. Whatever our parents want must be abided by just like a decree which you cannot avoid. But you may bargain with them, for both parties have enough intelligence to talk to each other. They would have nothing against your wishes; and you should have nothing against theirs.

**To behave befittingly as an heir:** This has a broad meaning, but on the whole it means that you must be a good person. Think for yourselves what is meant by 'good.' You must consider that your inheritance is a sacred thing because it is a result of your parents' toil. If you spend it on drinking liquor or women, then you would go to the deepest hell. For example, those children who, while studying in Bangkok, waste up their tuition money, would surely go to one deep hell or another because the money is

from their parents' sweating labor. Spending money like this, the children are unworthy as heirs to their parents.

Finally, for children's dedication of merits to their parents, this is a tradition of people who believe in life after death. It means for children to show all their gratitude, respect, and veneration even after their parents have passed away. There is a small picture in our Spiritual Theater showing a boy who embraces his mother's tombstone every time there is a thunderbolt or a thunderclap. He does that as though his mother were still alive, because he is always grateful to her. The Thai and Chinese tradition of merit dedication to the dead is in keeping with this principle. We have to show our gratitude both physically and spiritually, with all of our capability, to match our parents' benevolence.

Don't forget that the Pali word for parents is *mātāpitu*, and the corresponding Sanskrit word is *mātrupitru*, with the word for mother (*mātā* and *mātru*) coming before that for father (*pitu* and *pitru*). Whatever reason for this you must think about for yourselves. I myself assume that they want us to think of our mothers first, for, if we look from a child's standpoint, a mother cries more easily than a father. Or we may see that, when a child is born, the mother has to labor, take pain, and suffer more than the father does. So we should think about our mothers first. Or, whatever standpoint you may look from, just take them as venerable persons. Here we consider them as a *disa* to pay homage to, with the mother coming before the father in accordance with the the Indian word used for them traditionally.

I would like to support the words in the Pali Canon that **parents are life givers, those who create a child's flesh and blood**. Therefore, what we are worth is a result from our parents' giving. Don't take the fool's view that our

parents gave us our lives in no meritorious manner and, as a common rule, their doing so cannot be counted as wonder. A fool considers that parents have personal fun which results in babies coming into life. We will not take this view even though some married couples may do as such. Our parents are not like such couples; they created our lives with the hope that we would be a source of gratification. A child is a pleasure for the parents.

Now we have to consider our parents as the greatest creditors, ones who are the first and foremost among all creditors. We are life-debtors to them because they gave us our lives and could have sacrificed theirs for us if situation or opportunity required it. A Pali scripture says that *mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyasā ekaputtamanurakkhe*, which means that a mother realizes in her heart that she may have to save her child's life with her own—to sacrifice her own life for the child's. You will see that a female dog or a hen would fight an enemy without thinking about its own life so that it could save its young ones. Human mothers do better than the animals. So we have to consider our parents as our life-creditors, the greatest, the first and foremost of all.

We have to commit ourselves to our parents as their completely submissive debtors, so that we could satisfy their wishes. Then how can't we put them in the front *disa*? Who else should we put there? The Buddha was right in saying that we have to put our parents in front. If you leave monkhood, get married, put your parents behind you, and instead put your wife in front, then you might as well become a rebel. In the past, books were written to teach the moral value that parents are like body limbs whereas spouse and children are something else, which can be found any time, outside the body. Parents are like an integral part of

the body; they cannot be simply discarded. Since we consider our parents as more important than our children and spouse, we put them in front.

As we have put our parents in front of us, we simply have to follow them. The words 'to follow' here means not only to blindly do what they do or ask of us to do, but also to do better than they do. For example, if our parents are farmers, we may follow them by also being farmers, but we can be better ones than they are. Or if they are government officials, we may follow them by taking a public service position but later on becoming an official who is ranked higher than they are. We have a duty to follow their wishes while at the same time trying to do better than they expect.

In the past, farmers plowed the field by using water-buffaloes. Nowadays, we who are farmers' sons can do better by plowing it with a tractor. This is also how to follow our parents. Or you can take other examples. Factors for sustenance of life are diverse. Our parents hope for us to find a way to make a living. Whatever we can do better than they do should be carried out to improve ourselves over them. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid being their debtors.

Another Pali scripture says that there are three kinds of children: those who are lesser than their parents, those equal to their parents, and those better than their parents. To be lesser than the parents does not mean that the children are bad or do something damaging, but it means that they can do less than their parents can. To be equal to the parents means that the children are as good as their parents are. And to be better means that the children can improve the family status over what the parents have done. The meanings are just these. But there is a Buddha's proverb that, **among the three kinds of children, those who obey their parents**



**are the best.** This means that, among all kinds of children, those who can progress much are the ones who obey their parents. Therefore, those who would be better than their parents have to obey them. So are those equal to and those lesser than their parents. The Buddha specifies that obeying children are the best of all. They are none other than those who rightly pay homage to the front *disa*, who respect their parents with all their heart and mind.

So this is all about parents as the front *disa*. You should collect all of the meanings about them from my lecture. You should know how the front *disa* is put in front of you and how important it is to get into that direction.

The meaning of parents as the first teachers must not be confused with teachers on the right *disa*. But if we distribute the importance of parents among many *disas*, they can also be in all of them: our friends, our teachers, or whatever in their capability. As their main benevolence, they are life creators; then they become children's first teachers. Look at offsprings of animals, whether they are chickens, puppies, piglets, calves, or something else, their mothers become their first teachers. The same is true for human children, who are nurtured by their mothers. 'When we were born, each of us was nursed by our mother's milk, stayed with her, asked from her whatever we wanted, and saw what she acted out. Therefore, our character is like hers than others'. This means that parents are their children's first teachers, with a mother coming before a father. And apart from giving our physical lives, our parents give our spiritual lives too. We get the two aspects of lives, physical and spiritual, from our parents. Our mothers started instilling in us spiritual knowledge from the first day we were born, when our physical lives came into being in their lineage. Since our parents are our first teachers as described, we venerate

them as the front *disa*.

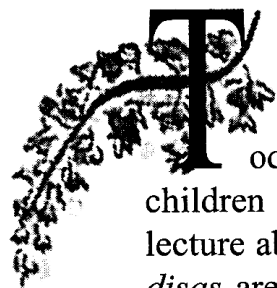
That parents are their children's *brāhmas* means in general parental love and loving kindness. Nobody else would love us more than our parents. So they are our *brāmas*. The word *brāhma* can mean as far as one who is holy or supreme.

In Buddhism, parents are thought of highly as ones deserving veneration from their children, ones with a position similar to that of *arahats*. So parents are considered their children's household *arahats*. And, as Buddhists, the children have to treat them like they really are *brāhmas* or *arahats*. The guideline about veneration of parents as described in the *Navakovāda* is extremely easy to implement.

Thus I hope that we would have an ideal about paying homage to our parents as the front *disa* in a manner like this. With this concept in mind, those of you who are leaving the monkhood would love, adore, and sacrifice for your parents more than you have ever done before; and this means that your ordination and your return to laity as *pundits* will not be wasteful.

Our time is up now.

**PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR TREATMENT  
OF CHILDREN AND WIFE, TEACHERS,  
AND RELATIVES AND FRIENDS AS THE BACK,  
RIGHT, AND LEFT DISAS**



Today I shall talk about the back *disa*, namely, children and wife, in continuation of the previous lecture about the front *disa*, that is, parents; the two *disas* are counterparts of each other. I would begin by reminding you of what we always take as a general principle: we humans were born to reach nibbāna. All human beings, whatever situation or condition they are in, have to intend to go to nibbāna, which is the ultimate end for all of whatever we will be. At least mentally, we should end the perception of what we are. Then there will be no more problems, and we would get an idea that everything goes the way it should go. This means that we look at life as not so bad or ugly, discarding any pessimistic view of it. At the same time, we do not take an optimistic view that life is so enchanting or fascinating that we indulge in bodily pleasure. Actually we should see life as a journey. If we have a good journey, it is heartening; but if we have a bad one, it is stressful. And that is all about it.

Now look at ourselves as the center encircled by various things — those we classify into *disas* — which will

accompany us in our journey. For householders, none can make a journey alone. They should not think of themselves as being sinful in taking with them bunches of others. For monks or monastics, the purpose is not to go in a bunch, but to go alone for convenience. But if situation requires that a monastic be accompanied by others, he should not think of himself as unlucky or sinful, but should rather take it as an opportunity to show his ability. If anyone wants to travel alone, he is entitled to do so. He may consider himself lucky, rather than sinful or pessimistic as most people—particularly Westerners—think he is.

Some people compare Buddhism to the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer. I am against this. I think that nature, in essence, is neither good nor bad; it depends on our handling of it. If we make it good or bad, we will have trouble; it's better to let it go its own way. We should make use of whatever aspect of it that is beneficial. We should live a useful life, taking it as a journey. Why some people classify a condition to be such and such or classify an idea as either meritorious or unmeritorious, good or bad, auspicious or inauspicious is because they want to do so and act out their feeling in a conventional way. If they do not want it their way, it cannot be good or bad. And if different people want it in different ways, then some may see it as good but others may see it as bad. Therefore, we should consider that nature itself is neither good nor bad; it offers people an opportunity to improve it in the way they want. A fool will do it one way; an intelligent one will do it another way. So knowing nature in its genuine essence is what is really good or meritorious.

This is why I have kept prodding everyone to see everything in its profound aspects, not just in its conventionality or definition. If we fail to do this, we can be

prisoned spiritually, thus losing our freedom of the mind; and that will be an act of ignorance. Therefore, we have to look at things freely and choose to transcend them, that is, stay beyond all sufferings that they cause. And this is a reason why we also have to consider our environments—including such a romantic one as our family affair—in a profound or supramundane aspect.

As children and wife, the back *disa*, are the counterpart of the front *disa*, we can consider the first in comparison with the second. The words "front" and "back" have many meanings. In the Thai language, which has many grammatical exceptions, the two sometimes mean the same thing: the front meaning the future, and the back meaning later on, for example. But here the word "front" means what is in front of us, what we see first, look at first, handle first, and think about first as having the top priority. The back is seen in the opposite direction to the front, but it requires about the same effort to treat it in accord with its being in the backward direction.

If we look at the back *disa* at a low level, that is, without thinking carefully, we may see that most people do not view it as in the back. On the contrary, they may see children and wife as in the front, prioritized near the top. If one falls for them under defilements, they can become the top priority. So you must be careful, or else you may become progressively foolish and make a mistake.

On a higher level, children and wife are not a cause of delusion but, as I once told you, give moral support to the father or husband so that he would do his best in his contributive duty or work. This is the level of common people, who can see no farther or can understand it like this because of some reason. Without children and wife giving support, these people seem not to work to their full capability.

From this standpoint we can clearly see that, although they are in the back, children and wife are a force that pushes the father or husband from behind, not a retarding load which pull him backward instead. If one is encouraged by his children and his wife, who push him forward, he should consider them better than a tagging load or a burden that restricts his hands and feet.

Now let's consider how far children and wife can push forward. A father or a husband should hope that they would push him to the ultimate destination for humanity, not so near as just to indulge in eating, sensuality, and fame, which are worldly matters for those deluded by bodily pleasure. This is why I suggest everyone to look forward to nibbāna. If we can do something to make people understand this ideal, that everyone is born to go to nibbāna, then having children and wife will not be a burden.

As I was told and have clearly seen, or at least heard of vaguely, the Thai culture in the past had a tradition of mentioning nibbāna very often. In households, Thai people would talk about nibbāna, telling their younger members of the family to always set their mind to their work in order to accumulate merits to reach nibbāna. Children would often hear the mentioning of nibbāna. I myself, when I was very young, heard the elderly people say very often about accumulating merits for nibbāna — which seemed to become their verbal culture. This means that we should promote nibbāna as everybody's destination. Children who would hear of this, although they do not understand what is meant by nibbāna, would try to find out about it later. This is very important because it would eliminate various problems and sufferings.

As we see, nowadays there is a family problem that parents do not have enough money for their children to

have good education; and parents are under distress constantly. This is misfortune caused by nothing other than wrong understanding. If we accept the cultural heritage of trying to get to nibbāna, there will be no problems for parents in finding enough money to send their children to study abroad. The distressful problem arises because parents do not know the destination for mankind. If parents have right information about this matter, there will be no distressful problems. They would be able to find enough money or whatever they want; their children would have good education; and they would not suffer.

But sometimes there is difference in opinion. For example, the father wants his children to progress dhammically or spiritually toward nibbāna whereas the mother does not agree with him and does not accept anything about his idea. Therefore, there is often difficulty, suffering, and headache. The father's idea or intention that tends toward nibbāna will not cause much difficulty. This is because poor people, however poor they are, can do it; and so do medium-income people and rich people. But if one thinks only about worldly fame and honor, it has to do with money or something like that, which would tend toward wrong view, corruption, or bad conduct. So one should carefully consider the matter about children and wife.

If it happens that both husband and wife have the same view about life, they would live very harmoniously, leading a peaceful life similar to that in the old days, progressing in a righteous way, and having no foolish ambition. Everything would be sufficient. Children's intelligence would be sufficient to reach nibbāna even though it may not be enough for them to get well-versed in worldly matters. Livelihood and wealth would be sufficient for them. Everything would not be retarding.

binding, burning, or goring. It's good like this and leads to progress because there is no way for one to have a sin or demerit.

So you have to consider children and wife in a way that would not cause distress or burden, but see them as companions for the journey toward nibbāna. The wife would take half of the load during the journey, leaving only a half, which is less than the whole, to the husband. Children are backups for parents who cannot reach nibbāna in this life. They would be heirs to the journey so that mankind would evolve to nibbāna as the ultimate destination. An example is the Buddha, who made it to nibbāna and revealed the path toward it so that people would get the best possible thing they could get. Many of them understand this and decide to live their lives always for the journey toward nibbāna. Even though they have not reached it yet, they have some of its coolness, which is opposite to the worldly heat; and this, in itself, is one of the best things for mankind.

So a family life should not conflict with this ideal. Although being a householder may make the journey toward nibbāna rather slow, it's also good and shows one's great capability. If you look at it from this standpoint and practice it with this concept in mind, your children and wife would not be a burden like a ship's barge but would be a support and backup. Parents are like a ship. When it goes down under water, the barge—that is, children—can take over. The meaning of children should be like this, not just lumps of something created by parents. Nor should children be just like a fruit of a tree. Nevertheless, children are biological heirs to their parents in the same way as fruits are to the associated trees. Parents hand down biological heritage to children, but they should give them spiritual heritage too. It's proper to do so because humans are spiritually higher than



plants and animals.

The word 'children' does not strictly mean biological offsprings. Those who are not directly born from a pair of parents may also be called children. Biological children are physical or bodily offsprings, but there should be those children who are born spiritually, or in the spiritual sense, from the parents' soul. Actually we readily have other kinds of "children," for example, the Thai term *luk jang* [employee-child] means a person whom we hire to take our order. There are many other Thai terms containing the word *luk*, which means a child, such as *luk khu* [associate-children], *luk samun* [underling-child], and *luk sit* [pupil-child]. All of them are those who would respond to our demand and purpose for continuation of duty. A monastic can also have *luk sit* for "children" and have a duty that is even broader than that of a lay parent.

If a monastic have a hundred *luk sit* for children, he has to treat them just as a parent does to his or her offsprings, but it is more of a spiritual matter than of a worldly one. Why does the Thai language use the word *luk* [child or children] in combination with other words? I see this as a good sign, for the word would remind those who have a subordinate to look at the other party with so much care as to consider it their own child. For example, if you have an employee and love him or her as your own child, there will be no problems. But, as it is evident nowadays, people do not love their employees like that, so there are dangerous problems.

Pupils are usually not children physically or biologically born to their teacher; rather, they are their teacher's spiritual children. So the teacher has a duty like that of a biological parent. For instance, the Buddha is called the *Buddha-pitā* [Father of the Buddhists] because He is a

spiritual father to us. Teachers are sometimes called "fathers" because they spiritually are so. In Northern Thailand, some people are called *pho liang* or "caring fathers" because they are spiritual fathers to others. A real *pho liang* has love and kindness for those whom he associates with. But a false one takes advantage of others; he should not be taken as a model.

That's the matter about children and the spiritual meaning associated with it: they deserve love, loving kindness, and right guidance for the ultimate destination so that they also become spiritual children. I talk about everything as connected to nibbāna so much that some people accuse me of being a nibbāna zealot. Physical or bodily matters have little substance; they are just a shell of the more important inner core.

For householders to have this back *disa* as a pleasant and meritorious thing, they have to look at it in the way I have said, not in an unpleasant way as being felt by most people. We may say that even poor parents such as laboring peasants still have an opportunity or ability to look at everything in this sense our ancestors have seen. Those people of the old days were not unhappy. They had children who followed their footsteps — like father, like son. For example, if a father was a rice farmer, his son would also be one and would be happy to see the father plow the field. There are no problems that would cause them spiritual distress because sons always followed fathers. This opened up a great chance for them so much that even the illiterate could also go to nibbāna.

In the ancient India, many of those who attained *arahatship* [final emancipation] were illiterate. At present, people have much education and receive an endless series of diplomas, but they have foolish, distressful problems.

They do not want to extinguish suffering but decide to follow temptation leading to indulgence in food, sensuality, and fame. They turn a deaf ear to the fact that even illiterate people can go to nibbāna. We can imagine that people today are madly in turmoil, running full speed in a direction nobody knows.

Close your eyes and imagine it, then you would see that people nowadays are running full speed, stumbling and getting up again along the way, in an unknown direction. It appears that they tend toward a more distressful way. The present world is going deep into turmoil and distress because people are madly running without knowing the direction. They neither take precaution nor keep their cool even though they are well educated and knowledgeable in many things -- including how to get to the moon. However, there is no improvement for the peace of their mind; they cannot rival the illiterate of the old days.

So don't worry much about your children having insufficient money to go abroad or the like. Instead, try to assure them as early as you can that human beings are born to get to nibbāna and should do their best to achieve this. Whatever one does—making a living, having a family, or attaining eminence—must not conflict with going to nibbāna. Even if you could not get those worldly achievements, you can still go to nibbāna. Don't be afraid that in your life you would not get the best possible thing for mankind. Nowadays you may get as much as you want, but consider this as a show of your capability or an exercise for it.

If you want to have 10 million dollars or a yard long of academic degrees, so do it; but let it be an exercise or a drill for your capability and a journey toward nibbāna. What you get from your 10 million dollars or a long tail of academic degrees is actually garbage or weed. Whatever

material wealth you get is garbage; the real good thing is attaining nibbāna. Those who understand this are not deluded. They use what they get as a tool for self-training, starting from their early age, when they are good at learning, get good grades from examinations, and can get whatever they wish for. But as they get more and more, they know that all they get are garbage, nothing to be grasped at or held on to as one's self or one's possession. This can make them immediately attain nibbāna. What they get is not a hindrance; it's rather a supporting factor. However, it's quite difficult to do things moderately.

So don't hope so much beyond what is proper. Knowledge, honor, and fame are things we should not hope for so much that they make us lie sleepless. Do your job right, and they will readily come to you rightly and properly in a proper amount. Then all will be well. Keep in mind the Buddhistic principle of moderation, for we should not overdo anything.

Those who would extinguish their suffering have to have a moderate amount of work or duty. They have to follow the Middle Path, doing things just right, neither too little nor too much. Littleness or muchness here cannot be measured by any measuring instrument people use. A very intelligent person can do a lot. I once told you that a wise person can run a hundred rice mills at the same time without feeling a burden; an unwise one cannot run even half of a rice mill. To do things moderately means to do them in accord with one's mental ability and intelligence. So different persons can do different amounts of work; one can run ten or one hundred mills whereas another can run only a half of a mill. Doing things moderately in accord with one's intelligence is convenient for the doer. However, doing less

is less burdensome, more comfortable, and more convenient. So do things in an amount just necessary for them.

We should also be moderate consumers, for moderation is a Buddhist principle. One should seek wealth moderately, without fearing that he or she would starve to death or could not sustain himself or herself as a good human being. If a man's children and his wife understand this, his family would be happy; they would attain a level of nibbāna. Without this understanding, they would suffer one or another form of distress, getting stuck in the terrible *samsāra* [process of birth and death].

So let's understand the back *disa* — children and wife — at various levels of meaning, starting from the most foolish, progressing to wiser ones, and ending up at the wisest. Then there will be no problems because the *disa* is brightly illuminated and clearly seen. The Pali scripture uses the expression, "This *disa* appears brightly illuminated to me," for a person who rightly understands and properly treats the *disa*. If the *disa* appears dim to someone, it means that he or she does not adequately understand it. These are the meanings for an illuminated *disa* and a dim one.

Literally, the Pali word *disa* means bright illumination, but one's ignorance makes it appear dim to him or her. The front *disa* — parents — is brightly illuminating as I have said. So is the back *disa*.

Now we come to the next *disa*, the right *disa*, which represents teachers and, for the present world, should include one's superiors and leaders. Employers should also be included in this *disa* because they are leaders in businesses or leaders in a part of employees' lives. What we mean here is those who are good superiors, good leaders, and good employers.

The Thai words for teachers and instructors mean somewhat differently from the original Pali words "guru" and "ācāriya." A good Pali or Sanskrit dictionary would describe "guru" as a spiritual guide and "ācāriya" as one who teaches his pupils how to behave in this world, and trains them for it. Another Pali word in this same category is "upajjhāya," which was used in the ancient India to mean an occupational teacher. A teacher for an occupation such as horse jockeying, elephant mahouting, and music was called an *upajjhāya* for that particular occupation. For monks in our religion, the word means one who teaches *sāṅgha* — monastic occupation — to others. The literal meaning of the word *upajjhāya* in modern Pali is one whom his associates have to constantly look at, so that they would know what he is doing and could rightly do after him. As an adopted word in the Thai language, the word has a very different meaning: a senior monk who ordains a lay person into a new monk. Actually this word originally means a teacher for any occupation, not just that for monkhood.

*Upajjhāya*, *guru*, and *ācāriya* have different meanings in the Pali language. After they have been adopted into the Thai language, their meanings changed; and this probably causes confusion. Now "guru" or *khru* in the Thai language means just a teaching employee, which is unextolling and foolish. Actually, a *guru* should be a spiritual guide as the word originally meant, an *ācāriya* should be a trainer for spiritual purpose, and an *upajjhāya* should be an occupational teacher for livelihood. On the whole, they are those who build a life foundation for their pupils so that the latter could earn a living and make progress. If we consider them as refuges, the three are their pupils' early mentors who help the latter start up and lead them to the stage when monastics, as higher-level spiritual leaders, come to take over the work. Now we are talking about the right *disa*, namely, householders'

teachers, so we see this *disa* as a representation of leaders or illuminators in the early life of the young.

If we have a superior, he or she is supposed to lead us in the said matter and in the said direction because he or she is more intelligent than we are. And if we have an employer, we are willing to follow him or her. Leaders of worldly matters exist in various categories. They are placed in the right *disa*, which, in the Pali language, is considered more important than the left one. This means that we have to take a better care of the right *disa* than we do to the left one. For example, in paying homage to someone or something, we turn our right side to that person or that thing, and may also walk around them in the clockwise direction.

If we are in front of a venerable person and want to leave the place, we are supposed to always turn our right side to him or her. This has resulted in a Buddhist tradition that one who sits on a side of a Buddha image should do so, such that his right side is on the Buddha image's side; and those who come to sit next to him have to do so on his left side consecutively. Doing this is proper in accordance with the tradition and importance of the word "right." Later on, this word becomes synonymous with "correct" and "righteous." An activity on the right side is a meritorious one, whereas that on the left side is the opposite of the former. This is because "right" is good and venerable. The well-known Pali term *dakkhiṇādāna* [dedicatory gift] contains the word *dakkhiṇā*, which means "right side," because the term itself means a good gift, which has to be offered with the right hand. So the right *disa* is important in accordance with the word "right" as described.

When we were born, our parents were our leaders and first teachers. They have been our teachers all their lives. On the other hand, school teachers, college instructors, and

monasterial teachers play their parts which parents cannot or have no chance to do. Therefore, we place teachers on our right side, and consider them to come next after the front *disa*. Respect for teachers is important and is generally accepted as something most benefiting. The elderly also deserve respect as do teachers.

Senior citizens were born before the younger generations. They have known and seen so much that they could be the latter's teachers. This is a reason why we have to consider them highly and show our respect for them just as we do to our parents and teachers. I have already told you that respect for the elders was a strict tradition of the Thai people in the old days. In those days, the young had to give a *wai*, showing respect, to every elder they saw— even those who were insane. This did not mean that we showed our respect to their insanity, but to their symbolism of long standing, having been born before us, and knowing the world more than we do. They were a symbol just as the national flag, which everyone pays respect to, is one for the nation, not just a small, inexpensive piece of cloth.

When I was young, I used to give a *wai* to older people who walked past me, even those who I knew were insane. I had to because my *ācāriya* made me do it; if I didn't, I would be spanked. It was not necessary for me to know who those old people were, just seeing that they were old was enough. This was to train us for a gentle mind, not a rough one with arrogance, and to instill good character in us.

Please remember the Pali term *rattaññū*, which means one who has seen a long past, who had been born and able to do things before we were. Nowadays, someone may still say to a younger one, "I started eating rice before you did," or "I started suckling milk before you did," and so on, to assert himself that he or she had been born before the



younger — and should know things earlier, more, or better. At least he or she knew the taste of rice or milk before the younger did. For a *rattaññū*, he or she normally has seen many things and can say something beneficial; an exception is the insane ones.

Now I shall base my principle on nature. I would say that this dog, the oldest one, is the wisest among the pack because it was born first. Another dog has just been born and is still ignorant in many ways. Later on, the young dog would gradually become wiser because it can learn naturally, without any teacher teaching it. This is a result of its long staying—being a *rattaññū*. It may be stupid or wise, relative to the standard of its own pedigree or heredity, but as it ages, it would learn cumulatively because it could emulate other dogs for things immitable. At first it could not do anything; but, later on, it would be able to do many things because it imitates older dogs. For example, killing a poisonous snake is not easy for a young dog. But older dogs know how to do this; and younger ones follow their technique and acquire the ability to kill snakes without being bitten. This is a result of having a long life and having seen much.

So we should consider the elders as teachers of some kind or in some aspect, even though some of them are insane. If they talk about their experience, their talk would always benefit the audience. We should not look down upon the elders or senior citizens. On the contrary, they deserve respect in at least one of the three facets: seniority, caste, and competence. Those who were born before we were are ranked higher in seniority over us; those born in a family nobler than ours are ranked higher in caste; and those who have better education or training are ranked higher in competence. All of them are in the right *disa*, deserving respect because of their better knowledge and capability for

leadership, and deserving treating rightly with our right hand.

The present world is going to lack the right *dīsa* because teachers' status is being destroyed; and teachers all over the world are becoming just teaching employees or playmates of students. But, albeit this, if children nowadays are instilled with respect for teachers as the right *dīsa*, the whole world will be better than it is now. To speak more precisely, if this culture still exists, a deviant one such as hippyism cannot occur. That there are young rebels, who neither listen to teachers, parents, and elders nor feel grateful to these people's benevolence, is a result of the sin which people of the world commit when they abandon the right *dīsa* and obscure it.

How to treat teachers as mentioned in the *Navakovāda* is what I should not repeat because it would unnecessarily waste time. Please read it from the book and practice it accordingly. Then you will get a result as talked about here and recited in your prayers. Keep in your mind that we have to have this right *dīsa* and are illuminated all our life. From birth to death we would have the brightly illuminating right *dīsa*, and would treat it rightly in a pleasurable way.

The right *dīsa* means our earlier refuge for intellectual capability. It is our good and right starting point for building our foundation of life and progressing to the ultimate destination, that is, nibbāna. Teachers are related to our going to nibbāna like this.

Even for teachers who teach students the ABCs of reading and writing, we should consider their work as the starting point for students' intelligence. Literacy is better than illiteracy because the former leads to increasing intelligence in other areas, which can be used rightly to leave *saṃsāra* and reach nibbāna.

Suppose that we happen to stay in *samsāra*, we should try to get wiser amidst sufferings. Then we would not get stuck all life long in *samsāra*. This is because we are educated since the beginning; so we are not ignorant for long but become more knowledgeable progressively.

Now we come to the left *disa*, relatives and friends. The word "left" does not mean wrongness in opposition to the right *disa* but means nextness to it in importance. In some instances, "left" means the opposite to "right," thus becoming synonymous with "wrong." We will not take such a meaning but consider that "left" is the counterpart of "right." The right hand is more competent than the left one, which is the associate of the former. Together they can perform perfectly well. We are born with both hands, the right one doing one thing, the left one doing another, and both forming a perfect pair. Therefore, we have to use them correctly. Some individuals oppositely use the left hand instead of the right one, so his left hand should be called his right one. Those who are left-handed should understand that the hand they use to write with is actually their right hand. With this understanding, we would not get the left and the right mixed up.

In spoken Thai, the right direction is southward, whereas the left direction is northward; this illogically makes the northerly direction seem inferior to the southerly. But the ancient Thai people called the southerly the "sleeping head" direction. For example, King Ramkamhaeng's stone inscription [of Thailand's Sukhothai Period] mentioned this "sleeping head" direction, meaning the southerly. This is why ancient Thais slept with their heads pointing south, which, because of superstition or whatever reason, they believed was auspicious. For one to sleep with his or her head pointing north or pointing west was believed to be

inauspicious. I don't know what science would say about this, but according to our dhammic or religious belief, teachers are in the southerly, or the "sleeping head," direction. So we sleep with our heads to the south, which is proper because we would not feel bad about pointing our feet to teachers and would have a peaceful mind sleeping.

Let it be said that the left direction is a supportive one for the right direction. The left hand helps the right hand and makes the latter more efficient to some degree. The left direction represents our relatives and friends. We can consider them as being around us in all directions, being social refuges which cooperate as a large group to help simplify our difficult tasks and lighten our burdens.

The Pali word *ñāti* for the English noun 'relative' literally means one whom we have to always bear in mind and to care for in our dutiful treatment of him or her. Similarly, the Pali word *mitta* for 'friend' means one whom we love spiritually without any sexual tendency. A friend is one whom we have pure love for because he or she and ourselves help each other. Relatives and friends are people whom we bear in mind with pure love; they and ourselves have *visāsa* or frequent association with one another, contributing to societal strength. For example, if people in a village unite as relatives and friends would do, then their enemies would never be able to conquer them; and they would progress easily. This is how a society can find a refuge. And the best way to eliminate an enemy is to unite all members of the society as good friends.

If one makes mistake, enmity or unfriendliness would arise even among siblings and relatives. One's mistreatment of the left *disa* means a serious enmity because relatives and friends are close to him or her. Therefore, the Buddha teaches us to mentally radiate loving kindness to all so that we would

not have enmity to anybody. Even when someone wants to kill us, we must not consider him or her as an enemy, but would try to overcome him with virtue.

To exemplify, the Buddha's words in the Kakacup-amasutta, which I have frequently mentioned, can be a principle here for anyone in this world to have no enemies because he or she thinks of others as friends. The Buddha said that, if you were caught by a robber who used a saw to cut your flesh deeply to the bone and the bone marrow, but you, while suffering great pain, did not hate him, then you were the Buddha's real disciple; but if you felt any enmity toward him, you were not His disciple. The Pali word for a saw is *kakaja*; and this is used in the name of the sutta, which is in the Majjhimanikāya of the Tipitaka. This sutta is an inspiration for one who would have no enemies all his or her life, because he or she does not think of others as enemies. There are also ways to convert enemies into friends. Think for yourselves about how to win over vice by using virtue. The answer is to always have loving kindness for others; even when we die, we should die with a loving heart. Then we would have no enemies. And we can tell this to ourselves. Other people may see that, when a person kills another, the latter has to be an enemy of the former. In reality, the dead person may never be so because he might always have loving kindness to all beings. In our prayer, there is a part for us to mentally radiate loving kindness to all others and to see none as an enemy. A strategy to convert enemies into friends is to have a friendly attitude toward them and to act out accordingly. To do this is to be the Buddha's real disciple.

For the Christians, Jesus Christ said that, if someone slapped you on the left cheek, you should let him or her slap you on the right one too; or if someone robbed you of a shirt, you should also give him or her your overcoat. This is

similar to what the Buddha said about one's being sawed to the bone but having no animosity toward the tormentor. The exemplification means for us to have no enemies or to convert them into friends. All other beings in the world including ghosts, angels, ferocious animals such as tigers and lions, and so on, have to be felt as friends in one's mind. If everyone practices this, there will never be killing, shooting, or the like. This means that all would look at one another with a friendly attitude or, to use a metaphor in the Pali Canon, harmonize like water and milk. The world should not be full of animosity. But at present it is an unfriendly one. If you listen to radio, you can hear people noisily scold one another indiscriminately, all parties being equal in abuse. The present world is full of enmity, feud, and fear. But if people have friendliness for one another, the world can be a warm and peaceful one.

The Pali scripture suggests in one of its parts how to make friends and how to treat them. The suggestion is that, if some people are superior to us in any way, we pay respect to them; if equal, we treat them congenially; if inferior, we show loving kindness to them. With ourselves as reference, we see others who are superior, equal, and inferior to us. Those who are inferior to us have, in turn, their own superiors, equals, and inferiors in the conventional meaning. Actually, our *kamma* classifies us in accordance with its power. So there are those among us who are superior, equal, or inferior to others.

If someone's *kamma* — his action — makes him or her rank higher than us in whatever status, may it be his or her seniority, caste, or competence, then he or she is our superior. If one ranks the same as we do in all of these, then he or she is our equal. And if one ranks lower than we, then he or she is our inferior. By no means, however, can we look down upon

any other person. Anyone who thinks about belittling others is no better than an animal; he or she does not follow the Buddha's teaching. If we treat our superiors with respect, treat our equals with congeniality, and treat our inferiors with loving kindness, then there is no way we can look down upon others. Monks would never belittle monasterial boys or novices or lesser persons. So let's accept this principle of Buddhism, which was in the Buddha's words recorded in the Pali Canon. It may have been established before the Buddha's time, but we accepted that He backed it.

As it appears at present, most people do not respect their superiors; instead, they try to upstage or overthrow the latter, thinking nothing about friendliness. People of equal status are jealous of one another and want to suppress others. Now for their inferiors, most people treat them like doormats, totally looking down upon them. We should revert to the principle that nobody in this world deserves belittlement or persecution. Superiors deserve respect; equals, congeniality; and inferiors, loving kindness. That's all we should do to convert enemies to friends. There is a minor problem with some narrow-minded individuals who claim that respected persons are apt to be oppressive. Actually both parties are fools. The present world is full of fools. High-ranking officials who are bullies make life difficult for their subordinates; the more respect they are paid, the more their subordinates suffer. Those officials are not the least respectable; so it's difficult for anyone to respect them, and things are getting out of hand. Let's not think about totally losing respect for them. At least they are lucky to get the position of commandants, and the subordinates should respect them for this. But this does not mean that the latter have to do bad things as their superiors do, or to follow their unrighteous orders.

To respect someone does not mean that you totally submit to his or her order in all circumstances, or that you do exactly what they do. It means that you care for them or their orders righteously and logically. You may respect a dog by rightly taking care of it in accord with how you as a human should do to a dog. This is respect and consideration. For one who is superior to us in what aspect, we have to respect him or her for that aspect. In this way we may be able to change his behavior. But if we try to upstage him or her, both parties would fight like fools.

To be congenial with your equals does not mean for you to join them in vain festivity, but to treat them righteously and harmonize with them. And to have loving kindness to your inferiors means for you not to belittle them, but to have sympathy for them.

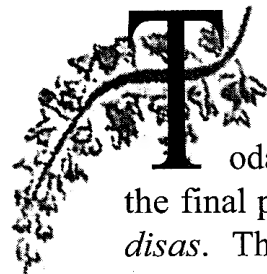
That is all about treatment for the left *disa*, the society whose members should be friends universally. Although it is lower next to the right *disa*, it is broader because it is mostly all around us. If one follows the Buddha's teaching, the northerly or the left *disa* would undoubtedly appear brightly illuminating and pleasant to him or her.

The right and left *disas* are just these. They have to be treated correctly as I have described, with similar, not oppositely different, standards.

The time is up for today.



**HOW TO TREAT THE UPWARD  
AND DOWNWARD DISAS:  
MONKS AND MONASTICS;  
SERVANTS, MENIALS, AND SUBORDINATES**



Today our discussion for the Six Disas reaches the final pair, namely, the upward and the downward *disas*. The upward *disa* means monks and monastics, whereas the downward one means servants and subordinates. The words "upward and downward *disas*" are religious terms in connection with our religious culture. Unlike us who know these terms, laymen do not call what they respect by the term *disa*. This shows that the religion sees *disas* broader and more profound than laymen do, and the *disas* in the religious sense is more important than the ones known by laymen.

We will begin by considering the pair of terms, namely, the upward and downward *disas*. These are sometimes called the upper and lower *disas*, which are somewhat different from the former pair, but still mean the same things. Materially they are called one thing; dhammically or spiritually they are called another. In other, simpler words, conventional language describes things, which include both merit and demerit, one way, whereas the language of truth describes them another way. The upward or upper *disa* may

be assumed to be good, and the downward or lower one may be assumed to be bad. But now we seemingly do not use this judgment.

Actually the words 'upper' and 'lower' are conventionally established in accord with people's feeling, which is not so wise. Properly we should look at the fact that an upper or higher point is far from the center of gravity of the earth, whereas a lower one is near to it. There are points all around because the earth is round and symmetrical about its center, and attracts all the masses around it. Gravitationally speaking, upper and lower points are meaningless because masses at both of them are similarly subject to the force of attraction exerted by the earth. But those who do not know this feel that the lower direction leads to monotonous falling down. This is not right, for the earth's attractive force may also cause an object to fall sideways. This, however, is a fact too scientific for nonacademicians to know, except for some special circumstances.

People in general do not have to know about gravity and can still lead a normal life. Those of us who know about higher and lower points have to deal with them correctly. For example, if we tell an ignorant person that the earth is round and everything is falling toward its center, he or she may not believe it. It may be impossible for them to imagine how some people would stay upside down on a part of the earth and others stand horizontally in another part. Don't waste time arguing problems like this and getting into a quarrel with the unknowledgeable. Among us, we may take the meanings of upper and lower as we feel proper: for example, heaven is above, and hell is below. In the absolute scientific sense, there are no such directions as the above and the below. Relatively, we may take the earth's center as the lowest point and think of the sky as far away from it. But

if we consider the universe as a whole, it is impossible to talk about upward and downward directions because there exist no absolute above or below, north or south, east or west. These directions exist on the earth because we take a point on the earth's surface as a reference and observe other points relative to it. So a material fact is one thing, whereas a religious fact is another. We should rather not waste time arguing about these two different viewpoints.

The two *disas* —the upward and the downward— are good for appreciation. The upward *disa*, which represents monks and monastics, and the downward *disa*, which represents servants and subordinates, deserve proper treatment and veneration. Even the servants should get a *wai* from their masters. Now let's step aside to discuss how we can settle different views about spoken words, so that we would not quarrel with one another. We have to know that the religious circle has its own technical terms with special meanings. The scientific circle, which deals with objects, mass, energy, and the like, also has its own technical terms, which are different from those of the religious circle. Once both sides have known what they mean by their words, they do not have to quarrel with each other. Let's accept that the six *disas* are to be venerated all equally even though some of them are conventionally favored more than others.

Now let's talk about the upward *disa* — monks and monastics. We shall emphasize the persons who are spiritually superior to laymen in general, but we shall not emphasize their material and physical aspects, nor their wealth, nor their pedigree. With spiritual virtue, there are *samaṇabrāhmaṇas* — monks and monastics.

*Samaṇas* are serene persons. They are superior to ordinary people because the latter are not spiritually calm, but are spiritually restless and difficult. Ordinary people are

like this because they do not know what is what. On the other hand, *samaṇas* knows best, or to a great extent, about how to become calm mentally and physically. *Samaṇas* arise in the world because there are disturbances, which create problems. They search for and find calmness, thus becoming a special kind of human beings. Starting from scratch, they progress to the top. This is because they are intelligent and so observant as to see that the way they were was still distressful. So they try to get out of it more and more until they find the condition without distress.

In the age of primitive humans, people were more concerned with livelihood and reproduction. They were quite calm mentally because they were not so much ambitious and led their life naturally. They seemed to be ignorant, but their ignorance did not create distress. Later on humans became more advanced with intelligence and created many more things that they liked and disliked obsessively; so they became more disturbed. But some wise persons saw the situation, got away from the chaos, and sought tranquillity in a quiet place, thus becoming *samaṇas*.

The Pali word *brāhmaṇa* literally means coming from or concerning with Brahma. The latter word means supreme or superior to all else. Brāhmins may say for themselves that they come from the Brahma God, but we just consider *brāhmaṇas* to be better and more spiritually intelligent than ordinary people. However, they do not concentrate on calmness, and do not reach the state of *samaṇas*. They remain in their households with their families and give consultation for spiritual matters.

From a standpoint, *brāhmaṇas* are not so good as *samaṇas* but are much inferior to the latter. However, they try to come on top by claiming that they originate from Brahma. From the opposite standpoint, if they could make

themselves calm while living with their families, they would be abler than *samaṇas*, who individually get away from the chaotic world. But the fact is that *brāhmaṇas* could not get so calm as *samaṇas*. In spite of this, they have a duty of getting calm as best as they can in their families and societies. *Samaṇas* leave the household life, whereas *brāhmaṇas* remain in the society and have more contribution to the society. I heard that there are married priests in Japan because they want to serve the society as *brāhmaṇas* do. Monks who are not involved with a society or a household become *samaṇas*. So there are two kinds of the ordained people, which are all right.

It could be guessed that the monastics first started from household priests, then progressed to monks who leave their families and become *samaṇas*. Those who still remain in their households associate with a broader society, functioning as consultants for spiritual and societal matters. They also perform rituals, which do not lead to serenity or nibbāna, thus being ritualists more than monastics.

The word 'priest,' which Christianity uses to call an ordained person, also means a person who performs rites as a *brāhmaṇa* does. So Christian priests are similar to *brāhmaṇas*, whereas those monastics similar to *samaṇas* are different people. Christians call the latter, who do not perform rites, as 'hermits' or the like.

We now have known the difference between the two kinds of monastics, namely, *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*. They are both placed in the upward *disa*, for they are spiritually superior to ordinary people. We cannot say that all the rite-performing priests are foolish. Actually, ordinary people themselves are foolish; most of them, up to 80 or 90 percent of the population, are so because of ignorance. Therefore, rituals are necessary for them as something to hold on to.

These rituals, if useful, need not be forbidden. The word 'useful' here means being able to create a peaceful society. When the majority of people believe in a religion and join in proper rituals, they may not cause trouble to others. This is where *brāhmaṇas* can be beneficial. For some of them who go to the extreme, they are just like branches spreading out from the main tree trunk. But if they go so far as to perform a vicious sacrifice — killing humans as scapegoats, for example — then this is not acceptable because it is barbaric.

The purpose of *brāhmaṇas* is not to sacrifice humans in order to please God, but to be close to the society. Therefore, they can have a wife and children as ordinary people. Those monastics who leave the society to become recluses are called *samaṇas*, not *brāhmaṇas*, even though they may return once in a while to associate with the society. *Brāhmaṇas* are like ordinary householders more than monastics. We may see them as monastics in a householder's clothes. Nevertheless, they are superior spiritually and very knowledgeable. They have taken care of the scriptures since when there were no written or published materials. Without *brāhmaṇas*, the scriptures would not have been made or come into existence. *Samaṇas*' teachings are too profound for ordinary people, and *brāhmaṇas*' explanations are useful. These are in what is called the Brāhmaṇa Scripture, which simplifies profound teachings into proper words for laymen to understand.

I may have talked much in the literary sense, but I hope this would be useful for you to see what is what. As you have seen the benefit from both *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, or their importance, you know your duty to rightly treat them for your own benefit. They become what you have to look at: a *disa*, the upward *disa*, to be exact. This *disa* is to be looked up at so you would know that it is high. Physically or concretely you have to look upward, but mentally or

spiritually you have no need to do so because the mind can think of any direction.

We have discussed before that *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* are spiritual refuges, the former being an ultimate refuge. Those who want the highest spiritual benefit have to be interested in *samaṇas*. There has been a saying since the ancient time, and in Buddhism too, that seeing a *samaṇa* is auspicious. Just seeing one with your eyes is considered a very good omen, but seeing him or her spiritually, or intelligently, is even more auspicious. For example, if we saw the Buddha in His physical body, we would have the ultimate sight. Or if we see a tranquil-bodied person, we may get a new idea about how nice or lovely he or she appears. This is good from the start. If, in addition, we know deep down into his or her mind, or see him or her spiritually, it would be even better. This is because our mind can follow his or hers and ultimately benefit from him or her.

So, to have *samaṇas* in this world is most auspicious for it, because just seeing them is good enough. At first sight, one would wonder why they look so extraordinary and so calm as to attract his or her attention. He or she would be inspired and influenced irresistibly and unknowingly by the sight. Now we remind one another to earnestly practice what we should do to *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*: respect them and do everything necessary to benefit from them. This is how to venerate the upward *disa*. More detail can be found from the book *Navakovāda*. In brief, we should do everything to gain advantage from *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* in this world. One kind of them— *brāhmaṇas* —is close to us; the other kind — *samaṇas* —is farther and spiritually higher.

The word "brāhmaṇa" has a special meaning. It is derived from the word 'brahmin' in Hinduism. The brahmins claim that they come from Brahma and that they are

completely void of sins because they have taken a sacred bath. We take the meaning of *brāhmaṇa*, not in connection with taking a sacred bath, but in connection with elimination of all sins. Then we should try to eliminate all sins from ourselves, following the guideline for *samaṇas* on the same level as that of the *arahats*. In Buddhism the *arahats* are called *brāhmaṇas* in this sense because they are the noblest, being free from all sins. In many Buddhist scriptures, for example, the Dhammapāda, the word *brāhmaṇa* is used extensively. Particularly in the Brāhmaṇavagga section of the Dhammapāda, *brāhmaṇa* is always used in place of *arahat*.

In Buddhist scriptures, *brāhmaṇas* are those devoid of defilements and hence the noblest. But laymen in the present world should not take this meaning only. They should take a broader meaning of the word: those who are still householders but superior to others intellectually, religiously, or spiritually should be respected as *brāhmaṇas*. We should take the real benefit from *brāhmaṇas* as social or spiritual leaders. This almost includes our teachers too, but they have a different meaning. In brief, *brāhmaṇas* in the Six Disas mean leaders for religious rituals. In our Buddhist circle, the *upāsaka* [lay devotee] who is the leader of a congregation functions like a *brāhmaṇa* in the sense we have just discussed.

The upward *disa* for monastics is as greatly important as other *disas*. It implicitly includes our religion or the Triple Gem because these can be considered as being *samaṇas* without defilements. So we should be interested in this *disa*, which also includes our high-level culture. It is difficult for us to separate persons from the religion because the concrete part of a religion appears in form of persons. So both the religion and religious persons are placed



together in the upward *disa*, both deserving respect and veneration. Spiritually venerated objects and spiritual leaders are already included in this *disa*. These are not necessarily in the sky above our heads because a spirit and spirituality can be anywhere around us; we cannot regard them as fixed to the top, bottom, north, or south. What is called 'spirit' is an element which exists everywhere, but we place it above us. Actually a point above us can be in any direction, but we seem to place it directly over our heads and, to see it, we have to look up at it.

Another *disa* is the downward one, which represents slaves or servants. The word 'slave' is proper for the past, when people had them under control. But the meaning of the word can be extended so that nowadays slaves can be considered existing. Technically people do not have slaves any more, but they have subordinates who have to follow their commands. Problems can arise if both sides do not take a good look at each other -- servants do not look up at their masters, and masters do not look after their servants. This is why the Buddha set up a *disa* for servants and considered it as important as other *disas*.

Try to think about what will happen if servants or subordinates are not loyal to their masters. You have to guard yourselves -- giving yourselves a charm -- against the danger from this direction of subordinates. If they become treacherous, they could be very dangerous. A Chinese saying following Confucius has it that, if you do not trust them, don't use them or keep them; but if you keep them, you have to trust them. This saying is perfect for us.

If you want to keep them, you have to trust them and do nothing that would make them suspicious of you. Don't say anything that would arouse their suspicion. Commandants must be cautious about keeping a straight face, showing out

constant trust for their subordinates. When the point is reached that we have had enough with some subordinates, and could no longer trust them, we have to cut them off from their jobs, ending their service or contract, for example. To continue accepting them for service means that we have to trust them as the Confucian Chinese suggested. As servants are important like this, we have to seriously think about them.

According to a religious principle, commandants should have loving kindness and genuine sympathy for their subordinates, even those who are on the same level as slaves of the past, so that the latter would sincerely submit to their commands. In the old days, it seldom appeared that slaves in our country became rebellious or treacherous. Nowadays situation has changed: it appears very often that employees and subordinates rebel against or swindle their bosses and commandants. If opportunity allows, some of the employees and subordinates would cheat or gossip about their benevolent employers and superiors. Even in the government service — those who are government officials would know best — there are frequent instances that some subordinates cause great trouble for their commandants because they are disloyal to the latter and do not dutifully follow the latter's order.

This is a sufficient reason why the Buddha pointed out that the lower *disa* is important, and we should guard against the danger from it by giving them a *wai*. The Thai word "*wai*" here means taking it most seriously, taking the best care of it, and respecting it. With respect for someone, we would have love and kindness and the like for him or her; and this would certainly create loyalty that binds him or her to us. Sometimes some subordinates may think about cheating their masters, but they may not act it out because they respect the latter who are very benevolent. This is possible. And

teaching people to venerate the *disas* would not be in vain because this kind of veneration is the most beneficial and necessary.

We have already discussed that our subordinates are our sources of labor. If kings in the past and prime ministers or presidents nowadays did not have subordinates who performed various works for them, they would never be able to achieve anything. It is very important to such an extent. Those who are intelligent have to get labor from their subordinates to implement what they have planned from their intelligence and to get the concrete results. So we should consider labor from people below us to be extremely important; this labor has to be adequate, skilled, and righteous.

Other details of the downward *disa* are what everyone can readily see. Here we shall talk only about what kind of importance it has. If its importance is well comprehended, people will be interested in it and treat it well.

For a word, we should look at all of its meanings as broadly as we can. Even when it represents various forms, if all the forms mean similarly, we should collect them together. The Buddha is perfect in his description of the various meanings of the upward and downward *disas*. For example, the downward can be so low down as to include oxen, water buffaloes, dogs, and cats under our care. If we feel that our oxen and water buffaloes are like our servants, we should properly take care of them.

Some people may think farther that oxen and buffaloes are our friends and should be treated like friends. This is all right too. In India, people venerate oxen even like gods, *samaṇas*, or *brāhmaṇas*. Therefore, the meanings of the downward *disa* can be extended. We take the meanings of a word to be more important than its forms. At present,

some people do not care for oxen and water buffaloes. They are doing wrong concerning the practical principle of the Six Disas. They may not progress properly because of their maltreatment of oxen and buffaloes.

There is another meaning of the downward *disa* which covers all of those below us. We have to treat them properly, or else, if all the poor and the beggars curse us, we may lose our worth. So don't belittle or look down upon others. If one is cursed by all the beggars, he or she may not stay well but probably suffer failure and bad luck. The reason is that people tend to see and think similarly. If the majority sees or thinks of a particular person as bad, the rest will have a tendency to follow suit. Therefore, be so careful as not to let beggars curse you. You should be better off giving small changes to beggars. They may bless you because of your giving, but that is not so important as your generosity.

Anyone who hates beggars so much as to spit on them is, I would say, a fanatic who does not know the Buddha's teaching. On the other hand, those who always keep small changes to give to every beggar they meet should not be criticized as foolish or condemnable. Actually this is how they train themselves in generosity, frequently overseeing the downward *disa*. If, however, they give to the beggars so much that more people become lazy and take up begging as a career, then they are wrong in some other aspects. More sinful are people who give tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of baht to others and make others more ignorant in the process. Contributing to others' ignorance is not worth anything, but giving just enough with loving kindness and really thinking of the downward *disa* are proper in accord with the Buddha's principle. One who helps another with a large sum of money and gets cheated is

a fool because he or she does not rightly practice the principle of the Six Disas.

Helping people in underdeveloped countries is a political issue which I choose not to talk about. Here we are talking about one's taking good care of the downward *disa* so that there would be no danger from it, and there would be only progress, happiness, well-being, and security for him or her. Try to think about a security guard of your house becoming treacherous; this can be disastrous. But if you can prevent this from happening, you can live in comfort. So don't get so negligent as to disregard the six *disas*, but be careful and respectful to all of them. You may not have to treat them equally: you venerate your parents in a manner and do similarly in other manners to children and wife, teachers, relatives and friends, monks and monastics, and servants. This is like having an amulet for all-round protection and well-being.

So don't take the six *disas* lightly, for this is the issue about how one can live in this world. In modern words popularly used by college students, this is about how we can live happily in this world. In old-fashioned words, it is how we venerate the six *disas*. Actually these are the same matter. People should not belittle teachings and traditions in their religious culture.

A tradition established in this world, whether it is veneration of *disas*, the moon, the sun, or whatever, is good as a starting point for our care for what is more powerful than us or what is powerful in general. People started with veneration of simple things they encountered including ghosts and household spirits. This was in response to their fear of the unknown. It was not right or perfect in the beginning, but it was adapted until it reached rightness or perfection. The six

*disas*, as they are now, do not include ghosts or demons as object for veneration even though they are all around us. Ultimately, the Triple Gem and the religion are the supremely venerable that are included in the upward *disa* to complete the six *disas*.

Now you may ask why we are not interested in our nation, why we do not say anything about our nation, or other questions like these. The answer is that you should know that we have already included our nation in the six *disas*. If we rightly venerate all of them, then we have rightly treated our nation. As a citizen, each individual who rightly treats all of the six *disas* is considered as having done the same to the nation. Nowadays people think of the nation as a principal issue. In the Buddha's time, dhammic or religious matters did not say anything about a nation, which was considered a minor issue included in an aspect or all aspects of a religious teaching. On the whole, if we properly practice the principle of the Six *Disas*, we will be a good citizen of the nation, a good child of our parents, a good pupil of our teachers, and a good practitioner in all other aspects of the society. We have to do it rightly and properly by venerating the six *disas*.

As you have been born a human being, you should be good in all aspects: a good child of your parents, a good pupil of your teachers, a good counterpart of your relatives and friends, a good citizen of the nation, a good follower of the religion, and, for one who is a lay person, a good spouse of the wife or husband. Then there will be no problems. The nation is included in all of these because it is composed of all of them. Every *disa* that we venerate already has our nation in it. This is a discourse for householders or laymen to rightly practice so that they could reach nibbāna quickly,

rather than slowly like the motion of a turtle or endlessly like going round and round in a circle.

If one is taught to intelligently understand these matters, he or she could progress quickly, being like a fast turtle moving directly to the destination rather than a slow one moving in a circle. Intelligent persons can become noble ones in their households, being like a bird freed from the cage. In the Buddha's time, a well-behaved householder became an *arahat* after having gone to see the Buddha for only four or five minutes. He had practiced householders' dhamma ultimately to the point of getting tired of and losing attachment to sense-desire. At that moment he became an *arahat* in a layman dress. Later on, he got ordained as a monk and did not fear of dying within the next day or a week.

For recollection, try closing your eyes and imagine that you are looking at a drawing on the northern wall of our Spiritual Theater. It shows a man who plays a flute while riding an ox. After having played the instrument and ridden the ox for a long time, he gets bored with both the flute and the ox. So he looks up into the sky, feeling the voidness and losing his self-attachment. Later on, he becomes a lay disseminator of dhamma. This is an example of one who journeys in the right direction.

Keep in mind that we must not get stuck to a routine forever but should rather progress to a higher-level practice. If we set our direction properly, we would, with great satisfaction, improve our practice to an ever higher level. The change is very useful. If we cannot make it, then we are in a dead-end, getting stuck there. But we also have to know how to change—to a higher level. Veneration of *disas* has progressively undergone change from a low form to the right, and highest, one.

Human life progresses similarly. After it has reached the saturation point of its material aspects, it changes to the spiritual aspect. This results from one's proper veneration of the six *disas* in the material, physical, and social aspects. Later on he or she proceeds to the spiritual aspect. The highest point in the life of a human being is getting the best thing for mankind. And this is the righteousness of proper treating of the *disas*.

I have seen quite a few monks who passed the first grade of Dhamma studies just because they could answer the examination questions. They forgot the Six Disas, being unable to name each *disa*, even before they returned to laity. After they have resumed being a layman, they fall into the same old habits. So, just graduating the first grade of Dhamma studies does not make one achieve anything. He should take the knowledge about the Six Disas along with him and venerate the *disas* in practice after he has defrocked. If he remains in the monkhood, he should memorize them for teaching other people. But if he becomes a layman and practices the Six Disas principle well, he would be able to teach others very well too.

The last issue we will discuss is how hard the duty will be for us to venerate the six *disas*. 'Duty' carries the meaning of hard work. You should understand that there is no light duty. A work load, a duty, a task, and the like are all heavy. If you monks want to return to laity, don't be afraid of hard work. You are out of your mind if you fear hard work and still want to become a layman. To avoid it, you should stay in the monkhood because you still have a chance to reach nibbāna. It's true that householders could also go to nibbāna, but they have to do it the hard way because they have many tasks to perform.



Laymen have many things to do; therefore, they carry heavy loads, especially in connection with the six *disas*. To treat the six *disas*, they have to work harder than do monks, who have fewer *disas* to venerate. Monks can skip some *disas*; and the remaining ones are easier to venerate. Then the *disas* would disappear one by one as though they did not exist. Householders unavoidably get tied down with tasks because they are in a familial and social environment, having children, a spouse, commandants, servants—all contributing to hard work. A Buddha's saying has it that laity is narrow and can cause defilements. Those who saw this truth understood what was said by the Buddha and iterated it to Him. They also said that monkhood is freedom, unoppressiveness, and lightness and that a monk is like a bird, which has only wings as its load to be flown. The heavy burden for a bird is its wings, which carry it through the air. The Buddha Himself, when preparing for the ascetic life, realized the meaning of this saying. You can read about this in one of my books, *The Buddha's Biography In His Own Words*. A famous Englishman who became a monk by the name of *Sīlācāra*, when he got ordained, wrote the following poem:

*A dense of strife, is household life,  
And filled with toil and need  
But free and high as the open sky,  
Is the life the homeless leads.*

A household life is a dense of strife; it is full of toil and need. A monk's life is like an open sky, free and high. This was what he translated and expanded from the Pali words. He knew well about a household life and called it a dense of strife. He wanted to be a fighter, using the knowledge about this as a weapon. When he stepped out into a clearing like that of the sky, he felt that he could shout, "Free is now." It was like the person in a drawing on the wall of the Spiritual

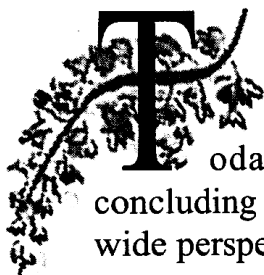
Theater, who floats above clouds as a euphemism of a dense of strife. Now we know at what point a householder stays, how he or she will proceed from there, and where his or her destination is.

In the past, a dying man would get a service of someone repeatedly shouting the words, "Arahami, don't forget it," into his ears. That was a meaningful method to guide the dying in the right direction. At present, some people still tell the dying to go to venerate Phra Chulamani in the Tāvatinīsa [the heaven of Thirty-three Gods]; they put flowers and incense sticks and a candle in the dying one's hands for the purpose. You can see that they want the dying to go to heaven with the flowers to pay homage to Phra Chulamani, which, according to a legend, is the Buddha's topknot cut off upon his becoming an ascetic and taken to the Tāvatinīsa by *devas*. The dying is told of the direction to get there. A better method is to tell the dying about *arahats* as described earlier. The shouter of the words, "Arahami, don't forget it," does not know what *Arahami* means, but he can say it to the dying one, who just closes his eyes while fading away. This is ridiculous. All of you who are sitting here have to know the right direction, from the low-level one in this world to the ultimate one — nibbāna.

For people to protest against, laugh at, or scold me, I tell them that everyone has to go to nibbāna. Married couples must go hand in hand to nibbāna; children must accept their parents' legacy of journeying toward nibbāna; friends must be companions in going to nibbāna; masters and servants must help each other to reach nibbāna. In my view, this is all about directions.

Our time is up.

## DESTINATION THAT HUMANITY MUST REACH



Today lecture on the six *disas* will be a concluding discussion. We will look at the *disas* in a wide perspective and conclude what they are all about.

The word *disa*, or direction, means the course we move along in order that we shall reach the destination. A child may say that we talk about the front, the back, the left, the right, the upward, and the downward *disas* of a person, while that person is at the center of all the directions. Then, the same child may ask, "How can that person walk? Would he or she go to the east once, return to the center, go once again to the west, and then return to the center? Then he or she would go nowhere." This is how one can get lost among the *disas*. He or she is a fool who knows about the directions but does not know how to make a trip.

To solve this problem it requires mindfulness and insight, or freedom from ignorance. To be successful we have to know what the direction means, how to walk along it, and how we can do it. I ask that you not forget that Buddhism is about mindfulness and insight. A Buddha means one who knows, awakes, and flourishes. After he or she has known things as they are, he or she is in the state of being awake, that is, not asleep, performs right actions, and flourishes.

These are the meaning of a Buddha. So we have a definite principle about knowledge that it is real insight, which can lead to deliverance.

In the Pali Canon, there are many sayings of the Buddha that we should think about often. For example, *paññāya parisujjhati*—one can be purified by insight. This means that insight eliminates demerit and ignorance. As one reaches purity, all is done; there is no more duty for him or her to perform. One of the most important sayings of the Buddha's is *sammāditṭhi samādānā sabbam dukkham uppaccagum*—one can eliminate all sufferings by the power of right view. Right view here means insight in the most limited and strictest sense, and cannot be interpreted otherwise in both the Thai and Pali languages. The word *paññā*, or insight, can involve wrong doing. For example, there is undhammic or impure insight like that of thieves. But if we use the word *sammāditṭhi*, or right view, the meaning is definite, for *sammā*, which means 'right,' restricts it. To have right view means to have dhammic or correct knowledge, understanding or opinion, which is in fact righteous and pure insight. There are many sayings of the Buddha's which mean the same as that we can reach deliverance through insight. A Buddha's saying which is broader and more general than this is that wise men extol insight as most superior, just as the moon is the brightest among all of the stars in the sky; and morality, prosperity, charm, and righteous men's dhamma are within grasp of insight. Therefore, it is all encompassing that insight attracts all other dhammas, even prosperity, which means good luck or tendency to merit.

We have to have insight before we know how to walk in the right direction. This will solve the problem of running to and fro and stopping at the center, which means nothing other than going nowhere. This is a comparison in the

teaching, which you must be careful not to misinterpret before you practice it. Otherwise, it will be an impractical knowledge, and a pity for you. Sometimes people misunderstand Pali words. For example, they think of the Atthaṅgikamagga—the Noble Eightfold Path—as eight different pathways, which are all wrong and impracticable. When you have eight roads to choose from, how can you decide which one you would take? Actually, Atthaṅgikamagga means just one path with eight properties, which you can follow.

Similarly, the Six Disas mean, collectively, just one direction leading to the destination that humanity must reach. To put it most properly, or most bluntly, the destination is the end of all sufferings, that is, nibbāna. We have all along used the words **six disas**, which is too confusing for children to follow. You should know that the six, eight, or whatever number of *disas* are a metaphor just like the Noble Eightfold Path. The meaning here is that we have to rightly walk along all of the six *disas*. Householders have to walk and at the same time carry the burdens involving parents, children and spouse, teachers, etc. In such a trip for which many loads are carried, the householders must know how to carry the loads properly before they can reach nibbāna, which is the destination for laymen and monks alike.

Try to think about the word *disa*, which we use in daily life. A word may mean different things in different particular contexts or situations. This is the case for *disa*, which can have a material or physical meaning, an abstract or a mental one, and, on a more profound level, a spiritual one. Materially or physically, it takes on a matter that we are familiar with. For example, the direction in which the sun rises is called the east, whereas the one in which it sets is called the west. In this case, the associated matter is the sun, which people see everyday. After these two directions have been established,

the right and left ones follow in connection with the two hands. Nowadays we may rely on a compass, which always points in one direction—the north; the opposite of this is the south. Here the associated matter is a compass, which can be useful for navigation of ships and for one's journey or calculation.

From this physical *disa*, abstract *disas* were established subsequently. As people lead their lives in this world, they perceive the front and the back directions in the abstract sense based on the material ones. For example, they need education, career, socialization, and practice to end all sufferings; all of these lead to abstract directions. For some of them, their front direction means education; so they study all the time until their death. Other directions which follow the first are those for career, socialization, and spiritual practice. This is how low-level abstract directions are established for the front and back, left and right, and upward and downward.

Then directions are perceived in a progressively more profound sense until finally the front direction represents parents, the back one represents children and spouse, and so on, each having a high-level abstract meaning free from the material sense. In brief, if we base our perception on material objects, we get one kind of directions; if we do it on persons such as parents and children and spouse, we have the six *disas*, which are another kind of directions; and if we do it on abstract matters such as education, career, socialization, and the like, we have still another kind. All have the meaning of what we have to follow along; and in the Buddhistic sense, this must be done with insight so as to attain deliverance. So don't forget insight which is like an instrument for guiding us in our journey to nibbāna as our only ultimate destination. This may be a temporary nibbāna for the practice at a low

level, or it can be the ultimate, permanent one for the practice at the highest level. We have an inevitable principle that nibbāna is our destination, which all of us, including even householders, have to be interested in so that we can be rightly guided. Even if we have so far not reached it, we have to know the direction so that we would not get lost or walk in a circle. For some of us who have heavy burdens to carry along, if they know the direction, they would be on the right track even though their trip may be slow.

There is an important saying by the Buddha in the Dhammadinnasutta. This *sutta* describes a Buddhist layman who, being weighed down by his family burdens, went to ask the Buddha to tell him about what would benefit householders in their whole life. The Buddha said that all discourses He gave on voidness of self, those which are profound and lead to transcendence of the world, are what would benefit householders forever. The *sutta* uses the word 'householders,' which clearly indicates those who have a family. To repeat once more, the Buddha said that what would benefit householders forever is whatever associates with *suññatā* — voidness of self.

So be careful! If you do not clearly understand this, you will see matters as contradicting. For example, why should householders reach voidness of self? The answer is, if householders do not have voidness of self as a purpose, they would be in turmoil; their lives would be deep down in hell. They have to know how to eliminate or alleviate what is binding, burning, or lancing them before they become insane. Without the knowledge of *suññatā*, some may at least become neurotic all their life. The ignorant do not understand this; they say that laymen have nothing to do with voidness of self because laity and the latter are the opposite. There are

many more ignorant intellectuals in Thailand who do not understand *suññatā* or void mind.

The knowledge of *suññatā* is both invaluable and profound. But, if misinterpreted, it would become *suññatāmicchādittḥi* – wrong view on voidness. This has happened since the Buddha's time. By the way, a mind under the perception of *suññatā* is called a "void mind." As *suññatā* is misunderstood by people with wrong view like this, "void mind" is also apt to be misunderstood and become the void mind of a wrong viewer or the void mind of a hooligan. This is because people in general base their judgement on their own feeling; they interpret void mind by their own view, thus making the view rowdy. For example, they interpret a void mind as one doing nothing or thinking of nothing, which is all wrong. Even worse, they think that, with a void mind, they can do anything they like; and so they disregard morality, rules, and regulations and bully others without restraint. This is the rowdy void mind which goes haywire.

The ignorant know only a rowdy voidness, or a void mind which cannot be implemented for a better life, even though the Buddha told householders that what would benefit them forever is *suññatā* and all matters about it. He used the Pali phrase, *ye te suttantā suññatapaṭisaṃyuttā*, which means whatever *sutta* in connection with voidness of self. The word *suttanta* means rules, regulations, or drawn lines; and *suññatapaṭisaṃyuttā* means concerning with *suññatā* or voidness of self. To be good Buddhists, we have to know how to apply *suññatā* to every matter in a householder's life. In particular, the six *disas* well treated will not cause distress and will lead to *suññatā*. If we rightly follow all the *disas* and treat them properly, they too can lead us to *suññatā*.



The word *suññatā* tells the truth about everything — including parents, children and spouse, relatives and friends, and teachers—which covers persons, actions, and thoughts. All of these are subject to *suññatā*, which follows nature and natural laws without being controlled by anyone. *Suññatā* is not a personal entity, but rather a natural condition that follows nature and natural laws. Therefore, we have to associate with it properly in accordance with natural laws. Since it is not a personal entity, it is void of self, and hence called in Pali by *suññatā*.

I repeat the matter *suññatā* again and again for all of you to remember. In Christianity, there is a teaching about how to deal with children and spouse and properties which suggests something similar to *suññatā* in Buddhism. Saint Paul, in the Corinthians of the New Testament, summarized all of Jesus Christ's teachings for a group of villagers by the following words: Have a wife as if you didn't have any; have properties as if you didn't possess any; enjoy happiness as if you didn't have it; suffer distress as if you didn't have it; buy things from a market but think of them as if you didn't bring them along. This is one hundred percent *suññatā* just like that in Buddhism. The teachings are about household matters and everyday life, namely, children and spouse, happiness, and distress. Even when you buy things at a market, you don't think that your money spent entitles you to possess them. So, as you do not consider the money and things to be yours, it is as if you did not bring anything from the market; you are always void of attachment. Without your attachment, your children and wife are void; so are your properties, happiness, and distress.

So Buddhists should not be ignorant or inferior to Christians about how *suññatā* can be applied to everything concerning householders. We have the six *disas*, but they are

neither for grasping at nor holding on to; otherwise the practice would become un-Buddhistic. They should rather be rightly treated until you are void of attachment and thus happy. Then you can be counted as those who know directions. As the *disas* appear brightly to a person, he or she is one who knows them. When you can handle problems in all directions, and they are no more a hindrance, you are comfortable. It sounds as if you carried them on your shoulders, but that is just a materialistic metaphor. Spiritually, it means that you can eliminate all the problems in connection with your parents, children and spouse, teachers, and the like, because you treat them properly. So you have neither distress nor defilements, and can be considered as having attained a level of voidness. Don't misunderstand, as ignorant intellectuals do, that *suññatā* has nothing to do with householders. To do that would contradict the Buddha's teachings, natural laws, and nature.

Try to think, if you have not perceived it, that life is a journey which follows natural laws. It depends on whether you behave rightly or wrongly. If you do it rightly, your journey is right, and you can reach the destination. But if you do it wrongly, the journey is wrong. All of your past experiences will enable you to make judgement. Right experiences will give you insight; they are instruments or materials for thinking. People are now talking much about spiritual experiences, those about spiritual issues.

Those who have made money know what and how money is; those with children and spouse know what and how the two are; those with fame know what and how it is. Whatever you have known profoundly in your mind is called a spiritual experience. Experiences push a person in the right direction until he or she reaches nibbāna. In order not to waste too much time along the way to this destination,

wise men set up rules and guidelines for the right practice. An example of such rules is the Six Disas described in the *Siṅgālovādasutta*. When you follow the rules, you can save time, get a good or supreme experience very soon, and approach nibbāna even as a householder. Thus, we have to know why we were born so that we can rightly set the purpose of our journey. And this is the reason why I like to talk often about why we were born.

If someone comes to ask me a question, I usually tell him or her that he or she has to start from knowing why he or she was born. Later on, the question will spontaneously give the answer. If we don't know why we were born, we may behave wrongly, deviating from the proper purpose. For example, in our education, if we are ignorant about the reason for our birth, we may get lost intellectually. This is the case for education nowadays, which is obscure, unsteady, and too broad. People know too little about too many subjects and miss the important little point about why they were born. So their knowledge cannot help them, and the world is without peace.

If people were taught that they were born for the purpose of uniting with God or reaching nibbāna, the education would be compact and would take care of itself in such a manner that people would quickly get to God or nibbāna. Then the world would be peaceful. But, as it is apparent now, education is obscure and is managed arbitrarily by those with defilements. Therefore, the world is permanently in crisis as a result of wrong education. But if people knew first why they were born, education would be proper, righteous, and straight to the point. The same is true for work. If people knew why they were born, they would work properly in accord with its purpose. Likewise for whatever people do or play, including sports and music, if

they knew the real purpose of their birth, they would play games or music in promotion of the purpose. Otherwise, they would do it in promotion of defilements, as is being done nowadays. For us to live, eat, dress ourselves, or to do whatever in our daily life, we have to know first why we were born; then we would get the results we want.

Look now at how people live, eat, and dress themselves. The ways they do it lead to problems, difficulties, and stupidity more than before. They are among those who do not know the purpose of their birth. So all of you here please ask yourselves often why you were born so that you would find the right answer all the time. But if you do not know it, don't be arrogant.

Children or young people who have been born to this world without knowing the purpose of their birth should not be arrogant. They should attentively listen to those wise men with the Buddha as the principal. I take somewhat much liberty to say so because in Buddhism there is a phrase, "wise men presided by the Buddha." This means that knowledgeable people accept the Buddha as most superior among all. Their mentioning about why one was born deserves attention because it would help simplify things. According to the Buddha's teachings, everyone is born to attain nibbāna. *Samsāra* would end at nibbāna, the ultimate destination for all.

In India, which is the birthplace of Buddhism, the long-practiced culture has the same principle that people are born to reach the supreme destination. I often say about the Indians' four *ashrams*: *brahmacārī*, properly being a child; *gr̥hastha*, properly being an adult; *vānaprastha*, properly being an elder by going out to find peace of the mind; and *sannyāsī*, properly being a senior person by spiritually guiding children.

To follow the four *ashrams*, you have to be a *brahmccārī*, *gr̥hastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsī*, consecutively. Or if you look at the ten life-depicting drawings of a man playing a flute on the back of an ox behind a screen in our Spiritual Theater, you will see a sequence of a journey to voidness of self (the eighth drawing). From then on, it is the life of dedication to helping and guiding others so that they too would reach voidness. Following this, we have to travel toward voidness or *nibbāna* and help other people to reach *nibbāna* also. Take a hint about why we were born from this idea or teaching.

While being a householder, don't crawl along a zigzag direction. People look down upon tortoises as being slow like this. But look at that picture of a blind stone tortoise. The original instinct in the life and mind of a being is knowledge, which is the Buddha nature within everyone. This instinct always aims for the ultimate destination, but it is intervened by ignorance. To what extent ignorance can get in the way depends on the senses perceived daily by the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind. As it happens, the senses usually lead to ignorance. But the Buddha nature always wants to go in the right direction and endeavors to do so by trying to eliminate ignorance. Whenever ignorance does not take over the mind, the mind will follow the right path. This is because, by natural rule, it tries to do so for deliverance.

So we should not look down upon tortoises, because they are like all other animals in that they too have Buddha nature in their instinct. Any tortoise is like the ones kept here at Suan Mokkh; if you let them go, they would unfailingly head back home. They would never go in a wrong direction, but would always go to a safe place like a thicket, not to another like a market place, for example. I have heard from someone, or read from a book, that a mother turtle would

climb ashore and crawl far inland to lay its eggs. After the little turtles have hatched, all of them would run to the sea without being taught to do so. Some kind of inherent instinct tells them all to run to the sea or water; none run up the mountain. This shows that nature has installed a mysterious mechanism like a seed of Buddhahood or intelligence in all beings so that they can survive.

As another observation, when a fish is caught and put on a dry land, it will mysteriously know to which direction the marsh or water is, and will not move in the direction of a drier land or highlands. It knows the direction with a radar-like sense, perceiving the natural ether for differentiation of directions. So we should not belittle animals and should accept that they are journeying to their best destinations, all evolving into higher species, reaching the class of human and finally attaining nibbāna. Materially or spiritually, *samsāra* would end at the best thing all beings should get, namely, nibbāna. It would not be a permanent vicious circle; and this is the reason why we were born.

Therefore, let's pay attention to the question of **why we were born** in a progressively more proper and more profound manner. Then, by the seed of Buddhahood within all, you yourselves would be able to answer the question. The Buddha nature is inherent in all beings, but it does not blossom, staying concealed instead, because the environment is not good. Now, by practicing dhamma, we can better the environment just as we fertilize and loosen the ground properly for growing a crop. Then we ourselves can progress into a Buddha. Knowledge of the Six Disas is actually for this purpose.

So live in such a way that the Buddha nature would grow better every day, every month, and every year. That's all what we should do, which would agree with the Buddha's

saying that, **if all the monks lead their lives properly, the world would never be void of *arahats***. This saying is at the end of the Mahāparinibbānasutta of the Tipitaka. The Buddha said the words when He was about to pass away; the saying can be considered as His will. These words constitute a hint that we don't have to do much; we only have to live properly in accord with nature; it is just as we loosen the ground, fertilize it, and water it so that our plants can grow well by themselves.

We have to live righteously in such a way that there is no danger or damage done to us through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Then the Buddha nature in us would grow well, leading us to *arahatship* in not so long a time. Just live properly. You may live leisurely, if that is righteous. The word 'leisurely' here is synonymous with 'righteously.' Righteousness does not mean idleness, but the word tends to suggest that. So live righteously but not idly; and live leisurely but uprightly. As we are righteous in both body and mind, defilements cannot arise and will finally be dissipated in the long run. This results from our knowledge of the six *disas*, with our eyes and ears fully open, and our constant reception of their bright and unobstructed illumination. As many people live righteously, the world will not be devoid of *arahats*.

Our talk for today is aimed at those who will play the role of a householder so that they can be good at it and see brightly lit directions. Their lives will progress and evolve to the ultimate destination quickly or slowly depending on the environment and supporting factors. A householder can possibly reach *arahatship* before an ordained monk. Don't be misled about this issue. There were several incidents in which a householder went to get audience with the Buddha and attained *arahatship* there and then while many hundreds



of monks who even sat near Him did not attain it. Those monks had followed a direction which was not yet fully facilitating: their right moment had not come.

The so-called right moment in Buddhism is described in Pali as *maggasamaṅgī*. This means the right and exact combination of the eight elements of the Noble Eightfold Path which results in one's attainment of *arahatship* where he or she is at that particular moment. So if a person is a bad, foolish, insane, or severely defiled householder, it is inevitable that he or she will get stuck in the mud. But if he or she is a good householder or a good Buddhist who follows the Buddha's dhamma, then he or she is hopeful to reach *arahatship* some day. For him or her, a life lesson comes in everything: distress, problems, children and spouse, properties, food, sensuality, and fame. All of these become supporting factors for him or her to reach nibbāna once he or she has transcended them. Then he or she will be the luckiest person. Anybody who wants to be one such person has to follow the proper practice and need not see a fortune teller or a black-magic performer.

If you want to be one of the luckiest persons, pay attention to *suññatā*, which, as the Buddha said, is forever beneficial for householders. Take it as your charm or sacred water for you to shower with. Don't get attached to the I-mine concept, so that you would be peaceful laymen. If you grasp at and hold on to the I-mine concept, you will be bad laymen who get on one another's nerve and fight one another all the time. But if you live righteously, the I-mine perception would hardly or never arise; even it does arise, it would not be so often or severe; and that will be good luck for you.

Now let's take the selfless principle as a guideline for right treatment of all the *disas*. A reason why we are unsuccessful in doing something, unable to do it, or able to



do it but not in a dhammic way is that the I-mine concept comes to intervene. Selfish persons are not thoughtful for others because they see only themselves, being influenced by the "I" concept. They may not even be thoughtful for their own children and spouse. If one cares for his or her children and spouse more than himself or herself, that person tends to jealously guard his or her personal dependents; and this means that he or she cannot escape the "mine" concept. Those who love themselves more than their children and spouse have the "I" concept, whereas those who love their children and spouse more than themselves have the "mine" concept. The I-mine concept is the screen that hides the Buddha nature in everyone, preventing it from growing well, stunting it, or killing it several times over.

So far we have looked at the six *disas* from a wide perspective, and summarized the knowledge about them for householders. I consider that this knowledge is necessary for householders in agreement with the Buddha's teaching that *suññatā* is necessary for them. As for the minor details of the six *disas* as described in the *Navagovāda*, there are extensive explanations which you can recite from. We don't have to waste time repeating them here. Those who want to know how to treat their parents, children, and wife, for example, and what result they would get from so doing, can easily understand the explanations.

Anyway I have to caution you not to consider yourselves and others as debtors and creditors who are under contracts, for that would create a commitment without your knowing it. If you read the *Navagovāda*, some of you may misunderstand that we have to treat our parents well so that we can get a right to receiving proper treatment from them in return, or we have to treat the teachers well for a similar right. That will be a fiasco. Keep in mind that what is

described in the Six Disas is how parents and children can dutifully treat each other, or how teachers and pupils can similarly do to each other. But don't consider it as a contract between a debtor and a creditor. That will be ridiculous and regressive.

And don't forget that a person can have many roles at the same time. Take me for an example. Even though my parents have been dead, you can consider that I still have them. In addition, I also have children -- dhammic ones, who actually are my disciples. A householder may look around to see his or her children in one direction and his or her parents in another, but that person himself or herself may be a parent, a child, a pupil, and a teacher, all in one. Therefore, he or she may have to perform many duties in accord with the different roles he or she plays. He or she should not choose or insist to perform only one of the duties.

Everyone has all-round duties to perform. Sometimes we may have to take the role of a *samaṇabrāhmaṇa* in our relation with small children, not just as a teacher. This is because we have to guide them spiritually too. We have to take all the roles, all the responsibility. Don't be misled to take only one role, or take one at a time, for that would cause giddiness. Take them all and let them help you to move closer to the proper destination, namely, nibbāna.

The religious life in Buddhism is a lone pathway for each individual's practice toward the unique destination, that is, nibbāna. This involves only single entities; and we can consider that one's children and spouse are individuals who go their own ways in accord with their *kammas* [actions] regardless of how much he or she loves them. That everyone has his or her own *kammas* is the reason why we consider Buddhism as the religion for individuals who have to go their own ways. So it is a daydream to expect that a married

couple would be able to continue their togetherness to each of their next lives. Although such an expectation may help strengthen their love and unity, it is only a worldly matter, not what happens in reality. In nature, every entity follows a natural or kammic rule in accord with the causes and supporting factors for the action. Each individual has to find their own deliverance in the right direction.

I would like to conclude my lecture on the Six Disas that the principle can be practiced on the lowest level up to the highest one. It is the same path for people to follow, no matter whether they are young or old, men or women. If the principle is correctly interpreted, even monks can practice it. Don't misunderstand that dhammas for householders cannot be practiced by monastics, or that those for monastics cannot be practiced by householders. Dhammas are not limited to just monks or householders; everyone can take some of them for practice in a proportion suitable for his or her status. Dhammas have no gender; there are no male dhammas or female dhammas. There are no dhammas only for men or only for women. They are on various levels, though; and whoever is on whatever level can take dhammas on that level for practice. This is the way of those who know the right direction.

That's all for today. The time is up.



## A Message from UNESCO

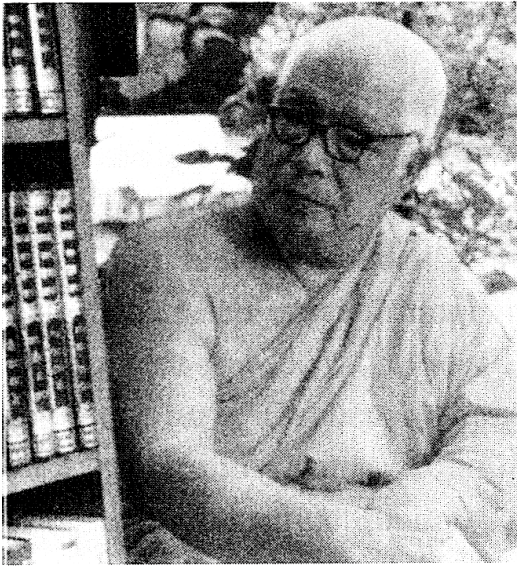


“Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a pioneer in the promotion of the inter-religious understanding through dialogue among people of different faiths, is remembered worldwide and is entered into UNESCO’s list of great international personalities.

“His emphasis on the interdependence of all things made of him a precursor of ecological thought and a champion of peace among nations.”

*- UNESCO Announcement for 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
of the birth of the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*

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## About the Author



“**Buddhadasa**”, the name he chose to be called, means “slave or servant to the Buddha”, and throughout his life, he was known to be just that; few have worked as hard to fulfil the Buddha’s legacy as The Master Buddhadasa.

In keeping with a tradition common among young Thai men, Buddhadasa became a monk at the age of 20 with the intention of leaving monkhood shortly thereafter to return to regular society. However, the experiences he had as a young monk not only ended up changing the course of his life, but they also ended up having a profound impact on Thai Buddhism, furthering it as a whole.

Early in monkhood, Buddhadasa's exceptional talents quickly became apparent, and it was not long before he gained a reputation for his innovative methods of studying and teaching Dhamma. It became clear that investigating and expounding upon the true nature of things would become his life's work.

Once, an elder monk asked him, "What is your view on life?" Buddhadasa quickly replied, "I must live to benefit humanity to the fullest". And so he did, living up to the name he so appropriately selected.

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When one asks a Thai person to describe Buddhadasa, the characteristics mentioned invariably fall under one or more of the following categories:

**He was unique.**

Buddhadasa is remembered today for his truly unique mindset; he excelled in finding new perspectives on Buddhism and became renowned for coming up with

creative ways to interpret and impart the Dhamma, always stressing that it is scientific, straightforward and applicable for everyone.

He is still regarded as one of the most innovative and avant-garde, radical and revolutionary Buddhists of our time. Dubbed by the media as “the country’s most provocative intellectual monk”, he remains among the most influential of modern Thai thinkers.

**He was a self-taught expert.**

Buddhadasa’s formal education went only as far as the ninth grade, as he was compelled to manage the family business; however, his enthusiasm for independent study never waned. During his teenage years, Buddhadasa’s favourite pastime was to form discussion groups to talk about the Dhamma. He gained a following in his neighbourhood because of his ability to expound Dhamma in clear and interesting ways even before he was ordained.

Once he had ordained, Buddhadasa studied all that was required of a monk, and much more. From the original Buddhist Scriptures (the Pali Canon) and the associated commentaries and treatises on meditation, to the scriptures of other schools and religious traditions, he became an expert not just in Thai Buddhism, but also in religious studies at large. Seven universities recognised the Buddhadasa's efforts by bestowing honorary doctorates on him.

However, his thirst for knowledge surpassed religious studies alone. Of his own initiative, he became skilled in English, poetry, architecture, science, art history, literature, photography and radio. He integrated this knowledge into his teachings and developed state-of-the-art methods to make Dhamma more accessible to all. With talks, articles, notes, poems, slides, VDO, sculptures and pictures, he tried every way possible to enhance the effectiveness of Dhamma propagation, though never denying that the best lessons derive from one's own practice.



**He was a real practitioner.**

In his career as a monk, Buddhadasa had many opportunities to establish himself in the city where there were (and still are) far more material comforts. He rejected such offers and chose instead to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha; retreating to the forest to meditate and study the Dhamma, both theoretically and experientially, on his own for six years...

Accordingly, in 1932, he established Suan Mokkha-balarama, near his hometown in Southern Thailand, in a deeply natural setting where the voice of Dhamma can be more easily heard.

During this six-year period, he practised rigorously according to the scriptures, maintained virtual isolation, and kept track of his own progress systematically, so as to be able to grasp the correct understanding of the Dhamma and to develop and apply it effectively.

Later, despite having attained fame as a highly achieved scholarly monk, Buddhadasa never neglected practising

the Dhamma, which to him was as important a task as propagating it was. His teachings of “duty is Dhamma” emphasise the practicality of Dhamma, of how it can be put into practice by everyone and the great potential it holds to render benefits to the masses.

### **He was a prolific writer.**

Throughout his life, Buddhadasa made compositional writing a never-ending task. Before leaving this world, he was determined to produce as extensive a set of reference material for the study of Dhamma as he could.

He is the author of innumerable titles, and remains Thailand’s most translated author. His literary output was so prolific that his works now fill a room at Thailand’s National Library, and the construction of a building to house his archives is now in progress.

That Buddhadasa was an inexhaustible worker is undeniable as Santikaro Bhikkhu, a well-known American disciple of his, recalls: “The Venerable teacher was a prolific thinker and writer until the last

day of his life. On alms round (the morning ritual where the monks go out to receive food donations) he jotted Dhamma insights on his hand. He tried out the phrasing for various Dhamma sayings that later became famous on any scrap of paper that might be at hand, and he filled hundreds of notebooks with Pali references, questions for further study, poems, ideas, and more.”

Buddhadasa died in 1993 after a series of heart attacks and strokes. The final stroke occurred as he was preparing notes for a Dhamma talk to be given on his birthday, just two days following. A disciple of his later said that even during that final stroke, he was calm and kept on with his writings. Such an end undeniably demonstrates once again – this time in a most literal fashion – that Buddhadasa remained a determined “servant of the Buddha” right up until his very last breath.

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## About Suan Mokkh



**Buddhadasa Bhikkhu** founded Suan Mokkhabalarama (The Garden of the Power of Liberation), or simply “Suan Mokkh”, on the grounds of an abandoned monastery near his hometown of Pumriang, in the southern Thai province of Surat Thani. He established the centre to serve as a headquarters for the study of the truth of Nature in surroundings that bring people and Nature closer together. His purpose was to fulfil his life resolutions:

- to help people realise the heart of their own religion
- to create a mutual understanding among all religions
- to free humanity from the constraints of materialism

Suan Mokkh does not only act as a cool sanctuary in the midst of the heated world, but it also serves as a spiritual entertainment complex of sorts, housing facilities aimed at providing Thai visitors with a spiritual boost, including the Spiritual Theatre – one of the very first ventures in true “edutainment” in Thai history.

While Suan Mokkh serves as both a “Holy Land” and a “Spiritual Disney Land” for Thais, Suan Mokkh International Dhamma Hermitage, Buddhadasa’s final project, is a centre dedicated to helping people who come from other countries and speak other languages in the search for the meaning of life and spiritual inquiry.

Visitors from around the world are welcome at Suan Mokkh International to experience a taste of natural truth. English-speaking hosts will greet them upon their arrival and they will be introduced to the Dhamma in an easy to grasp and practical way, and encouraged to participate in a meditation retreat designed especially for beginners.

Buddhadasa did not favour sending spiritual masters from the East to teach Buddhism in Western countries. Rather, he believed that for Buddhism to flourish outside of Asia, Westerners must take it into their hands and hearts and seek to spread the teachings in their own countries. Therefore, he devoted a great deal of attention to imparting the correct understanding of Buddhist principles and practice to non-Asians, so they can relay it to their own people, in their own way.

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**I**n this book *Disadhamma*, the author describes how a householder can grow the Buddha nature within himself or herself and finally attain nibbāna without first becoming a monastic. The author elaborates on the main concept: properly venerating the *disas*, namely, people in all directions around the practitioner.

